

COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR IN OPPOSITIONAL SETTINGS: THE EMERGING SOCIAL MOVEMENT

In approaching a field as diverse as collective behavior, one can choose to emphasize either the similarities or the differences among the forms of behavior under study. In trying to present a coherent, integrated description of the field, we have opted for the former strategy, stressing the common characteristics and shared behavioral dynamics that continue to bind the field together. There are, however, also some very real differences between the behaviors traditionally studied under the collective behavior rubric. Nowhere is this more apparent than in regard to that category of phenomena known as social movements. In the last twenty or so years, the study of social movements has almost achieved the status of a separate subfield within sociology. Or to the extent that it remains embedded in a larger subfield, there are those who would say that it is political or organizational sociology, and not collective behavior, that provides the more useful intellectual context for studying social movements. Even as we stress the similarities between social movements, fads, disasters, and crowd behavior, we cannot ignore the real and important differences among these phenomena. Thus, we devote the next two chapters exclusively to social movements, trying to stress the ongoing utility of the collective behavior framework while also honoring the wealth of recent scholarship on social movements.

POINTS ON DIFFERENCES

How are social movements different from the other traditional forms of collective behavior? To this point we have alluded to these differences without enumerating or describing them. Let us take a moment to do so. We can identify three key differences between social movements and crowds, and fads and disasters.

1. *Institutional versus noninstitutional.* Earlier we argued that one of the defining characteristics of collective behavior is its relatively noninstitutionalized character. That is, culture provides only the sketchiest of guidelines around which episodes of collective behavior can be organized. In the case of a looting during a blackout, darkness and large crowds afford people the anonymity to act in ways that are not culturally prescribed. In contrast, most of what goes on in social movements draws heavily on established cultural guidelines. For all the drama we tend to associate with movements, anyone who has ever participated in one knows how routine, even mundane, many of the day-to-day activities of the movement are. Press conferences, chapter meetings, petition drives, even sit-ins are all heavily scripted, culturally prescribed events. This does not mean that social movements are devoid of non-institutional elements, but these elements play less of a role than they do in the other forms of collective behavior.
2. *Spontaneous versus planned.* Another difference between social movements and other types of collective behavior is the degree of spontaneity associated with each. If the various forms of collective behavior were arrayed along a continuum measuring degree of spontaneity, the disaster and the social movement would represent the opposite ends of that continuum. In its purest form, a disaster is nothing if not spontaneous. There is nothing planned about a tornado or a stampede at a rock concert. By contrast, most of what goes on in a social movement is anything but spontaneous. Demonstrations are carefully planned. Chapter meetings of movement organizations follow a prescribed agenda and are often run in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order. Movement literature is produced and distributed according to a planned production schedule. Especially during the later stages of movement development, the balance between planned and spontaneous elements is clearly in the direction of the former. Social movements, at that stage, tend to be closely identified with the formal organizations that purport to represent them. In turn, these groups, like all formal organizations, tend toward planning and routinization in their operation.
3. *Ephemeral versus prolonged.* For our purposes, perhaps the biggest difference between the social movement and the other forms of collective behavior concerns the duration of the collective behavior episode. While the vast majority of social movements die aborning, the successful ones can last for years or even decades. Even then, many of these movements do not so much disappear as become incorporated into the institutional life of society. Most of the world's great religions began life as social movements. So too did the governments of many of the countries in the world. The roots of our system of government are embedded in the American Revolution in much the same way that the former Soviet state had its roots in the Russian Revolution. The recent wave of democracy movements throughout Eastern Europe provide numerous contemporary examples of the same phenomenon. The roots of the current governments in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, were but a few years ago outlawed social movements. Finally, many formal organizations begin life as social movements. In the United States, such organizations as the Boy Scouts, YWCA, and the AFL-CIO trace their origins to social movements. In contrast to the long histories of some movements, the other forms of collective behavior are ephemeral indeed. A panic in a theatre may last but a few tragic minutes. The crowd that gathers at the scene of an accident may form, congregate, and disperse within an hour. Fads last a bit longer, but no more than a matter of months in most cases.

The much longer time frame over which movements unfold makes it more difficult to study them using only the analytic framework we have applied to the

other forms of collective behavior. We are no longer simply studying an event, like the panic or the crowd, that is bounded in time and space. Instead, our attention is turned to a phenomenon that is likely to be occurring over a wide geographic area and may take years or even decades to run its course. What is more, the very nature of the movement is likely to change dramatically over the life of its existence. It is at the outset that social movements bear their closest relationship to the other forms of collective behavior. To the extent that social movements can ever be described as spontaneous or emergent, it is during this period. This early period is often a time of great excitement and high drama as the movement seeks to establish itself as a force in society. To the extent that it succeeds in this effort, however, the movement tends to become more institutionalized and less spontaneous over time. Formal movement organizations replace the ad hoc committees and informal groups that provided leadership in the early days of the movement. Litigation and membership drives gradually replace unplanned direct action and face-to-face recruitment as the modus operandi of the movement.

These changes indicate the need for applying a very different perspective to social movements, depending on the stage of their development. At a minimum, we need to distinguish the *emergent* from the *mature* movement. This is the perspective we adopt here. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the emergent movement, stressing the parallels between such movements and the other forms of collective behavior. The next chapter, turns to the ongoing development of the movement, noting how its characteristics parallel those of other, more institutionalized forms of behavior, such as organized religion, interest-group politics, and formal bureaucracy.

THE EMERGENT MOVEMENT

Social movements can be defined as organized efforts to promote or resist change in society that rely, at least in part, on noninstitutionalized forms of political action. *Noninstitutionalized* simply means any action that takes place outside of normal political channels. In this sense, marches, demonstrations, terrorist bombings, occupations of buildings, assassination attempts, and the like, are noninstitutionalized forms of political action.

The problem with this definition of social movements is that it suggests a level of coherence and organization that is often lacking in the early days of a movement. At the outset, movements tend to be rather ill defined and only poorly organized. The following first-person accounts of collective action in the early days of two movements capture the groping, emergent character of social movements. The first is taken from a description of one of the earliest and most successful marches to take place during the Chinese student movement of the spring of 1989.

On May 4th police and troops kept discreetly to the sidelines, fairly numerous but unarmed. The students basked in the bright sun and felt their new power and freedom. The march had a holiday atmosphere; townspeople turned out to watch and cheer the students on. A quarter of a million people gathered, but there was a strange sense that nothing happened. The march was curiously relaxed and slightly anticlimactic. I watched

brigades of students from the main universities march in northwest Beijing, carrying banners and signs, a few wearing sashes bearing slogans. As on April 27th, they knew that "the whole world was watching," and sported signs in French ("vive la liberté") and English ("give me liberty or give me death") to attract the television cameras and make their protest communicate on the evening news in Europe and the U.S. They marched the six or eight miles into Tiananmen Square, joining others on the way.

University contingents from the other parts of town made it to the square first. But once there, they had little idea what to do. It was hot, and people kept drifting away in search of a drink while the crowd waited for its last and most influential components to arrive from Beijing University, People's University and Beijing Normal University. Occasionally someone drew a cheer by circling the Monument to the People's Martyrs waving the blue and white flag of the Beijing Autonomous Students' Association. A few students made speeches, unamplified and audible only to those immediately around them. Many took pictures of each other.

The one really striking event of the May 4th demonstration was the arrival of a contingent of journalists carrying signs calling for the right to report the news objectively, and supporting the students. When the last marchers arrived, there was a cheer, a pause, and then everyone gradually dispersed. The students' repertoire of protest had few dramatic episodes, nothing to focus attention or keep the crowd entertained and motivated.

(Calhoun 1989: 21–22)

The second account is taken from a description of the initial demonstration of what was to become the 1964 Free Speech movement at the University of California at Berkeley. The account picks up shortly after several students have been cited by campus administrators for illegally setting up tables for the purpose of political solicitation.

When I saw the first citations being made to students at the tables—it was at Sather Gate...I got up on that wall (by the gate), and I started pointing out what was happening. ...I was feeling very self-conscious in doing it, because [I was not enrolled that semester]. ...I think someone else took my place. While this was going on, Mario took a chair from the table, got up on the chair, and began speaking in front of the table. ...This was when the deans had first come, while they were citing people. ...All I remember is—the deans are there, and what they were doing, and I tried to gather a crowd—I guess my aims were general agitation. It was partly spontaneous, but partly a conscious act to try to get something going. To get a group together. I was mad about what was happening. ...Mario spoke for a while pointing out what was happening. This was the first speech of the Free Speech movement. When Mario got down, I was the second person that spoke.

I remember the first time I ever spoke publicly—about a month before that—I had written everything up and read it. Now I was saying things I had never thought through carefully before...and there was this huge group around me, and I really felt I was communicating directly to everybody.

While all this was going on someone wrote on a piece of notebook paper, "WE HAVE JOINTLY MANNED THE TABLES AT SATHER GATE. DEAN OF STUDENTS OFFICE 3:00 P.M." This was passed around for signatures.

At 3:00 P.M. a crowd of students began marching into Sproul Hall to keep their "disciplinary appointment" with Dean Williams. The *Daily Californian* claimed that almost 500 students entered Sproul Hall at this point. If this was an actual head count (as it could have been, since they remained inside for several hours), the marchers picked up additional sympathizers as they went in. At any rate they must have included a good

proportion of the persons who signed the "petition of complicity," as it came to be called. The United Front leaders were amazed and delighted at the size of their following as they led the march inside.

(from Heirich 1968: 81–82)

These accounts make it clear that initially social movements share many of the same characteristics as the other forms of collective behavior. As with the fad, craze, or panic, there is clearly an emergent quality to the social movement. Both at Berkeley and in Beijing, events unfolded, not in accordance with some well-established social routine, but in response to a complex and clearly evolving reality negotiated by the parties to the conflict. Indeed, like the panic, these initial instances of collective action entailed a break with established social routines. In 1964, marching on the dean's office was not a part of the taken-for-granted reality of college life. And in Beijing, the students' actions were in violation of the law as well as hundreds of years of social custom. In this sense, both incidents were noninstitutionalized, as are the other forms of collective behavior.

Finally, there was a great deal of spontaneity in each of these events, just as there is in any instance of collective behavior. The difference is in the extent to which the various forms of collective behavior typically involve some degree of planning. The true panic involves none and therefore occupies one end of the spontaneity continuum. At the other end is the emergent movement, which is generally characterized by elements of both planning and spontaneity. The two incidents described fit this characterization. In both cases, planning preceded the event, with considerable spontaneity characterizing the actual incident. So at Berkeley, a core group of students planned to set up tables in violation of a recent university directive. But once the confrontation was underway, spontaneity became the order of the day. The student who was quoted did not know he was going to speak or exactly what he was going to say. Nor did the students know beforehand that they were going to march on the dean's office. Much the same mix of planning and spontaneity was evident in the case of the Chinese student march on Tiananmen Square. It is the spontaneous elements in each instance that mark the emergent movement as continuous with the other forms of collective behavior.

These examples, however, also serve to illustrate several important differences between the fad, disaster, and crowd, and the developing movement. We have already noted that the previously mentioned incidents were marked by considerably more planning than is usually the case in other instances of collective behavior. This in turn suggests a level of organization that tends to be absent in the other forms of collective behavior. Indeed, both incidents cited above depended on and were played out against a backdrop of established organization. In the case of the march on Tiananmen Square, it was the various universities in and around Beijing that afforded the broad organizational context out of which the movement emerged. The University of California at Berkeley served much the same function in the case of the Free Speech movement. In addition, the movement benefited from the dense network of political organizations that already existed on campus. Indeed, it was a coalition of a dozen or so of these organizations that coordinated the movement from the outset (Heirich 1968: 61).

Virtually all movements benefit from established organizations or informal friendship networks during the initial stage of collective action. The 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott, which inaugurated the modern civil rights movement, was organized through the black churches of Montgomery, Alabama. In her fascinating book *Personal Politics*, Evans (1980) shows how the radical wing of the women's liberation movement grew out of an established network of personal ties forged by women active in civil rights and New Left organizing. Fantasia's (1988: 42) account of two wildcat strikes at the Taylor Casting Company stresses the crucial importance of existing relationships among the workers as a prerequisite for what followed. To quote Fantasia, "The first wildcat was a relatively spontaneous affair. However, it was also an action which relied on mutual trust based on pre-existing shop floor relationships." Established relationships and informal modes of worker organization were also critical in the development of the Solidarity movement in 1979–80 among Polish workers in the Gdansk shipyards. Thus, for all their drama and spontaneity, emerging movements typically depend on established organizational or associational networks to a greater extent than do the other forms of collective behavior.

The same can be said for the role of cultural guidelines in structuring the early instances of collective action in social movements. There is usually a heavy normative component to emerging movements. Again, the earlier examples serve to illustrate this normative component. In the case of the Beijing march, the students' violation of the convention prohibiting such demonstrations stands in sharp contrast to their conformity with all manner of other norms of public behavior. As Calhoun (1989) notes, the march had more the quality of a friendly holiday outing rather than that of an anarchistic political gathering. At Berkeley, much the same propriety can be observed among the Free Speech activists. In one famous incident, the acknowledged leader of the movement, Mario Savio, removed his shoes before climbing on top of a police car to address a crowd. The reason for his action: a desire not to damage the car. Very rarely, then, are movements anarchistic, even at the outset. The challenge they pose to social order or to established routines tends to be highly selective. Even in the urban riots of the 1960s, looters were selective in the targets they hit and obeyed traffic signals while driving in the riot area (Fogelson 1971). Emergent movements, then, tend to rely heavily on established cultural guidelines even while challenging specific social, political, or economic arrangements and the values on which these arrangements are based.

Having discussed some of the basic differences and similarities between the emerging movement and other forms of collective behavior, we are now ready to focus our attention on the former. What is it we want to know about the emergent movement? The examples cited above raise two important, yet different, questions about the beginnings of collective action. The first is the "macro" question of movement emergence. It asks what factors account for the rise of a social movement in the first place. The second question can be thought of as the "micro" counterpart to the first. Instead of the movement as a whole, it focuses on the individuals

affiliated with it. The issue is that of "differential recruitment." Why does one individual engage in collective action while another refrains from doing so? To understand the dynamics of movement emergence we need answers to both questions. In the remainder of the chapter we summarize the main answers movement researchers have offered in response to these questions.

THE QUESTION OF MOVEMENT EMERGENCE

In the long history of research and theorizing about social movements, no question has received more attention than that concerning the origins of social movements. What factors make for a movement in the first place? It is a perplexing question. Typically, people's day-to-day behaviors are governed by predictable, institutionalized routines. Consider college life: there is an extraordinarily predictable quality to daily events on campus. After the initial excitement of the first few weeks, the college community—teachers, students, and staff alike—settle into the predictable, often tedious, routines of campus life. Students (more or less regularly) attend classes, take notes, cram for exams, pull all-nighters, and wait anxiously for their final grades. Teachers prepare lectures, meet with their classes, grade exams, sit on committees, and hold office hours. These routines, or institutionalized patterns of behavior, structure college life; at least they do most of the time. But on occasion, say, for example, at Berkeley in the fall of 1964, very different behaviors disrupt these routines. Students capture police cars, speak to mass rallies, and occupy buildings, while administrators call in the local police. How did this happen? Under what conditions do students step outside of the routines of college life and act to create very different behavioral patterns?

The same question can be posed in regard to any social movement. Let's take the American civil rights movement, arguably as successful a social movement as this country has seen since World War II. Why, after years and years of grudgingly accommodating to the routines of the "southern way of life," did blacks in large numbers begin to aggressively challenge Jim-Crow segregation? After sitting in the back of the bus for years, what prompted them to take to their feet or crowd into cars in support of bus boycotts throughout the South? After decades of buying food at the outside windows of eating establishments, why did blacks come to occupy stools and demand service at "white-only" lunch counters? Or, to take another fascinating and more recent example, how are we to understand the rise, in 1989, of Civic Forum and the broader democracy movement in former Czechoslovakia? Having accommodated Soviet-style communism for nearly forty-five years, why did the Czech people suddenly rise in revolt against it? With the memory of the Soviet crackdown of "Prague Spring" in 1968 still fresh in the minds of many, where did they find the courage to do so? Given the normal force of institutionalized routines and people's understandable fear of repression, the question of movement emergence is fascinating and has produced no shortage of answers. In the remainder of this section we will use the civil rights and the democracy movement in former Czechoslovakia to compare and contrast three of the most common theories.

Strain Theories

The first model to be reviewed is not so much a specific theory as a class of explanations that share an important assumption: that social movements are a response to some form of *strain* in society. The form of strain varies depending on the specific theory in question, but at the most general level, the impetus to collective action remains the same: collective action arises out of people's efforts to cope with the stresses of life in a social system under strain. Of the various strain theories, perhaps the most important are the collective behavior and mass-society models.

Collective Behavior. Besides serving as the name of a subfield within sociology, the term *collective behavior* has also come to be identified with a specific model of the emergence of social movements. As formulated by its chief proponents (Lang and Lang 1961, Smelser 1962, Turner and Killian 1986), this model describes social movements as a response to a major disruption in the normal functioning of society. Among the processes that are often cited as productive of such disruptions are economic depressions, urbanization, and industrialization. But any instance of rapid social change is a potential trigger for collective action. To quote Gusfield (1970: 9), "We describe social movements and collective action as responses to social change. To see them in this light emphasizes the disruptive and disturbing quality which new ideas, technologies, procedures, group migration, and intrusions can have for people."

The argument, then, runs as follows. Rapid social change introduces serious strains into society. Among the most serious of these strains are the widespread feelings of uncertainty and anxiety that any major instance of social change may produce. Social movements, then, arise as a means of coping with these feelings. More specifically, they function to reassure participants that "something is being done" to redress the underlying source of strain while also affording them the means by which they might release their anxieties through action. The social movement is effective not as political action but as a coping mechanism. To be sure, movements are not unrelated to politics. Indeed, Smelser (1962: 73) explicitly argues that they frequently represent a precursor to effective political action. Nonetheless, in themselves, movements are primarily groping attempts to help the individual cope with the emotional tensions and stresses caused by social disorganization and change.

This should all sound familiar. This perspective has been used to account for all the various forms of collective behavior described in this book. Indeed, much of the intellectual coherence of the field has derived historically from the unifying force of this perspective. According to proponents of this model, every form of collective behavior can be understood as a response to the breakdown of social order brought about by some form of rapid social change. So the panic in the theater owes to the collapse brought about by the fear of fire of the norm of taking turns when exiting from public places. The well-publicized night of looting that took place in New York City on July 13, 1977, fits the same change/collapse of social order/collective behavior sequence. The rapid change in this case was the power failure,

which led to the breakdown in routine social order, which resulted in looting and other illegal behavior.

But is this kind of argument equally valid when applied to social movements? After all, a night of looting and a panic in a theater are discrete events, whereas a social movement is a broad collection of events lasting many months or even years. Can such different phenomena be explained by the same general dynamic? Certainly, there are movements that have been accounted for on this basis. An example would be the so-called Luddite revolt that took place in the industrial areas of England in the period 1811–1816. Groups of workers staged riots, destroyed textile machines, and engaged in other acts of industrial sabotage to protest high unemployment and low wages. It can easily be seen how this movement could be explained by reference to the approach sketched here. Rapid social change, in the form of the introduction of the textile machines, threatened to undermine the traditional way of life and work of the industrial working class, thus precipitating the movement.

Similar arguments could be made to account for the rise of the democracy movement in former Czechoslovakia and the American civil rights movement. One could argue that the general crisis that gripped the Warsaw Pact countries in 1989 (and had earlier toppled communist governments in Poland and East Germany) constituted the instance of rapid social change that gave rise, in November of that year, to the Czech democracy movement. What is not so clear is that the Czech people flocked to the movement to better cope with feelings of anxiety and uncertainty engendered by the crisis. But this is the kind of argument that classic strain theory would suggest.

How might a strain theorist account for the development of the civil rights movement? One possibility would be to cite the dramatic demographic changes that occurred in the South between 1920 and 1960 as the destabilizing process that ultimately produced the movement. As late as 1920, some 85 percent of all blacks living in the United States remained in the South. And nearly 75 percent of all southern blacks lived in rural areas. They were agricultural laborers, tied to the land by the demands of the cotton economy. But "King Cotton" was about to be dethroned. A combination of boll weevil infestations, the Great Depression, foreign competition, and the rise of synthetic fibers served to seriously weaken the cotton economy. The collapse of the cotton economy changed the "southern way of life" forever. With the number of southern agricultural jobs in decline, blacks (and poor whites) fled the South in record numbers. By 1960, barely half of the nation's black population resided in the region. Many others who stayed in the South moved from the country to the city. These simultaneous demographic transitions loosened the force of social custom and undermined the racial status quo in the region. The full flowering of the civil rights movement could be seen by a proponent of the collective behavior perspective as a response to these processes.

Mass Society Theory. A somewhat similar account of the rise of social movements is put forth by mass-society theorists. In this model, however, it is not rapid social change but widespread social isolation that triggers collective action. Societies that are marked by this condition are described as *mass societies*. The

defining quality of such a society is the relative absence of political, religious, or social groups that give individuals the sense of community they seek. Deprived of such groups, individuals who find themselves in this situation tend to feel alienated, anxious, and marginal. They are, therefore, drawn to social movements to escape these feelings. Social movements, then, are seen as functioning as "substitute communities" for persons who would otherwise suffer feelings of rootlessness and marginality.

There are a number of similarities in these two models. For one, they ascribe a basic psychological function to social movements insofar as the movements help individuals cope with types of strain. Second, both models see social movements as a kind of byproduct of social disorganization. It is for this reason that some scholars have dubbed these theories "breakdown" models of collective action (see Useem 1980). According to collective behavior theorists, it is rapid social change that occasions the breakdown in social order that triggers collective action. In the mass-society formulation, the absence of strong integrative organizations weakens the social order and paves the way for social movements.

Once again, we may gain a fuller understanding of this model by applying it to the two movements discussed earlier. Regarding the civil rights movement, one could argue that the collapse of the cotton economy and the demographic transition it set in motion served to uproot blacks in exactly the way mass-society theorists contend is productive of a social movement. No longer rooted in the close-knit community of the rural South, blacks found themselves confronting the alienating world of the big city. Cut off from the kin and religious groups that served to integrate them into society in the countryside, the newly arrived urban blacks found themselves part of an anonymous urban mass. A mass-society theorist would contend that it was the desire of these displaced blacks to escape this mass and to find some collective source of identity that gave rise to the modern civil rights movement.

A similar argument could be made to explain the beginnings of the democracy movement in former Czechoslovakia. Indeed, it would be hard to imagine societies that better fit the theoretical image of the "mass society" than the Warsaw Pact countries under communism. With political parties, organized religion, and independent trade unions outlawed, the Czechoslovakian people found themselves lacking the "intermediate" groups so crucial to social integration. Instead of feeling a part of society, the majority of the citizenry felt disillusioned and alienated. The argument is clear. The democracy movement was a response to the impersonality and anonymity of mass society, affording participants an escape from the alienation they felt in their daily lives.

As plausible as these strain theories may seem when applied to the civil rights and democracy movements, there are good reasons to call them into question. Among the most frequent criticisms leveled at the collective behavior and mass-society models is the presumed link between social disorganization and collective action. This link has been attacked on a number of grounds, not the least of which is the simple empirical observation that most movements appear to develop out of stable, existing organizations. As a number of scholars have shown, it was the

southern black churches and colleges that provided the context out of which the civil rights movement emerged (see Oberschall 1973, McAdam 1982, Morris 1984). The same point has been made in regard to other movements. For instance, in his definitive account of the Free Speech movement, Heirich (1968) shows clearly that the protest developed within a coalition of established campus groups rather than among marginal, poorly organized students. Indeed, if there is anything approaching a consistent finding in the study of social movements, it is that movements seem to depend on prior organization rather than disorganization.

The proposed link between social disorganization and collective action has also been criticized for understating the extent to which social disorganization is *always* present in social life and therefore inadequate as an explanation of social movements. The point is, social movements are a fairly rare phenomenon, but social disorganization is not. In a society characterized by high unemployment and divorce rates and in which one in every three Americans moves within a five-year period, there would presumably always be sufficient social disorganization to produce widespread collective action. But, in fact, the level of social-movement activity tends to fluctuate markedly, making it difficult for social disorganization to be its sole cause. Finally, and perhaps most important, strain theories were challenged simply because they did not fit with the experiences of a whole new generation of scholars who came of age in the 1960s. To this new generation, the popular and clearly political movements of the 1960s and 1970s seemed incompatible with and poorly explained by models that emphasized social disorganization and psychological motivations as the keys to movement emergence. In turn, this perceived lack of fit sparked something of a renaissance in the sociological study of social movements. The net effect of the new scholarship has been to shift the focus of analysis from psychological or "breakdown" models to more political or organizational accounts of movement emergence. Two of these models are the *resource-mobilization* and *political-process* theories.

Resource-Mobilization Theory

It is a bit of fiction to label resource-mobilization a theory. So influential has the perspective become that scholars saying very different things have used the sheltering canopy of the model to legitimate their work. As a result, the perspective has been stretched to accommodate a variety of different positions, at considerable cost to the conceptual coherence and clarity of the model. We can, however, summarize the central thrust of the perspective.

As formulated by its original proponents, McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977), resource-mobilization was conceived as a response to those who saw social movements as resulting from strain or discontent in society. They argue that there is always sufficient strain in society to serve as the motivation for collective action. Therefore, you could not rely on strain arguments to account for the rise of protest activity. What varies, they argue, is not the motivation to organize but the organizational resources required to do so. The image invoked is of fertile, but barren, soil

that lacks only the life-giving resources needed to produce a movement. And what was to be the source of these resources? According to the authors, nothing less than general societal prosperity.

Economic growth and prosperity are expected to stimulate movement activity in at least two ways. First, good times increase the amount of discretionary income available to people, thus putting extra money into their pockets to be spent on a variety of "luxuries" they ordinarily cannot afford. One such luxury is support for social causes. In times of economic hardship or uncertainty, people are generally not willing or able to devote scarce resources to political pursuits. In periods of economic prosperity, however, they are more likely to do so. This, according to McCarthy and Zald, encourages the creation of formal movement organizations to compete for the expanding discretionary income of the affluent. The result is more movement activity, increasingly sponsored by bureaucratic organizations that vie for the consumer dollar much like any other firm would. In effect, prosperity creates a potential market for social and political causes, which formal movement organizations seek to stimulate through aggressive marketing and fund-raising techniques. McCarthy and Zald (1973) use the term *conscience constituent* to refer to those who provide the resources to support collective action on behalf of others. In turn, other scholars have documented the crucial role played by conscience constituents in a variety of movements, including the farm workers' movement (Jenkins and Perrow 1977), the National Welfare Rights Organization (Bailis 1974, West 1981) and the civil rights movement (Mc Adam 1982).

Second, economic growth may also promote collective action by increasing the flow of resources to the disadvantaged as well. This may happen directly, through the improvement of employment prospects, or indirectly, through greater budget outlays for social programs. Both processes have been cited as contributing to the rise in social-movement activity during the 1960s. Not only were unemployment rates low during the decade, but programs such as Head Start and VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) served, at times, to channel financial and organizational resources into the hands of movement organizers. The result was the creation of a stronger base from which to launch social movements.

What of the two movements we have been discussing throughout the chapter? How might a proponent of the resource-mobilization approach explain the rise of the civil rights movement or the democracy movement in former Czechoslovakia? They would do so by arguing that the resources needed to launch the movement were somehow more available during the period in question than they had been earlier. McCarthy and Zald (1973) have made precisely this type of argument to account for the general rise of sixties activism, of which they see the civil rights struggle as a part. The key to the turbulence of the sixties, according to McCarthy and Zald, was the general increase in societal resources that resulted from the prolonged period of prosperity enjoyed by the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. They link this prosperity to the rise of the civil rights movement in a number of ways. First, blacks themselves had more resources to contribute to the struggle. So too did liberal whites who served as conscience constituents in regard to the movement. The general

prosperity also produced (hard as it is to imagine in this era of a trillion-dollar federal deficit) budget surpluses, some of which were spent on ambitious social programs such as Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. In turn, these programs indirectly aided the movement by funnelling monies into local community organizations and anti-poverty programs with strong ties to civil rights groups and figures. Finally, McCarthy and Zald place special emphasis on other forms of external sponsorship in the rise of the movement. Liberal foundations, labor unions, and church groups are credited with providing resources vital to the survival of the movement. But ultimately the generosity of these groups has to be seen in the context of the general prosperity characteristic of the era. It was this prosperity that increased the level of discretionary resources available to individual and organizational sponsors alike.

It is considerably harder to see how the resource-mobilization perspective could be used to help explain the rise of Civic Forum in former Czechoslovakia. Instead of general societal prosperity, the movement arose at a time of severe economic crisis and hardship. One could, we suppose, point to other forms of external "sponsorship," such as extensive Western press coverage and rhetorical support from the West, but to make this kind of argument stretches the definition of resources well beyond the kinds of tangible organizational resources stressed as crucial by proponents of the model.

Political-Process Theory

One of the major contributions of recent work in the study of social movements has been the reassertion of the political. Virtually all scholarship in the last twenty years rests on the implicit image of social movements as a form of organized political activity on the part of groups who lack the necessary leverage to pursue their goals through "proper political channels." In this conception, society is seen as an elaborate system of power relations that grants some groups routine access to power while denying it to others. Gamson's (1990) distinction between members and challengers is an attempt to express this idea. Those groups with routine access to power he calls "members"; those lacking such access are termed "challengers." In times of political stability, the power disparity between members and challengers is likely to be so great as to virtually preclude any effective political action by challengers. In such eras, groups simply lack any real leverage to press their demands. During periods of political instability, however, the balance of power between members and challengers is bound to change. The process is not unlike the reapportionment of voting districts. District boundaries tend to remain stable for some time, thereby solidifying power relations between the various groups within the district. Reapportionment, however, puts pressure on all groups to renegotiate existing political alliances in light of the redrafting of district boundaries.

In a more general sense, politics at any level can be described as the alternation of periods of stability with periods of change that afford challengers opportunities for successful collective action. It is during these latter periods that social movements are expected to arise. The political-process model rests on this assumption.

The basic idea is that social movements develop in response to an increase in the "structure of political opportunities" available to a particular challenging group. What the model calls into question is the idea of a fixed and immutable political system that leaves certain groups permanently powerless. To quote Lipsky (1970:14)

Attention is directed away from system characterizations presumably true for all times and places, which are basically of little value in understanding the social and political process. We are accustomed to describing communist political systems as "experiencing a thaw" or "going through a process of retrenchment." Should it not at least be an open question as to whether the American political system experiences such stages and fluctuations? Similarly, is it not sensible to assume that the system will be more or less open to specific groups at different times and at different places?

According to political-process theorists, the answer to both of Lipsky's questions is yes. Over time, any given challenging group can expect to confront a political system that varies a great deal in its vulnerability to organized protest activity. In one era, the political forces aligned against the challenger may make collective action a near impossibility. In another, shifting political alignments may create a unique opportunity for successful political action by, or on behalf of, the same group. This variability in the political leverage available to challenging groups has, in turn, been linked by a number of scholars to the emergence of specific social movements.

For example, Jenkins and Perrow (1977: 263, 266) attribute the success of the farm workers' movement in the 1960s to "the altered political environment within which the challenge operated." The change, they contend, originated "in economic trends and political realignments that took place quite independent of any 'push' from insurgents." In his analysis of the emergence of the contemporary environmental movement, Gale (1986: 203) also notes the importance of the development of a "political system which included agencies already sympathetic to the movement." In general, it can be argued that the ascendance during the 1960s of the liberal wing of the Democratic party created a political environment supportive of the emergence of a wide variety of leftist movements. Similarly, the conservative backlash of the 1970s and the dominance during the 1980s of the political right encouraged the mobilization of the Moral Majority and pro-life forces while dimming the prospects for successful leftist movements.

But what of the movements discussed earlier? The civil rights movement provides an especially good example of the kind of argument offered by political-process theorists. In his 1982 book entitled *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*, McAdam argues that the movement was born of a series of broad social changes that served to increase the leverage available to civil rights activists. Perhaps the most important of these changes was the mass migration of blacks to the states of the industrial North. This migration, set in motion by the collapse of the cotton economy, dramatically increased the national political importance of black voters. While national politicians had been able to ignore civil rights as an issue prior to the migration, they were no longer able to do so. This gave civil

rights leaders a potent source of pressure that they successfully exploited during the heyday of the movement.

Civic Forum and the other Eastern European democracy movements also seem to have developed in response to a fundamental "expansion in political opportunities" within the Warsaw Pact countries. Mikhail Gorbachev's reform policies, coupled with his stated unwillingness to use Soviet troops to quell political unrest in other Warsaw Pact nations, opened the flood gates. With the threat of Soviet repression removed, dissidents and reformers were free to fashion mass movements based on political and economic grievances that had long simmered beneath the grey conformist surface of Soviet-style society.

So we are left with three very different accounts of the emergence of social movements. *Strain theories* suggest that movements arise in response to social disorganization in society. In this view, movements provide one means by which people attempt to cope with the stress and anxiety caused by social change and disorganization.

In contrast, *resource-mobilization* and *political-process* theories emphasize the political function of social movements. Movements are the means by which relatively powerless segments of society seek to improve the conditions of their lives. Where these two models differ is in the conditions that are seen to trigger a movement in the first place. For resource-mobilization theorists, a significant increase in the resources—principally money—available to these challenging groups is thought key to the process of movement emergence. Proponents of the political-process model argue that the roots of a social movement are to be found in broad economic, demographic, or political processes that serve to enhance the political leverage of previously powerless groups. An increase in political power, then, not resources, is thought to encourage the development of a social movement.

We leave it to you to assess the merits of these three approaches. Before we close this section, however, we think it is worth noting that, for all of their differences, all three of these models share one assumption. All three see social change as the impetus to collective action. Where the strain models differ from the newer approaches is in the role they assign to change or disruption in the process of movement emergence. For collective behavior theorists, social change operates at a psychological level to encourage people to engage in collective action as a means of expressing and relieving the feelings of uncertainty and anxiety that change inevitably produces. For resource-mobilization and political-process theorists, the significance of change is primarily political or organizational in nature. That is, change operates to encourage collective action by increasing either the organizational resources a particular group has to pursue its goals or the political leverage available to it.

At the heart of these newer theories is an implicit model of social life stressing the role of inertia and entrenched self-interest in perpetuating political and economic systems that benefit a few and disadvantage many. These systems, however, are never so firmly entrenched as to make them immune to challenge. It is the routine dynamics of social change that serve to weaken these systems, even

while strengthening the hand of particular challenging groups. The hypothesis, then, is that social movements are set in motion by changes that make existing political or economic arrangements increasingly vulnerable to challenge.

THE QUESTION OF INDIVIDUAL ACTIVISM

Companion to the question of movement emergence is the issue of individual participation in a social movement. Just as one might ask what broad political, economic, or social factors make a movement more likely in the first place, so too can one seek to identify those microlevel factors that lead an individual to get involved in collective action. Clearly, the two questions are closely related. Obviously, no movement will form unless individuals choose to become involved. At the same time, much of what prompts an individual to get involved in a movement is the sense of momentum that an already-existing movement is able to generate. Thus, the two processes—movement emergence and individual recruitment—are expected to go hand in hand.

It is important to keep in mind, though, that they remain two separate processes. Explaining why an individual comes to participate in collective action does not suffice as an account of why a particular movement emerged when it did. By the same token, knowing what mix of factors produced a movement tells us little about the processes that led particular individuals to get involved. As obvious as this may sound, the fact remains that the literature on social movements is filled with examples of the two questions being confused. In this section, however, we intend to focus only on those factors that have been proposed as explanations for individual activism. These factors can be grouped into two broad categories: *individual characteristics* and *social-structural conditions*.

Individual characteristics are any psychological factors or attitudes that might predispose someone to get involved in a social movement. Social-structural conditions are the ways in which the social organization of the person's life may encourage or discourage participation. To illustrate the difference, a hypothetical example should prove helpful. Suppose tomorrow you heard that a march was being organized on campus to protest the continuation of the policy of apartheid in South Africa. If you were asked to play sociologist and predict who would take part in the march, on what would you base your prediction? One approach would be to base your guess on the political attitudes of all potential marchers. It is certainly reasonable to assume that only those who oppose apartheid will join in the march. This would be a crude hypothesis based on an account of movement participation that sees individual attitudes or psychological factors as the key to understanding activism. In contrast, a social-structural theorist would come at the problem very differently. He or she would want to know more about the social-structural circumstances of the potential marchers' lives. The theorist might predict that it will be those students and faculty who are most active in campus organizations, who are closest to those on the organizing committee, or who have fewer work or family responsibilities who are most likely to take part in the march. Instead of focusing

on the individual in isolation, the social-structural theorist would assess what the individual's structural chances for participation in the march are.

This example is intended merely to illustrate the key conceptual difference between the two approaches. To fully appreciate this difference and the rich scholarly tradition embodied in each approach we need to review them in more detail. We start with the individualistic approach.

Individualistic Accounts of Activism

There is a very basic appeal to individual accounts of activism. That appeal may be even greater in the United States, with its strong emphasis on individuality and free will. We are comfortable with the notion that people's behaviors reflect their psychological "needs" or their individual values or attitudes. Often it is thought that to explain behavior one need look no further than the individual. This assumption has given rise to a number of individualistic explanations of activism. These explanations can be further grouped into two basic types: those that attribute participation to certain psychological characteristics and those that see activism as a reflection of underlying attitudes that support participation.

Psychological Characteristics. Many individual accounts of activism identify a particular psychological state or characteristic as the root cause of participation. The emphasis is on character traits or states of mind that presumably dispose an individual toward participation. Although the underlying assumption remains the same in all such models, the specific characteristics thought to account for activism vary from model to model, however. What follows is a mere sampling of some of the psychological accounts one can find in the literature. This is not intended as an exhaustive survey of these models but rather is designed to give the reader a flavor for the class of models under discussion.

An example of this kind of psychological theorizing is Feuer's account of the rise of the Free Speech movement at Berkeley. In his 1969 book, *The Conflict of Generations*, Feuer argues that those who were drawn to the movement were apt to be those students—especially males—who saw in the movement a chance to play out unresolved emotional conflicts directed at their parents. Other observers, most notably Hoffer (1951) and Adorno (Adorno et al. 1950) have argued that nondemocratic movements may disproportionately recruit those with "authoritarian" personality traits. In their view, these movements afford participants a legitimate—at least in the eyes of the movement—opportunity to act out authoritarian impulses that in everyday society would be disapproved of.

The mass-society perspective touched on earlier offers us another psychological account of individual activism. Proponents of the approach, such as Kornhauser (1959), argue that movements provide "substitute communities" for those alienated, marginal members of society who are disproportionately drawn to activism. In Kornhauser's view it is the psychological state of alienation that pushes the individual to seek the community and sense of identity the movement provides.

Finally, some psychological theories see activism as a form of aggression caused by various forms of frustration. These models are variations on the well-established theme of "frustration/aggression" in psychology. The argument is that much of human behavior—including activism—should be seen as a release of frustration through aggression. One specific application of this perspective to movement participation is the theory of relative deprivation. The theory rests on the underlying assumption that the perception that one is deprived, relative to someone else, creates "an underlying state of...psychological tension that is relieved by SM [social movement] participation" (Gurney and Tierney 1982: 36).

What are we to make of these various formulations? Does this general class of explanations seem to be a plausible account of activism? Let us return to the hypothetical example touched on earlier. Imagine there was to be a march tomorrow on campus to protest South Africa's policy of apartheid. Is it convincing to think that all of those who would take part would conform to a similar psychological profile? That, for instance, all of the marchers would have "authoritarian" personalities or would be using the march as a vehicle for resolving emotional conflicts with their parents? Obviously this assumption is too simplistic. Having participated in such marches, it seems to us that one finds a great deal more psychological diversity among activists than this perspective suggests.

Ultimately, however, what matters most in judging the merits of any theory is not one's subjective response to it but rather its predictive utility. By *predictive utility* we mean how well the theory accords with actual evidence of the phenomenon it purports to explain. In this case, do activists disproportionately display the kinds of psychological profiles described in these models? The answer in general is no.

For all their apparent theoretical sophistication, psychological accounts of movement participation have fared rather poorly when it comes to empirical support. Summarizing his exhaustive survey of the literature on the relationship between activism and various psychological factors, Mueller (1980: 69) concludes that "psychological attributes of individuals, such as frustration and alienation, have minimal direct impact for explaining the occurrence of rebellion and revolution per se." Wilson and Orum (1976: 189) offer a similar assessment of the empirical record: "We conclude that the many analyses...of collective actions during the past decade, impress upon us the poverty of psychology; or, at the very least, the limitations of psychology."

This is not to say that psychological factors have no effect on movement participation. But no single set of psychological factors accounts for activism across diverse movements. Nor would all activists appear to be of the same psychological "type."

Underlying Attitudes. Similar to the logic of the psychological models reviewed above, attitudinal accounts of activism locate the roots of participation squarely within the individual. The claim is simple enough: activism grows out of strong attitudinal support for the values and goals of the movement. This account was especially popular as applied to student activism in the late 1960s and early

1970s. According to the research of Flacks (1967) and Keniston (1968), the actions of student radicals were motivated by values learned from their parents.

To their credit, the advocates of this approach have rejected the somewhat mechanistic psychological models of activism sketched in the previous section. In their place, they have substituted a straightforward behavioral link between a person's values and political attitudes, and participation in collective action. Unfortunately, this conceptual advance has not produced any better fit between theory and data. Based on his analysis of 215 studies of the relationship between individual attitudes and riot participation, McPhail (1971) concluded that "individual predispositions are, at best, insufficient to account" for participation in collective action.

In point of fact, the discrepancy between attitudes and behavior has been borne out by countless studies conducted over the years. In summarizing the results of these studies, Wicker (1969:75) underscored the inadequacy of this approach. There exists, he concluded, "little evidence to support the postulated existence of stable, underlying attitudes within the individual which influence both his verbal expressions and his actions."

Does this mean that attitudes are totally irrelevant to the study of individual activism? Certainly not. It is just that their importance has been overstated in many accounts of movement participation. In our view, attitudes remain important insofar as they serve as a kind of minimum requirement for involvement in a given movement. That is, certain prior attitudes will virtually preclude a segment of the population from participating in even the mildest forms of activism. For instance, anyone with strong feminist values is simply not going to become active in a movement to block passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. By the same token, an individual who believes that racial separation is the will of God is hardly going to become active in the antiapartheid movement.

These examples, however, help illustrate the basic problem with attitudinal accounts of activism. In the case of most movements, the number of persons who agree with the basic goals of the movement is still many times larger than the actual number of persons who take part in any movement activity. Take, for example, the imaginary antiapartheid march on campus. If someone were to take a poll at your school, wouldn't you expect the vast majority of students to be opposed to the South African system of apartheid? But would all of those students holding antiapartheid views participate in the march? Almost certainly not. Two Dutch social scientists, Klandermans and Oegema (1987), provide an interesting illustration of the gap between attitudes and activism in their study of recruitment to a major peace demonstration in the Netherlands. Based on before and after interviews with a sample of 114 persons, the authors conclude that 26 percent of those interviewed were simply unavailable for participation due to their disagreement with the goals of the demonstration. That left nearly three-quarters of the sample as potentially available for participation. Yet only 4 percent actually attended the rally. It is precisely this disparity between attitudes and participation that, of course, requires explanation. One thing seems clear, however; given the size of this disparity, the role of individual attitudes in shaping activism must be regarded

as fairly limited. If 95 percent of all those who are attitudinally disposed to activism choose, as they did in this case, not to participate, then clearly additional factors are affecting the decision to take part. One factor that has recently gained favor among scholars is the individual's social-structural relationship to the movement in question.

Social-structural Accounts of Activism. Because of the apparent lack of empirical support for all manner of individual accounts of activism, attention has turned in recent years to explanations based on an individual's social-structural proximity to a movement. The argument is that people participate in movements not simply because they are psychologically or attitudinally compelled to but because their structural location in the world makes them available for participation. It matters little if one is ideologically or psychologically disposed toward participation if one lacks the opportunity to get involved. Take, for example, two students with equally positive views of the antiapartheid movement. Now imagine that one of those students commutes to school from a distance of thirty miles and spends little time on campus outside of his classes. The second student, on the other hand, lives in a dorm and spends virtually all of her time on campus. Should an antiapartheid demonstration develop on campus, which of these students do you think is more likely to get involved? Almost certainly it would be the second student. Not only does the fact that she lives at school make her more available for participation, but her presence on campus increases her likelihood of hearing about the demonstration and knowing others who are involved.

Consistent with this line of argument, research in recent years has demonstrated the importance of these types of social-structural factors in recruitment to activism. Specifically, three structural factors have been linked to individual participation in movement activities. We will illustrate each by reference to the hypothetical antiapartheid march.

1. *Prior contact with another activist.* Imagine that you live on campus and that your roommate is a member of a student group calling itself the "Antiapartheid Coalition." This group has called for and organized the march that is to take place on campus. Unless you strongly support an apartheid policy it is likely that you will take part in the march. Why? Not because you are any more psychologically or attitudinally disposed to do so, but because you are more sociologically "at risk" of being drawn into the movement.

At least two factors are operating that make your participation quite likely. First, your relationship with your roommate guarantees that you will have heard about the march. This is not a trivial matter. Obviously one cannot take part in an activity one is unaware of. Second, and sociologically most important, your relationship with your roommate may give you an important *social incentive* for attending the march. That is, unless you dislike your roommate, you may feel some pressure to take part in the march simply to enhance or maintain the respect and affection he or she feels for you. In point of fact, this is how we generally get involved in any new social activity. We are introduced to it by someone whose approval we desire or whose opinion we value.

The explanatory power of this basic sociological process has been borne out in many studies of recruitment to activism. Bolton (1972: 558), for example, found that most

recruits into the two peace groups he studied "were already associated with persons who belonged to or were organizing the peace group, and were recruited through these interpersonal channels." Similarly, Snow's (1976) analysis of recruitment into the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist movement in America revealed that 82 percent of those he studied had been drawn into the movement by virtue of existing ties to other members. In a study of all applicants to the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer project, McAdam (1986) found that participants were twice as likely to have "strong ties" to other volunteers than were those who withdrew in advance of the campaign. The fact that those who did not participate were indistinguishable from actual participants in their attitudes toward the project only serves to underscore the importance of personal ties in recruitment to activism. Finally, in their important survey of the empirical literature on movement recruitment, Snow, et al. (1980) found prior interpersonal contact to be the single richest source of movement recruits in all but one of the nine studies they reviewed.

2. *Membership in organizations.* Another social-structural factor that has been linked to individual activism is membership in organizations. Belonging to organizations may encourage activism for a variety of reasons. Let us return to our hypothetical example. How might membership in some campus organizations increase your chances of participating in the antiapartheid march? Three separate processes can be identified. The first is simply informational. Membership in any campus organization brings the individual into contact with more students and therefore increases the chances of learning about events on campus.

Second, membership in a student group increases the likelihood that the individual will be drawn into the march by virtue of his or her organization's involvement in the event. Imagine, for instance, that an activist is a member of the International Relations Club on campus. Imagine further that the leadership of that club decides to endorse the march and to urge members to take part. Under such conditions, the individual may well feel that he or she needs to participate to maintain status within the organization.

The final explanation for the link between organizational participation and activism represents a simple extension of the factor discussed in the previous section. To the extent that membership in organizations expands the number of people a person has contact with, it also increases the person's susceptibility to the kind of personal-recruiting appeals that were earlier shown to be so effective in drawing people into movements.

Regardless of the mix of factors accounting for the relationship between membership and participation, the empirical evidence of its existence is clear. Marx (1967), for example, found that organizational involvement was highly correlated with support for the civil rights movement among blacks. Orum (1972) found a consistent positive relationship between involvement in the black student sit-in movement and the number of campus organizations the student belonged to. McAdam's (1986) data on applicants to the Freedom Summer project showed that participants belonged to more organizations than did those who withdrew from the project. Finally, Zurcher and Kirkpatrick (1976) found participation in a local antipornography campaign to be highly related to membership in several local service clubs.

3. *Absence of "biographical constraints."* To this point, in trying to account for individual activism, we have emphasized the importance of various social-structural links between the potential recruit and the movement. What this view omits is the biographical context in which this contact occurs. Quite apart from the "pull" exerted by these links, the circumstances of a person's life may serve to encourage or discourage participation in important ways. The concept of biographical constraints captures this impact. Certain major life experiences such as child rearing, marriage, and full-time employment seem to reduce the likelihood of movement involvement by raising the costs and risks associated with activism.