Collective Behavior

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Chapter 4

The Value-Added Theory

In 1962, Neil J. Smelser published what he called a new and controversial theory of collective behavior. In a dramatic departure from earlier theorists, Smelser focused on the structural social conditions that lead up to what his book's introduction called "collective seizures." Smelser argued that the factors leading to collective behavior are social, not psychological. He claimed to be able to explain why collective episodes occur where they do, when they do, and in the ways they do. Rather than looking inside the minds of the participants, he focused on the social structure itself.

Smelser's Value-Added Theory has its roots in Functionalism. To oversimplify a bit, functionalists assume anything that exists for a long time in society, or that occurs over and over, must serve some sort of benefit or function for society. Using this perspective, Smelser assumed that collective behavior must serve some sort of function. He decided that collective behavior occurs as a sort of relief valve for pent-up tension or strain in society. Whenever tension exists, the potential for collective behavior also exists. The greater the strain, the greater the likelihood of an episode.

The most basic assertions of Smelser's theory can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Collective behavior is not caused by mysterious forces. Clearly identifiable determinants drive a collective episode.

2. Collective behavior is not caused by the psychology of the participants, but rather by the conditions within the social structure, organization, or specific setting.
3. Collective behavior is driven by strain experienced by participants within a social setting. The unusual behavior acts as a release for participants, lessening their strain. It is not normative, institutionalized, or ceremonial behavior.
4. There are determinants that must be present in order for any form of collective behavior to occur. The determinants are: structural conduciveness, structural strain, generalized belief, precipitating factors, mobilization of participants, and social control. If any determinant is lacking, there will be no outburst. If all of the determinants are present, then collective behavior is immanent.

At no point does Smelser refer to pathology, contagion, temporary insanity, or any other mental or psychological condition of participants. He specifi-
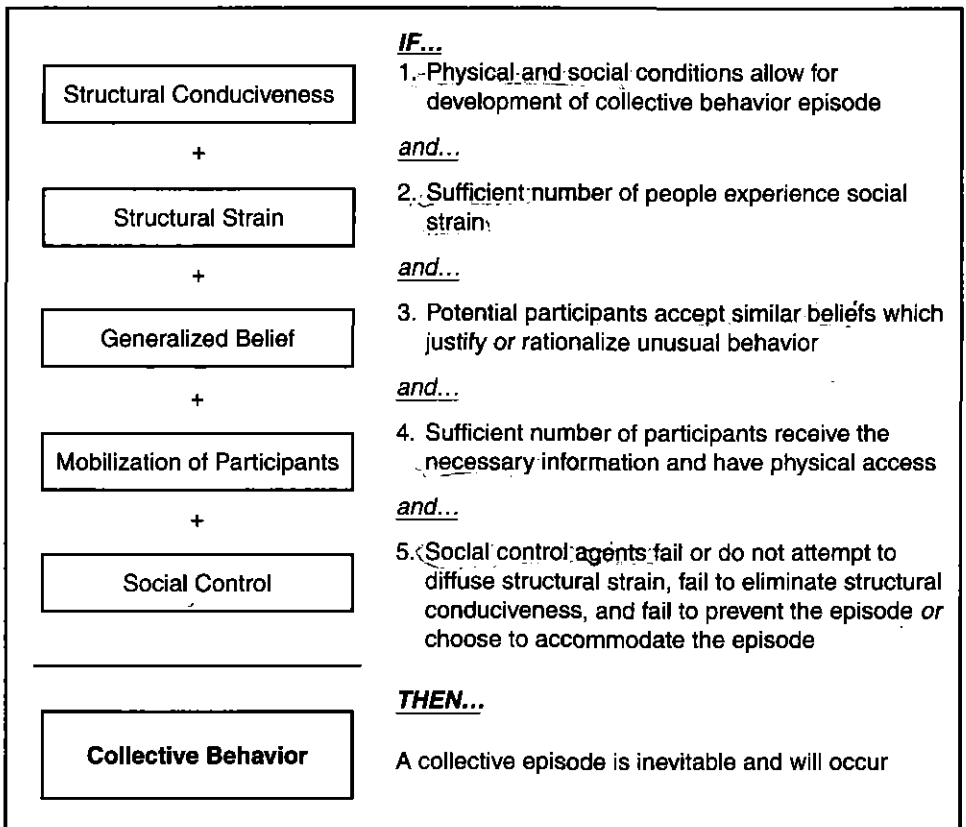

Figure 4.1   The development of Collective Behavior from the Value-Added Perspective

cally argues that psychological factors are created and driven by social factors. Like Turner and Killian (Chapter 3), Smelser assumes that collective behavior participants maintain the ability to reason. Circumstances and social factors create a situation where illogical or irrational behavior seems logical and rational to those within the situation. These circumstances must come about in a particular order for an episode of collective behavior to occur (see Figure 4.1).

Components of Social Action

According to Smelser, all social behavior is driven by one of four components of social action. These components are: values, norms, organized individual motivation in roles and collectivities, and situational facilities. Different forms of collective behavior relate to each of these four components.

Values

Values provide a general source of legitimacy for social behavior. In any society, behavior is judged at the most general level according to societal values. If behavior goes against social values, it is condemned. If behavior seems to mesh with social values, then it is generally accepted.

Norms

Norms give specific guidelines as to how these values are to be enacted. They are the formal and informal rules and laws that we are expected to follow.

Individual Mobilization of Motivation

Smelser uses the phrase "the individual mobilization of motivation for organized acts within roles and collectivities" to refer to the third component of social behavior. He meant for the reader to understand that social behavior occurs within the context of a social structure. Society creates certain social organizations to fulfill certain functions. Social organization and social structure influence and sometimes even dictate individual behavior. We are often judged by how well we fulfill the demands of a particular role, such as student.

Situational Facilities

Situational facilities, the fourth component of social behavior, are the means and obstacles that facilitate or hinder the attainment of goals. These include tools, skills, and knowledge.

Values guide what we as a society desire, norms guide how we go about getting what we desire, individual motivation guides the structure or organi-

zation that we create in order to achieve that which we desire, and situational facilities guide how successful we are in achieving it. For example, "financial independence" is an American value. Getting a higher education is one normative way to go about getting it. In order to gain higher education in the United States, a person must attend a college, university, or other institution of higher learning. These institutions represent the social organizations that our society has created to provide the transfer of knowledge. Economic resources, availability of loans and scholarships, and proximity to such institutions all contribute to a person's ability to attend. They represent the situational facilities required to attend college.

For any action that sociologists analyze, Smelser wants us to ask: What values legitimize this action? What norms keep it coordinated and relatively conflict-free? In what ways is the action structured into roles and organizations?, and What kind of situational facilities are available?'These four components of behavior are important to the extent that they form the basis of Smelser's conceptualization of collective behavior. He argues that collective behavior can be classified and analyzed under the same conceptual framework as any social behavior. The primary difference is that collective behavior falls outside of normative expectations. Collective behavior occurs when strain is exerted on one or more of the four components of action and established ways of relieving the strain are not available. Any time there is strain on societal values, norms, social organizations, or resources, collective behavior is likely to occur.

The Value-Added Process

The term "value-added" is borrowed from the field of economics. In economics, value-added refers to the idea that each step toward a finished product adds value to the resources used. For instance, before an automobile can be assembled iron ore must be mined. The first step of production (mining) has added value to the iron ore. The ore must then be made into steel, which is worth more than the ore. The steel is then stamped or formed into parts, which must be assembled into an automobile. Each step (mining, milling, stamping, assembling, etc.) moves the materials closer to becoming a final product. Painting, shipping, and selling are the final stages. What were once raw materials are now valuable consumer products.

The term "value-added" is somewhat misleading when applied to collective behavior. Collective behavior does not have inherent monetary value. In fact, some forms end up costing millions of dollars in damages. Smelser was actually referring to the stages of assembly as a metaphor for the steps that must occur before a collective episode is possible. If a step is skipped in assembling a car, nothing is created. One cannot assemble a car out of raw iron ore, without the smelting, stamping, and forming. The steps must also occur in the proper order. It isn't possible to stamp raw iron ore into car parts. In

exactly the same way, certain things must occur in a certain order before any episode of collective behavior becomes possible. Smelser calls these factors "determinants." It is a step-by-step process. Once the first several determinants are present, then the collective episode becomes increasingly likely.

In Smelser's original formulation, there were six determinants of collective behavior. The determinants are labeled structural conduciveness, structural strain, growth and spread of a generalized belief, precipitating factors, mobilization of participants for action, and the operation of social control. The Value-Added Theory has been gradually modified over the years as it is used in research. It can be said that Neil Smelser owes a particular debt of gratitude to sociologist Jerry M. Lewis, who has modified and applied the Value-Added Theory to numerous collective episodes over the last few decades (see, for example, Lewis 1972, 1982a, 1982b, 1989 and Lewis and Kelsey 1994). This gradual evolution of the theory has created some changes that will be noted throughout our look at Smelser's theory.

Structural Conduciveness

The first determinant of collective behavior is structural conduciveness. This refers to any factors in the social and/or physical environment that make collective behavior possible. This determinant creates the conditions that make the collective behavior possible, but cannot cause an episode to occur by itself.

Each form of collective behavior has its own factors of structural conduciveness. The factors that make a panic possible are not the same as the factors that make a consumer craze possible. Riots, for example, require a number of people to be in the same place at the same time. An empty cornfield lacks the most basic component of structural conduciveness that would make a riot possible. If, for some reason, hundreds of people gather in the field to hear a speaker, then one of the basic components of conduciveness (a gathering of people) has been met. Any social or physical factor that makes any form of collective behavior possible is a part of the structural conduciveness. This determinant is present in many places virtually all of the time. The more factors of structural conduciveness are present, the more likely the event is to occur. However, no collective episode will occur until the other determinants are present.

Smelser refers almost exclusively to societal factors in his original discussion of conduciveness. He does not mention physical surroundings. However, researchers (including Smelser) have since realized that physical factors within a situation may permit or inhibit social action as much as social factors. The right weather, time of day, week, and year, and the actual physical layout of a space all contribute to the likelihood of collective behavior. Dry, hot weather makes forest fires more likely by creating circumstances under which trees will readily burn. Many forms of human behavior are similarly dictated by mundane variables like the weather. The easier it is for a collective episode to occur, the more structural conduciveness is present.

In the United States, riots almost always occur during warm, dry weather, often over the weekend. This is not because people experience more rage when the weather is sunny. It is because they are more likely to be out and about during nice weather. In fact, it used to be that the hotter the weather got, the more likely a riot became. Many of the riots that occurred before the 1980s started in the middle of heat waves. July and August were the months most likely to erupt in violence. This was because more and more people would gather outside as it got hotter, trying to catch a cooling breeze. The proliferation of air conditioning throughout the United States has modified our behavior. In many parts of the country, once the temperature rises above a certain point people begin to avoid going outdoors because it is cooler inside. The more homes and businesses have air conditioning, the less people gather outside during hot weather. Fewer people gathering outside means less structural conduciveness for mob behavior. Riots are now more likely to occur in the spring/early summer and the late summer/fall than in July or August.

The social characteristics of those present in a situation can also contribute to the structural conduciveness. Young men are more likely to engage in violent, aggressive behavior than older, gender-mixed crowds. Therefore, a heavy-metal concert has more structural conduciveness for a riot than an opera. Both events may draw thousands of people to a particular location to watch a performance. However, one crowd is more likely to erupt in violence if the performance is interrupted. On the other hand, both crowds may be equally likely to panic and crush each other if a fire breaks out in the theater. Both situations contain structural conduciveness for some forms of collective behavior.

Some structural conduciveness is present any time people gather or communicate. The particular form of collective behavior that is possible varies dramatically from situation to situation. Some forms of collective behavior require people to be in the same place at the same time (lynchings, riots, and panics), while others (fads, social movements, and crazes) do not. Some are more likely to occur in urban settings, some in rural surroundings. Collective behavior is possible much more often than it actually occurs. It does not occur more often because the other necessary determinants are not always present to produce the action.

Structural Strain

Collective behavior is interesting to us because it is not normal behavior. People do things that they would not normally do, in situations where the behavior is not expected. Smelser argues that this unusual behavior is driven by social factors leading up to the event. Structural strain, the second determinant of collective behavior, drives participants to engage in such unusual behavior. Anything that causes stress, tension, or anxiety to participants makes them likely to do things that they would not normally do. Collective behavior

becomes much more likely if the strain is caused by ambiguities, deprivations, conflicts, or discrepancies that somehow coincide with any factors of conduciveness. Strain alone cannot cause the event, but if the strain is compatible with the structural conduciveness, the raw materials of the event have been assembled. The episode becomes much more likely to occur.

In his original formulation of the Value-Added Theory, Smelser discussed strain in purely social terms. He argued that strain is primarily caused by any event that does not meet cultural standards or personal expectations; strain is a result of insufficient reward or too much responsibility in performing a task, not enough power, conflict of societal values, etc. Unemployment, poverty, fear of unemployment, fear of poverty, discrimination, worry about the coming of a new century, natural disasters, or war could all be sources of social strain. Researchers have since pointed out that physical factors such as the architecture of a sports stadium, extreme heat, electrical blackouts, or traffic jams can also be sources of structural strain. Some forms of collective behavior are caused by long-standing strain that originates from within the root of a culture. Others are caused by temporary strain that is short-lived and unique to the situation. For example, the dissonance between societal values about equality and treatment of minorities is a source of general stain within society. Being trapped in an elevator for hours is a source of specific strain for those inside the elevator. These different levels and types of strain will potentially lead to different forms of collective behavior. They may even overlap. The people trapped in the elevator may also be worried about social changes.

It doesn't matter how grand or small, how long-lasting or temporary the strain is. When people feel strain, they want to get rid of it. It makes them uncomfortable, uncertain, and anxious. If you are thirsty, you drink. If you are hungry, you eat. However, what if your discomfort is caused by worry about the state of the economy? How do you fix the problem? The more strain people are under, the more likely they are to engage in unusual behavior. The more vague or general the strain is, the more likely they are to feel anxious or helpless. Anything that seems to release their tension is welcomed as a good thing.

Structural strain makes the other determinants important. If there is enough structural strain present, people become more and more likely to engage in bizarre behavior. It makes people believe things they would not normally believe, think things they would not normally think, and do things they would not normally do. Structural strain can make an ordinary event turn into the catalyst for an explosive release. If a white man hits a black man in a community with little racial tension, there is a chance that someone will call 911 and report the assault. In a community that has a great deal of racial tension the same event could become the trigger for an explosive riot, a lynching, or a revolutionary social movement.

Anxiety is the particular form of structural strain most likely to lead to collective behavior. Although Smelser states that anything that places people

under stress can lead to collective behavior, he argues that anxiety leads to the widest variety of behaviors. Anxiety revolves around the unknown. People feel anxious, but cannot pin down the source of their unease. The strain that they feel is vague, and the behavior that they choose as an outlet for those feelings can take virtually any form. It all hinges on how they choose to define their anxiety, and how they decide to go about alleviating it.

The connection between the anxiety and the behavior might not be obvious or even logical. Anxiety caused by an economic depression can become the trigger for fads, crazes, panics, riots, religious revivals, social movements, or any other form of collective behavior. As long as the behavior gives participants something to focus their energy and attention on, it is likely to occur. Which behavior participants take part in is dictated by the generalized belief that they attach to their strain.

Generalized Belief

Once participants are in a situation that makes a particular form of collective behavior possible and they experience strain that makes that form of behavior more likely, the crucial next step involves the formation of a generalized belief. Potential actors must come to share a definition of the situation that makes a particular course of action seem logical, rational, desirable, or unavoidable. The generalized belief supplies meaning within the situation. This belief identifies a source of strain, attributes certain characteristics to the source, and specifies certain responses as possible or appropriate. The generalized belief makes the behavior seem appropriate to the participants. In other words, it gives people something to do that they believe will eliminate or reduce the strain and anxiety they are feeling.

It is important to note that the generalized belief does not have to be based on truth. If participants believe a wild rumor, they will act as if the rumor is true. It does not matter how odd or illogical this belief seems to observers, or how the participants feel about it later. At that moment, it takes away the uncertainty and anxiety that they have been experiencing and replaces them with certainty and conviction. Many riots have begun because of rapidly spreading beliefs that later turned out to be unfounded. At the time of the episode the participants believed the rumor and it made their next actions seem logical. For example, in the Detroit race riots of 1943, whites believed that a white baby had been thrown from a bridge by blacks, that a white woman had been attacked on the bridge by black men, and that blacks were trying to force whites out of the Belle Isle area. Blacks believed that a black baby had been thrown from the bridge by white sailors, that white men had attacked a black woman, and that whites were trying to force blacks out of Belle Isle. None of these rumors were true, but participants behaved as if they were. These specific rumors fit what they already believed about members of the other race, gave them a specific reason to attack, and justified their violent actions.

The growth and spread of a generalized belief is crucial for a collective episode. It is the belief that determines what participants will do next. Even though structural conduciveness and strain are often present in society, there will be no collective outburst until a generalized belief forms. Furthermore, the particular details of the generalized belief will dictate what form of collective behavior does occur. For example, an angry mob can choose to attack law enforcement officers, attack each other, march to town hall for a quiet protest, or simply disperse and go home. The generalized belief determines which of these potential behavioral patterns occurs. Smelser lists five specific types of generalized belief. Each type of belief leads to a different form of collective behavior, and justifies or rationalizes the behavior in the minds of participants.

Hysterical Beliefs

Hysterical beliefs transform an ambiguous situation into a specific threat. Premonitions of disaster and fear are two forms of hysterical beliefs. Participants become convinced that something terrible is about to happen. Hysterical beliefs may seem to explain a past event or situation, report a present one, or predict a future one. "The recent floods were a warning that the world is going to end on Thursday," "There is more crime than ever before because society as we know it is ending," and "The market is crashing and the value of my stocks is going to evaporate by five o'clock" are all examples of hysterical beliefs. There doesn't have to be any particular reason why the catastrophe is supposed to occur, it just is. Hysterical beliefs generally lead to some sort of panic. The panic may take the form of stampeding for fire exits, selling off stocks at brutally low prices, or heading for the wilderness with a gun and survival supplies. It doesn't matter if the participants fear death in a fire, financial ruin, or attack by Martians. The driving force behind the behavior, a hysterical generalized belief, is the same.

Wish-fulfillment Beliefs

Wish-fulfillment beliefs reduce ambiguity by producing what is believed to be an effective solution to the problem, or by predicting some sort of positive event. Anxiety is replaced with hope and confidence. Participants believe that something wonderful is going to happen, or that they can prevent something terrible from happening if they perform the right behavior. "The economy is about to enter a period of unprecedented growth" would be an example of the former, "The world is going to end on Thursday *unless we pray!*" an example of the latter. Wish-fulfillment beliefs often include a magical faith in individuals, objects, or values; anything that provides the necessary hope. They lead to behaviors that we can generally categorize as crazes. Examples would include speculation booms, certain fads, some types of religious or political revivalism, faith healing, etc. In all of these different crazes, participants believe that they are getting in on something good, or that their behavior is

going to make something good happen instead of something bad. Wish-fulfillment beliefs provide a bright hope that the source of strain is about to disappear, or that the participants themselves can eliminate it.

Hostile Beliefs

Hostile beliefs are similar to wish-fulfillment beliefs, except the action required to fix the problem involves removing an agent or object perceived as a threat or obstacle. In other words, the specific fear is focused onto a scapegoat: "The world is going to end on Thursday unless we burn the witches!" The strain and anxiety become focused into anger and hatred that requires action against some individual, group of individuals, or institution. Hostile beliefs are the driving force behind violent episodes such as scapegoating, mob lynchings, and many riots. Participants come to believe that all of their strain is caused by one specific target. This target can be as specific as a particular individual or as general as "the government," "foreigners," or "the New World Order." Participants genuinely believe that if they can only eliminate or destroy the target of their hatred, that everything will be good again and the strain will disappear.

Norm-oriented Beliefs

Norm-oriented beliefs envision either replacing or renewing and reinforcing a threatened normative structure. Participants want to reorganize the basic organization of a social institution. They want to either restore, protect, modify, or create social norms. This often takes the form of either trying to pass new laws, or abolish existing ones. Many social movements are driven by norm-oriented beliefs, particularly reform movements and counter movements. The war on drugs is a good example. Almost every ill in American society is blamed on illegal drugs. Participants in the movement believe that if illegal drugs were eliminated in the United States, the entire society would benefit in a variety of ways. Spousal abuse, absenteeism, poverty, and violent crime would all be eliminated by the creation of one simple norm. Alcohol was outlawed in the United States during Prohibition for exactly the same reasons. Movements aiming to establish (or repeal) laws, desegregate (or keep segregated) schools, acquire (or prevent) government subsidies, restrict (or ease) immigration, increase (or decrease) taxes are all driven by norm-oriented beliefs. They all attempt to control the inadequate, ineffective, or irresponsible behavior of other individuals.

   Of course, the members of the movement always have their own beliefs about exactly who is being irresponsible and what would improve the situation. It is common to find a movement aimed at creating a particular change, and another aimed at preventing it, both with the justification that they are trying to save society. Norm-oriented generalized beliefs make a connection, no matter how illogical, between a general source of strain and a specific course of action. They believe that their actions are for the good of all society.

Value-oriented Beliefs

Value-oriented beliefs envision replacing a threatened value system. Although the complaints are often much more vague and general than norm-oriented beliefs, the "solution" is usually simple and straightforward. Cult formation, secession from a parent political or religious body, group withdrawal into isolation, and social or political revolution are all examples of collective behavior driven by value-oriented beliefs. Participants seek to construct a more satisfying culture. They have a preoccupation with the highest moral bases of social life, and a vision of future harmony and stability. The source of strain is identified as inherent within the culture itself, so participants seek to withdraw from it or reshape it in their own image. Value-oriented beliefs attribute the structural strain to a problem inherent in a particular societal value. The only way to eliminate the strain is to change the value.

Precipitating Factors

In Smelser's original formulation of the theory, precipitating factors or events comprise the next determinant in the process. Some sort of occurrence sparks the beginning of the episode. This occurrence ties in with the particular conduciveness, strain, and generalized belief within the situation. Smelser argued that this gives the generalized belief concrete, immediate substance. Using riots as an example, many cities have the necessary conduciveness and strain for a riot to occur at virtually any time. Individuals may believe that there is racial inequality and police brutality, and deeply resent it. However, it takes a specific incident, such as the death or injury of an arrestee, to spark the actual riot.

Many researchers today simply place precipitating factors within the determinant of generalized belief. Precipitating factors sometimes seem to create the generalized belief, while other times they seem to be meaningful only as defined by already existing beliefs. Some collective episodes do not seem to have specific precipitating factors at all. Precipitating factors and generalized belief are so intertwined as to sometimes be indistinguishable. In a sense, precipitating factors have been demoted from the level of determinant to the level of a component within the determinant of generalized belief. Precipitating factors are not necessary for the construction of all types of collective episodes. They are no longer considered a determinant of collective behavior by many researchers and will not be treated as one throughout the rest of this book.

Mobilization of Participants

The final stage in the value-added process of collective behavior is the actual mobilization and organization of action. In a situation where structural conduciveness, strain, and a generalized belief exist, the only thing left is the actual mobilization of participants for action. The behavior of leaders is im-

portant at this stage. The collective episode itself has begun. Those who act first or who attract the attention of potential participants may be able to dictate what behaviors are appropriate or acceptable. This shapes the behavior of the rest of the participants.

Mobilization of participants involves both the action of the individual participants and the ability of people to get to the event itself. People cannot become participants in an event if they do not have the ability to get to where the action is. Riots can only occur if individuals are already present or can quickly congregate. In order to take part in a consumer craze, an individual must have access to information about the product and must have the means to purchase the product. Social movements only occur if enough people can be mobilized and motivated to give their time and/or money to the cause.

Leadership is important for this determinant. If potential participants are actively encouraged to take part in the collective episode by leaders they know and trust, the event is likely to be much larger than if they had been discouraged. The right person at the right time may capture the attention of a crowd and send them into a frenzy, or pull them out of one. Leaders within the event may preach for calmness or immediate action, peacefulness or violence, thoughtfulness or malice. Once the event has begun, the effectiveness of leaders may be reduced or eliminated. Timing is the key issue. Calling for calm and peaceful assembly has a much greater effect on a crowd that is merely considering violent action than it does on a crowd actively engaged in rioting.

Social Control

The operation of social control is more of a counter-determinant. At any stage, the actions of formal and informal social control agents can end the process before the collective episode begins. Smelser discussed two broad types of social control: those that minimize conduciveness and/or strain, and those that are mobilized after an event begins. Any action that effectively reduces or eliminates structural conduciveness or strain will prevent the episode from occurring. Successful efforts at minimizing the first few determinants disrupt the value-added process and make it impossible for the latter determinants to come into play.

Social control agents may include police, courts, media, religious authorities, community leaders, etc. Any individual or group with legitimate authority within a particular setting represents social control in that setting. For example, a schoolteacher is a social control agent in his or her classroom, but not on the beach. A lifeguard is a social control agent on the beach, but not on a street corner. If the appropriate social control agents fail to recognize the presence of conduciveness and strain or fail to diffuse them before a generalized belief can form and mobilization occurs, then prevention becomes impossible. Although social control agents sometimes attempt to prevent an episode that has already begun, it is impossible to do so. Instead, the social control agents must choose to deter, redirect, or accommodate the event.

Deterrence

It is sometimes possible to deter participants from continuing their behavior once it has begun. For example, changes were made to the New York Stock Exchange as a result of the crash of October 24, 1929. These controls were instituted specifically to stop the panic selling that occurred when trading outpaced tickertape information. Changes continue to be made. Some stock markets now shut down automatically if prices fall too fast, because online trading once again made it possible for the volume of trade to outpace tracking systems in the early 1990s. In this case, social control agents have devised a crude but effective way of eliminating a key factor of structural conduciveness: If there is no trading, there can be no selling. Those in charge hope that once people have had a chance to think things through, the market can reopen and restrained trading will resume. President Franklin Roosevelt employed a similar tactic during the Great Depression when he declared a "bank holiday," allowing all U.S. banks to close down long enough for him to give a speech on the radio, assuring citizens that their money was safe. Both of these are examples where the conduciveness is temporarily eliminated. In the first example, making it impossible to buy or sell securities for a few hours makes it impossible for a panic to continue. In the second, making it impossible to withdraw money from banks also made it impossible for panicked customers to take out all of their money and collapse banks. Each of these tactics is intended to allow structural strain to dissipate after the episode has already begun. Social control agents could also potentially eliminate the strain itself. This is much more difficult, and sometimes impossible. There was tremendous social strain throughout the United States in the decades of the 1950s and '60s over the civil rights of African-Americans. Changing segregation laws put many prejudiced whites under strain, but not changing the laws kept blacks and less prejudiced whites under strain. No one official action could eliminate strain for both sides. There was no way for social control agents to eliminate the social strain for everyone.

It is also sometimes possible for social control agents to deter collective behavior by simply overwhelming participants in the early stages of mobilization. If police dramatically outnumber participants in the initial stages of a riot or violent protest, they often successfully quell the behavior before it becomes too widespread to handle. Unfortunately, the other possible outcome is that their behavior may enrage onlookers and become the factor that sparks off massive, widespread violence.

Accommodation

Except in situations where authorities can immediately eliminate the conduciveness or strain or where they can simply overwhelm participants through force, social control agents often have little choice but to accommodate the episode. Authorities routinely accommodate some forms of collective behavior, such as fads, fashions, and nonviolent group behavior. Police

often direct traffic and act as security guards at nonviolent protests and certain types of religious events. Merchants and the media often provide information to participants in consumer fads, fashions, and crazes. It is not uncommon for local news broadcasters to report on the availability of products that have suddenly become scarce. Law enforcement officials sometimes "look the other way" during collective behavior episodes. These are all examples of accommodation.

Redirection

Redirection is more difficult and less common than prevention, deterrence, or accommodation. In this situation, authorities do not eliminate the conduciveness or strain, but somehow manage to shape the generalized belief and/or mobilization for action. They redirect the attention of participants. A hypothetical example of redirection would be if a city official could somehow turn the attention of hot, angry residents away from starting a riot by offering them free ice cream if they hurry to the municipal swimming pool down the street. If participants' desire for ice cream and cool water outweighs their immediate anger, then they might redirect their attention. Another example would be getting members of a wartime anti-immigration movement to redirect their energy into helping out in a government-sponsored war effort. The group still gets to focus their anxiety on a scapegoat, but a different one. Instead of scapegoating immigrants within their own society, they are putting that energy into selling war bonds or filling sand bags in order to "do something" about members of another society.

Discussion

Smelser's Value-Added Theory focuses on the social causes of collective behavior, not psychological factors. The Value-Added Theory argues that participants are reacting to structural strain according to generalized beliefs that they accept at the time of the episode. They are not reduced to temporary insanity, nor are they behaving irrationally. Their behavior is rational according to their definition of the situation. They have not lost the ability to reason, they are simply basing their reasoning on generalized beliefs that may or may not be true. It is only when the behavior falls outside of societal norms that we consider it irrational.

Core Assumptions

Smelser assumes that abnormal group behavior is caused by stress and anxiety experienced by the group. The collective action is taken in order to ease the strain. Any time people are under strain, there is a potential for collective

behavior. If the other determinants fall into place, then an episode will occur. It is only a question of what form the outburst will take.

More importantly, he assumes and argues that collective behavior is only different from any other group behavior because it falls outside of normative expectations for the situation. If a group of people believe that a blizzard is heading their way, they might stock up on canned food and batteries. This fits our expectations for the situation, and we think nothing of it. If another group of people believe that the world is going to end at midnight, they might gather their friends and pray. This behavior is perfectly logical within the context of the belief, but we define the behavior as abnormal because we define the belief as irrational. When people collectively engage in behavior that we expect them to engage in, it is simply social behavior. When they engage in behavior that we do not expect, it becomes collective behavior.

Collective behavior is defined as a social phenomenon. It does not rely on the psychological state of participants, except to the extent that social forces alter them. People engage in collective behavior because it alleviates strain caused by external factors.

Evaluation

Unlike the Contagion and Emergent-Norm perspectives, the Value-Added perspective makes it possible to analyze any form of collective behavior ranging from the apparently inhuman (lynchings, mob violence, riots) to the apparently rational (organized social movements) to the silly (fads, crazes). Furthermore, it is hypothetically possible to predict when and where episodes of collective behavior might break out in the future. Using weather as a metaphor, the Value-Added Theory describes what makes clouds, why they gather, and what conditions are necessary for them to make rain. Meteorologists cannot predict rain months ahead of time. However, they do know that when a moist warm front is overrun by a cold front in a low-pressure condition, rain is almost inevitable. They know this because they understand why the rain happens. Likewise, using the Value-Added perspective, we understand why collective behavior happens and therefore what conditions make it likely.

Smelser's Value-Added Theory classifies forms of collective behavior not according to the behavior of participants, but by the motives and beliefs that drive their behavior. The focus is on clearly defining and understanding the forces driving behaviors that may outwardly appear to be baffling and incomprehensible behavior, but actually follow identifiable patterns. If Smelser's core assumptions are correct, it is possible to trace the beginning of any form of collective behavior. It is also possible to understand, at every stage of development, why the event may either dissipate or amplify. Crowd behavior, once thought mysterious, becomes predictable once the generalized belief forms and solidifies. A researcher can observe the process, understanding and predicting each following phase of activity.

For many researchers, the Value-Added Theory's biggest drawback is its functionalist roots. When applying the Value-Added Theory to episodes of collective behavior, it is tempting to assume that conduciveness, strain, and a generalized belief exist because the theory says so. Some sociologists argue that this makes Value-Added Theory difficult (if not impossible) to use as an effective tool of explanation. However, this same trap can occur when attempting to explain collective behavior with any theory. Each of the theories discussed in this book assumes that certain factors must be present in order for the episode to take place. It is the researcher's job to do enough research to determine if those factors do, in fact, exist. It is not enough to argue that they must be present just because the theory says they should be.