

Sociological Understandings of Social Movements: A North American Perspective

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Abstract

This review traces how sociologists study movement emergence and participation. Proceeding in a roughly chronological fashion, we begin by reviewing the “structural” approaches to the study of social movements, and specifically discuss resource mobilization theory and political process theory. Then, after outlining the critiques of structural approaches, we consider the “cultural turn” in the study of social movements. We focus on three avenues of inquiry that animate the cultural approach—research on framing and frames, emotion, and collective identity. Before concluding the chapter with a brief assessment of the contributions of sociologists to the study of social movements, we turn our attention to new directions in social movement research. Here, we discuss two areas of research which have attracted a lot of attention over the last decade—the movement-media relationship and social movement strategy—and highlight the contributions of European scholars to sociological understandings of social movements.

Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.
C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*

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Sociologists study human social relationships and institutions. Given this focus, it is not surprising that sociologists are interested in how individuals work together to express dissatisfaction and affect social change. It is also easy to imagine sociologists taking very different approaches to studying when and why people challenge the status quo. Early sociological understandings of collective action made structure the linchpin in explanations of social movement emergence. Scholars argued that individuals participated in social movements in the wake of systemic changes that disrupted the

patterned interrelationships between individuals, groups, and institutions, and negatively impacted individuals' lives or well-being (Blumer 1939; Le Bon 1895). While sociologists believed that these disaffected masses could act with a common purpose (Turner and Killian 1972), it was decades before scholars considered the role of organizations in collective efforts to affect political change (Killian 1984; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Piven and Cloward 1977) and even longer before scholars made individual agency central to movement emergence (Klandermans 1984; Passy 2001; Snow et al. 1980). As we outline in this chapter, sociological understandings of social movements have come a long way since the late 1800s.

Generally speaking, American sociological research on social movements, or the "...collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority" (Snow et al. 2004: 11), is animated by three questions: What are the conditions underlying social movement emergence and mobilization? Who participates in social movements and why? What are the (un)intended consequences of social movements to their targets and participants? In this chapter, we provide a selective overview of how American sociologists have addressed these questions. Proceeding in a roughly chronological fashion, we begin by reviewing the "structural" and "cultural" approaches to the study of social movements. Next, we turn our attention to some of the new directions in sociological work on social movements. In this section we discuss the burgeoning research on the movement-media relationship, social movement strategy, and important work being done by European sociologists. In terms of the latter, we highlight the unique contributions of European sociologists to the study of social movements and discuss one particularly promising line of research—the recent work on social movement diffusion. Finally, we summarize the chapter with a brief assessment of the contributions of sociologists to the study of social movements.

There are three points worth making about the structure and content of the chapter. First, we neither claim nor try to be comprehensive in terms of the literature covered. Our goal here is to introduce readers to sociological research on social movements and provide readers citations to excellent work on a broad range of empirical cases. Second, and related, our discussion of different theoretical perspectives and their shortcomings are not all-inclusive. We assume that readers are unfamiliar with sociological work on social movements and, consequently, highlighting the central tenets, main contributions, and chief criticisms provides the most utility to readers who are new to the area. Finally, we make an effort to point out cross-pollination between disciplines as it relates to the study of social movements. Here, we discuss how political science, communication studies, and business administration have influenced—and been influenced by—sociology.

Structural Approaches to Understanding Social Movements

Understandings about what moves individuals from their armchairs to the streets have changed dramatically since the 1890s. This is, in part, a response to sociologists' shifting assumptions regarding what causes social movement emergence. Early scholarship assumed that movements developed when relatively stable social systems, such as the economy, were disrupted in ways that affected individuals' psychology and quality of life (Smelser 1962). Sociologists reasoned that disturbances to a social system made individuals feel frustrated, and, since individuals rarely can act independently against a source of frustration (such as the factors that lead to an economic decline), they got involved in social movements. Early conceptualizations of social movement emergence, in short, assumed participation was a short-lived and irrational response to structural changes (see Cantril 1941; Kornhauser 1959; Lang and Lang 1961; Le Bon 1896).

Observing that the strategies and tactics used by African-Americans to secure equal rights under the law in the 1960s were far from short-lived or irrational, sociologists looked for new ways to understand social movement emergence and participation (Buechler 1990; Morris 1999; Piven and Cloward 1977). They found inspiration in the work of Mancur Olson (1965), a political scientist who argued that individuals are rational decision-makers and participate because collective action is either more rewarding or less costly than inaction. Additionally, Olson reasoned that collective goods, which would benefit all members of a group irrespective of their participation in a movement, were not sufficient motivation for participation. Individuals would “free ride” on the efforts on others. Olson’s arguments spurred a new line of inquiry; one that focused on the cost/benefit threshold, or the point where the perceived benefits to an individual exceed the costs (Granovetter 1978; Smelser 1962; Snow et al. 1998). More germane to this review, the implementation of Olson’s ideas into the study of social movements meant that sociologists, particularly sociologists who examined social movements in the mid- to late-20th century, adopted an economic logic to conceptualize movement emergence as a rational, strategic response to a larger political environment.

In this section of this chapter, we review two influential theories that explain movement emergence and participation as a rational response to changes in social systems—resource mobilization theory and political process theory—and outline their critiques. It is worth noting that both theories are influenced by Olson’s innovative approach to interpreting collective behavior, which emphasized that individuals are rational decision-makers when it comes to political engagement, and demonstrate the value of cross-pollination between political science and sociology. We conclude the section with a discussion of the dynamics of contention approach, which attempts to address these criticisms and explicate a broad range of collective behavior.

Resource Mobilization Theory

Resource mobilization theory argues that social movements emerge as a result of changes in a group’s organization, resources, and opportunities for collective action. Resource mobilization theory adopts an economic approach to understanding collective action, emphasizing how resource flows influence movement emergence and success (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Over time, scholars have developed key dimensions of the theory including (1) the kinds of resources relevant to social movements, (2) the (dis)advantages of different organizational forms, and (3) the effects of movement dynamics on the course and outcomes of organizations. We discuss each.

Resources

Sociologists identify three resources that are critical for movement emergence and success: material, human, and moral resources. *Material resources*, which include money, supplies, a physical space for hosting meetings, and equipment, are a staple of resource mobilization theory. There are costs associated with organizing and, if movements are to emerge or be successful, someone has to pay the bills (Edwards and McCarthy 2004). *Human resources* primarily consist of competent leaders and reliable members (Cress and Snow 1996). Competent leaders can effectively frame demands, recognize (and create) opportunities for action, and match organizational tactics to opportunities (Ganz 2000; Klandermans 1989)—all of which are important to movement success. Reliable members also are critical to success. Members may discuss their activism with family, friends, co-workers, and associates, and these face-to-face conversations can mobilize the uninitiated to action (Klandermans and Oegema 1987; Snow et al. 1980). For instance, reliable members are critical to mobilizing individuals into right-wing movements that espouse extreme

ideologies and goals (Blee 2002). Finally, *moral resources* refer to expressions of support by those outside a movement. Moral resources include celebrity endorsements, sympathetic support, and political legitimacy (Meyer and Gamson 1995; Snow 1979). Sociologists often focus on legitimacy and its importance to political success. As we discuss below, legitimacy typically is related to organizational structure. Activist groups that mimic institutions and have a paid staff, clear leadership, and a moderate message are better positioned to attract public support and respond to journalists' requests for information, both of which enhance political legitimacy (Staggenborg 1989).

Organizations

Organizations are central to resource mobilization theory because they shepherd resources and harness dissent (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; Oberschall 1973; Tilly 1978). Early research focused on formal social movement organizations, which, as discussed above, rely heavily on paid employees to work primarily through institutional channels, such as lobbying, to affect change. Sociologists understood that organizational forms varied dramatically and soon distinguished formal social movement organizations from informal organizations, which often rely on a volunteer staff, lack clear leadership, have few established procedures, and limited resources (Staggenborg 1988, 1989). This distinction proved important because it explained how different organizational forms shape the trajectory of an activist group. For instance, formal social movement organizations, which are often federated, must find ways to mitigate conflict with local chapters whose political priorities may diverge from their own (Reger 2002). This is less true of informal social movement structures that use consensus-building processes to determine the targets and actions of the group (Fitzgerald and Rodgers 2000; Lichterman 1996; Polletta 2002).

There is still much to learn about the effects of organizational form on the course and outcomes of movement groups, particularly in the digital

age. Activists can use new technology to organize completely online and open (or inhibit) communication among supporters (Earl and Schussman 2003; Rohlinger et al. 2014), both of which influence the relative success of movements (Earl and Kimport 2011). How social scientists should conceptualize social movement organizations in the 21st century is up for debate. Some communication scholars, for example, argue that communication *is* organization in the Internet era and researchers should focus on how information flows among individuals structure action (Flanagin et al. 2006). Most sociologists agree that the structure of communication matters, but caution that researchers need to pay attention to how individuals and activists use new technologies so that they can assess whether the digital age is fundamentally altering movement processes such as mobilization (Earl and Kimport 2011).

Movement Dynamics

By situating social movement organizations in a larger "multiorganizational field" that consists of opponents and allies (Curtis and Zurcher 1973; Klandermans 1992), resource mobilization theory draws attention to three important dynamics: those between opponents, competitors, and allies. Opponents, or individuals/groups who make competing claims on an issue, consist of political elites who occupy institutional positions and opposing movement organizations (Lo 1982; Mottl 1980). Sociologists have learned a lot about the trajectory and outcomes of movements by analyzing activist groups' decision-making relative to opponents (Zald and Useem 1987). Opponents can force social movement organizations to operate in institutional venues (e.g., the legal system) with which they have little experience in an effort catch activists off guard and exhaust their resources (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996). For example, the pro-nuclear New Hampshire Voice of Energy and Americans for More Power Sources sued the anti-nuclear Coalition for Direct Action at Seabrook to compel the Coalition to expend precious financial resources (Zald and Useem 1987).

Resource mobilization theory also focuses attention on competition between and cooperation among like-minded groups. Recall that resource mobilization theory is rooted in economic logic and assumes that resources are finite. To survive, social movement organizations must adapt to changes in resource flows, shifts in the multiorganizational field, and political exigencies (Clemens 1997; Minkoff 1993, 1999). While competition can be detrimental for movements (Benford 1993), sociologists find that it isn't all bad. In fact, tactical innovation is common in movements where activist groups compete for support (McAdam 1983; Olzak and Uhrig 2001). For example, when the organizational field contained "rival state associations, splinter groups, more radical groups, groups with working-women members, or a younger generation of women" suffragette organizations were more likely to introduce the novel tactic of suffragette parades in an effort to win the vote (McCammon 2003: 806). Additionally, there are good reasons for like-minded groups to cooperate (Downey and Rohlinger 2008). Social movement organizations can combine their resources and push forward their goals more effectively. Cooperation, however, is rife with complications. Organizations may agree on a broad agenda and little else, making common ground difficult to find. Likewise, because groups have different priorities, organizations may struggle to find ways to work together without compromising their values and goals (for discussion of the peace movement see Hathaway and Meyer 1997; for discussion for anti-war, labor, feminist, and ethnic solidarity movements see Van Dyke and McCammon 2010). Social movement groups have an easier time setting aside their differences when opponents are poised to forward their goals. In fact, activist organizations band together in order to stave off political losses or defeat a common foe. The opposite is true when a political system is amenable to change. During these moments, social movement organizations compete to forward their particularistic agendas and claim victory as was the case with the suffrage and prohibition movements

(McCammon and Campbell 2002) as well as the abortion rights movement (Staggenborg 1986).

Political Process Theory

Like resource mobilization theory, political process theory draws attention to the role of power in the course and content of movements (Jenkins and Perrow 1977). However, instead of emphasizing the resources needed for mobilization and success, political process theory examines (1) how the configurations of power relations shape the opportunities available to activists to affect change and (2) the importance of cognitive liberation, or the combination of citizens' perceived injustice and collective efficacy, to movement emergence (McAdam 1999; for an early interpretation, see Piven and Cloward 1977). Since we discussed resources above, we outline how sociologists conceptualize political opportunities and cognitive liberation.

The Structure of Political Opportunity

Political scientists and sociologists alike are interested in how the configurations of power relations shape the opportunities politicians and activists have to affect change. The notion of political opportunity can be traced to political scientist Peter Eisinger, who recognized that "such factors as the nature of the chief executive, the mode of aldermanic election, the distribution of social skills and status, and the degree of social disintegration, taken individually or collectively, serve in various ways to obstruct or facilitate citizen activity in pursuit of political goals" (1973: 11). Over time, political scientists developed the conceptualization of political opportunity to understand how elites maintained power as well as to explain when and why the political system was amenable to policy change. Kingdon (1984) and Deborah Stone (1997), for example, analyze the factors that open "policy windows" and the narratives that make policy change possible.

Sociological definitions of political opportunity parallel those of political science. For instance, Charles Tilly (1978) conceptualized “opportunity” as the extent to which other organized groups, including state institutions, accept or oppose a movement’s goals and reduce or increase the cost of collective action. McAdam (1996; see also Tarrow 2011) identified its features, focusing on what the configuration of power meant for activists looking to affect political change. The features of political opportunity include: (1). Whether the structure of a state’s constitution, courts, legislative and other governing bodies permits challenges from outsiders, (2). The consistency of alliances among elites, (3). The presence or absence of elite allies, and (4). The state’s capacity for and tendency to engage in repression. The difference in the empirical focus is important. Political scientists, generally speaking, are more interested in the maintenance of power while sociologists studying social movements focus on how activists can disrupt power relations and affect political change.

As a concept, political opportunity has a lot of traction among sociologists (Kriesi et al. 1995; McAdam 1999; Tarrow 2011; Walker 1991). Dozens of articles have been written about the topic with sociologists adopting different definitions of opportunity and treating opportunity as both a dependent and independent variable (see Meyer 2004; Meyer and Minkoff 2004). Some sociologists have even expanded the concept by identifying its gendered characteristics (McCammon et al. 2001). This has caused some scholars to criticize political opportunity outright (see Goodwin and Jasper 1999) and its proponents to worry that political opportunity has become a sponge in danger of losing its conceptual utility (Meyer 2004).

Regardless, the discussion of political opportunity advanced the study of movements in three ways. First, sociologists explained why activists mobilize even with the political cards stacked against them by distinguishing objective opportunity from perceived opportunity. By questioning the assumption that structural opportunities, or the vulnerability of the state to activist

pressure, and perceived opportunity, or the public’s belief that protest will affect political change, align, scholars clarified why movements might emerge even when the costs of collective action are very high (Kurzman 1996). Second, sociologists’ uncovered covert forms of repression that are available to state actors during political opportunities. During the 1960s, for instance, the FBI infiltrated and disrupted Students for a Democratic Society, an organization many agents regarded as a threat to American society (Cunningham 2004). Third, studying the impacts of political opportunity on movement activity caused sociologists to take up protest events as units of analysis. Examining protest events, as Oliver (1989: 3) explains, ensures scholars capture the “full complexity” of a movement including sequences of actions/reactions that forge or foreclose future political opportunities and the involvement of those parties who may lack official organizational affiliations, such as crowds who joined boycotts or marches during the Southern Civil Rights Movement.

Cognitive Liberation

While political process theory is criticized for being overly structural (Goodwin and Jasper 1999), this is largely a function of scholars’ keen focus on political opportunities. As mentioned above, sociologists understood that activists must perceive that a political opportunity exists, believe that engagement in activism could affect meaningful political change, and get involved (Gamson and Meyer 1996). In their formative study of poor people’s movements, Piven and Cloward (1977: 3–4) asserted that movements emerge when the legitimacy of “the system” declines, people’s fatalism wanes, and they experience a surge in their sense of efficacy. McAdam (1982) built on their innovative findings, coined individuals’ perceived injustice and collective efficacy “cognitive liberation”, and arguably helped fuel the “cultural turn” discussed below. The central insight that meaning-making around movement issues played an integral role

in mobilization put a critical focus on the interactions among activists (Costain 1992; McAdam 1999). Despite this, cognitive liberation has little traction as a stand-alone concept for two reasons. First, cognitive liberation, as defined within political process theory, describes what a person believes but does not propose a mechanism for how those beliefs translate into collective action, which limits its utility (Nepstad 1997). Second, cognitive liberation does not consider the construction of collective identity, which is “one of the most important of the simultaneous cognitive processes taking place as collective action develops” (Gamson 2011: 463).

Critiques and a Response: Dynamics of Contention

Resource mobilization theory and political process theory are criticized for underestimating meaning-making processes (Buechler 1990; Jasper 1998; Taylor 2000). Scholars note that, among other critiques, structural theories can identify facilitative conditions for participation, but cannot explain why one person exposed to these conditions may mobilize while another remains inactive (Viterna 2013). Likewise, processes such as the construction of collective identity are taken for granted and individuals’ experiences in other movements completely ignored (Buechler 1993). Finally, both theories are criticized for adopting a relatively inflexible understanding of strategy. The emphasis on political institutions and actors ignores that strategy is not a function of political opportunities alone (Jasper 2004).

The dynamics of contention approach, which identifies generalizable processes and mechanisms that govern the course and content of movements, emerged in response to these criticisms. Unlike resource mobilization theory and political process theory, dynamics of contention theorizes comprehensively about collective action (e.g., social movements, revolutions, strikes, democratization, etc.) and maps the interactive, reiterative and mutually-reinforcing

relationships between conditions and characteristics such as political opportunity, strategy, organizational forms, and society-wide transformations. A key way that dynamics of contention answers the criticisms of structural approaches is by focusing on how power structures, which can change quickly, shape the interactions between a movement and other actors. For instance, dynamics of contention identifies agency-driven mechanisms such as brokerage to explain how previously unconnected actors come together and potentially affect change. Specifically, dynamics of contention argues that cycles of conflict are comprised of “episodes” which can explain identity processes, strategy, tactics, and outcomes, and the emergence/decline of collective action (McAdam et al. 2001).

The dynamics of contention approach, as Tilly and Tarrow (2006: xi) admit, is encumbered by its extensive enumeration of mechanisms without providing due specification, the absence of a clear vision of appropriate methodologies for testing their suppositions, and a tendency to “revel in complications, asides, and illustrations.” In a special issue of *Mobilization* commemorating the theory’s tenth anniversary, McAdam and Tarrow (2011: 5–6) identified additional “failures” of their approach, including a state-centric bias that ignores movements targeting corporations and other non-state targets.

Cultural Approaches to Understanding Social Movements

While dynamics of contention has champions (Heaney and Rojas 2011) and critics (see the symposium in the *International Review of Social History* 2004), structural approaches inspired sociologists to look closer at the agentic aspects of movements. The “cultural turn” in the study of movements generated three avenues of inquiry that illustrate the importance of social interaction to movement emergence, continuity, and change: research on framing and frames, emotion, and collective identity. We briefly discuss each, including criticisms.

Framing and Frames

Framing refers to the meaning-making processes associated with the construction and interpretation of grievances, the attribution of blame, the selection of movement targets and tactics, and the creation of a rationale for movement participation (Benford 1997). Frames, in contrast, are the result of these meaning-making processes (Benford and Snow 2000). More specifically, frames are a central organizing idea that tells the public what is at issue and outlines the boundaries of a debate. Organizational leaders, for example, present frames as a way to define a situation as problematic, to identify the responsible party or structure, to articulate a reasonable solution, and to call individuals to action (Gamson 1992; Snow and Benford 1992).

While, as we discuss in the section on media below, frames are sometimes treated as artifacts whose presence and absence can be analyzed empirically, frames are best understood as the result of discursive, strategic, and contested processes whose content can change over time (Benford and Snow 2000). For instance, a movement may change its frames in response to its opponents (McCaffrey and Keys 2000). It is not uncommon for opponents to use the cultural resonances from another movement's frame in an effort to confuse the audience and reduce the effectiveness of its appeals, which forces activists to find new ways to sell their ideas to the broader public (Fetner 2001; McCammon 2012). Opponents of legal abortion, for example, reduced the effectiveness of pro-choice advocates by claiming legal abortion had dire emotional and physical effects on women (Rohlinger 2015). Disputes over what frames will best mobilize the public and affect political change also occur within movements. Sociologists find that movements sometimes put their futures in jeopardy because groups fight over frames and goals (Benford 1993).

There are two additional points worth making about frames and framing. First, not all frames are context specific. Movements can draw on generic frames called "master frames" (Benford and Snow 2000) that are inclusive enough that

they can be employed by a range of movements (Snow and Benford 1992). Master frames are alluring because their resonance—or the extent to which it harmonizes with the cultural boundaries of accepted meaning, fits within the confines of the current political arena, and echoes movement constituents' experiences—has already been established (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1992). For example, American movements often call for the protection of equal rights under the law since this idea resonates with the U.S. Constitution (Ferree 2003; Gamson 1992). African-Americans, American-Indians, women, Latino/as, senior citizens, and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender citizens have all used a rights master frame in their campaigns for equal recognition under the law. The relative importance of master frames is clear in movements outside the U.S. as well. An injustice master frame was used by labor, anti-war, feminist, and anti-poverty movements in Canada (Carroll and Ratner 1996) and, in Berlin, master frames questioning how state actors and international organization exert power served as a rallying point for mobilization (Gerhards and Rucht 1992).

Second, framing occurs at both the organizational and individual levels (Snow et al. 1986). Activists draw on rhetorical strategies during their interactions with the uninitiated in an effort to mobilize individuals to action. For example, activists' highlight the salient issues and beliefs of a frame to align movement ideas with the values of the individuals they seek to mobilize (Benford and Snow 2000; Robnett 1996). For example, Blee (2002) found white supremacists' conspiratorial framing of perceived Jewish dominance of the state activated participants' pre-existing beliefs in local control and mistrust of the government. Likewise, McCammon (2012) found that activists advocating for women's right to jury service successfully argued that women needed to be on juries because court verdicts often affected the lives of children, whose welfare were predominantly women's responsibility.

Shifting the scholarly focus to interaction and meaning-making processes among current and

potential participants was an important change in social movement research. That said, the framing perspective has its fair share of critics. Benford (1997), for example, notes that the focus on frames and the tendency of scholars to identify new ones relevant to particular movement groups trivializes the perspective because it focuses on “things” rather than dynamics. Likewise, scholars criticize the framing perspective for not paying more attention to power in meaning-making processes (Carragee and Roefs 2004). Some actors have more power than others (e.g., leaders as compared to members) and these statuses influence what ideas have traction and what ideas die on the vine.

Emotions

The cultural turn in social movement research renewed interest in how emotion influences the course and content of social movements. Today, scholars recognize that emotions affect movement goals, interests, and actions. In fact, without the flames of passion, there might not be any movement activity at all (Flam and King 2005; Hercus 1999; Taylor 2000). While emotions involve physiological changes, sociologists often focus on the strategic dimensions of emotions, or how activists use emotion to mobilize individuals to action and keep them involved in a movement over time (Goodwin et al. 2004).

Evoking an emotional response can be a powerful way to mobilize citizens into social movements (Goodwin et al. 2001; Yang 2000). Moral shocks, for instance, often are the first step toward participation in some types of activism. Moral shock refers to information that raises such outrage in individuals that they recognize political engagement as a solution (Gould 2004; Jasper 1997, 1998; Jasper and Poulsen 1995). Such shocks may emerge suddenly (as with the Three Mile Island nuclear meltdown; see Jasper and Poulsen 1995) or over a long period of time (Jasper 1998). Of course, whether or not an individual participates also depends on framing processes. If individuals do not have a target, a meaningful course of action, or believe that there

is a chance to change the situation, than it is unlikely that they will participate in a movement (Snow and Benford 1988; for a review of the role of efficacy in motivating collective action see the chapter on social psychology).

Emotional expression can negatively influence mobilization as well. Activists who hit the wrong emotional note can alienate potential supporters who regard the emotional displays as inappropriate, overwhelming, or extreme (Jasper 1997; Norgaard 2006). Specifically, activists who are classified as overly emotional or having an improper emotional response can elicit “bystander beliefs about what constitutes a legitimate form of opposition,” which act as barriers to collective engagement (Kemper 2001: 71). Since activists are aware of the drawbacks associated with emotional expression, they often try to position themselves as rational actors who have well-reasoned justifications for their campaigns and goals (Goodwin et al. 2001). Groves (2001), for instance, found that animal rights activists avoided emotional displays because they were concerned that they would be labeled as unprofessional or radical. Women activists too are careful to monitor their emotional expressions in an effort to combat cultural stereotypes that cast them as irrational and overly emotional (Groves 1995; Taylor 2000).

Emotions play an important role in movement continuity as well. The moral shocks that spur people to join a movement may not keep them involved over time. Consequently, emotion work, which often takes place outside the view of the public, is important to activist persistence (Polletta 1998). Emotional expression in “free spaces” cultivates commitment to movements and causes as diverse as child sexual abuse survivors (Whittier 2001) and utopian communities (Kanter 1968). This is, in part, because these free spaces provide opportunities for individual emotional fulfillment and self-realization. For example, Yang (2000) found that the participation in the Red Guard provided individuals an opportunity to develop and pursue a political agenda, which included challenging the Chinese state. Of course, emotional expression is not always positive (Groves 1995; Jasper 1998). In

fact, activist groups sometimes cultivate emotional cultures marked by anger, fear, and grief, which can produce negative affective bonds between participants and, ultimately, undermine solidarity (Gould 2009; Klatch 2004; Summers-Effler 2010).

In sum, emotion is pervasive to social life and collective phenomena. It may provide the fiery passion that motivates individuals to get involved or lay the foundation for the commitment and work necessary to sustain activism in the face of adversity and over the long haul. However, emotions can be difficult to quantify and study. In recognition of this fact, Goodwin et al. (2001) plot emotions on a two-dimensional scale that is sensitive to temporal variation (how long the feeling lasts) and scope (whether feelings involve a specific object or more generalized feelings about the world). Additionally, they suggest that emotions may be discussed as “nouns” or as “adverbs.” When emotions are seen as a “noun,” they are regarded as “distinct entities each with its own coherence and behavior implications, at least within a specific cultural setting” (Goodwin et al.: 13). This type of emotion is displayed, sometimes consciously, in movement literature, public addresses, and in action, and is not only an expression of feeling but also an attempt to arouse similar feelings in others. When emotions are regarded as an “adverb,” they are a “style,” “taste,” or “tone.” This type of emotion is a quality or an identity that is not always easily articulated (Goodwin et al. 2001). Some types of emotional expression relative to movements and events may be easier to study in the digital age. Increasingly, emotional management occurs in public forums online, making them easier to analyze (Rohlinger and Klein 2014).

Collective Identity

In addition to framing and emotion, the cultural turn in social movements invigorated sociological research on collective identity as a mechanism of collective claims-making, recruitment, strategic decision-making, and movement outcomes. Collective identity is the feeling of

“we-ness” or “one-ness” among a collectivity that provides a sense of shared agency, which can be an impetus for collective action. More specifically, collective identity can be defined as:

An individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly Collective identities are expressed in cultural materials- names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and so on ...” (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 285).

Sociologists understand collective identity as both a process and a property of social actors that exists at multiple levels (Gamson 1995; Snow 2001). At the level of the group, the lack of recognition by other groups of a particular collective identity, such as “black” or “homosexual,” may generate grievances and serve as a motivation for participation (Cohen 1985; Melucci 1995; Touraine 1981). For example, the socio-historical changes that allowed for the social control of sexuality also created the “homosexual” collective actor, who pushed for her equal rights via the gay liberation movement (D’Emilio 1983). Similarly, the liberalization of abortion law united some women in moral outrage over the desecration of femininity and lead to participation in the pro-life movement (Ginsburg 1998; Luker 1984). Negotiations over collective identities, however, are not always public. Some groups operate in “havens” or “free social spaces” where they can challenge dominant ideologies, develop alternative meanings, and construct emergent cultural forms away from elites (Fantasia and Hirsch 1995). This is increasingly true in the digital era. Online forums provide individuals with extreme views, such as white supremacists, a free space to connect, recruit, and cultivate community (Caren et al. 2012; Futrell and Simi 2004).

At the organizational level, collective identity signals the goals and orientations of the group, which affects with whom it may align, what types of resources it may garner, and what strategies and tactics it may employ (Clemens 1996). Collective identity at the organizational level must be responsive to both its

membership and the larger environment in which it operates. Because collective identities are created, rather than biologically or culturally determined (Snow 2001), organizations must maintain collective identities by communicating, negotiating, and making decisions with its members. This “identity-work” encompasses a range of activities that express who and what a group stands for in contrast to a set of “others” (Mansbridge and Morris 2001; Snow and McAdam 2000). Types of identity-work include rituals for the expression of solidarity and evocation of shared feelings, identity-talk, the use of songs and slogans that are politically and emotionally evocative, and gestures and symbols that serve as boundary markers of collective differentiation (Eyerman and Jamison 1998; Hunt and Benford 1994; Taylor and Whittier 1992).

Of course, activist groups must maintain collective identities that resonate (at least to some extent) with targets and within the larger culture, particularly if they want to affect social change (Bernstein 1997; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Whittier 1995). Organizations that represent goals that threaten the status quo and use tactics that may be construed as dangerous by authorities or the public are unlikely to garner support let alone successfully change institutional practices or policies (Gamson 1990). On the other hand, organizations must be careful that its identity is not overly restrictive or it will be unable to respond to a changing political environment (Rohlinger 2002).

In short, movement organizations must continually negotiate these various levels of collective identity. Hunt and Benford (1994) discuss these multilevel processes in terms of identity fields and framing processes. They posit that there are three socially constructed sets of identities that constitute identity fields that overlap, hang together, and expand and contract across time and space. These identity fields (the protagonist, antagonist, and audience) provide a framework for activist groups to negotiate how collective identities relative to other groups, members’ needs, and a changing political environment are maintained and expressed.

It is worth noting that identity processes can come into conflict. For example, sociologists recognize that tension can arise between the expressive and strategic aspects of collective identity insofar as the expressive aspects of collective identity such as the deployment of symbols, manipulation of personal appearance, engagement in coordinated rituals, adoption of a particular language, and/or presentation of shared narratives (Polletta 1998; Polletta and Jasper 2001) are not always the most political expedient (Bernstein 1997; Gamson 1997). As we discuss in greater detail below, news media coverage of movements can make this tension particularly acute as journalists feature the most expressive—and sometimes the most extreme—aspects of movements, which undermine their legitimacy and ability to affect change. Digital technology, however, provides new ways for individuals to connect with one another around causes they care about, which has implications for collective identity (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2002). Sociologists, for instance, find that individuals can connect around general ideas and causes online and that these shared interests can lead to the cultivation of collective identity and meaningful political engagement over the short term (Crossley 2015; Rohlinger and Bunnage 2015).

Implications of “the Cultural Turn”

The cultural turn in the study of social movements yielded several conceptual advancements. First, it assumes a relational approach, which allows for multiple levels of analysis and a more thorough explanation of the dynamics of participation. Framing processes, which involve both affective dimensions and collective identity, help explain (1) how grievances are constructed, (2) why some mobilization efforts succeed and others fail, and (3) how movement strategies, targets, and goals are determined in relation to larger publics. Second, cultural approaches recognize that movements must work hard to maintain citizen participation in collective action over time. Leaders that do not engage in emotion-work and identity-work are likely to

lose participants as the passion for action fades and other identities become more salient. Third, cultural approaches acknowledge that a movement must not only maintain a stable number of participants but must also adjust its tactics and goals to align with a larger environment. If, for example, the broader public or authorities regard movement activities as destructive, criminal, or unreasonable, the chances that these publics will interfere with group activities increases and the chances for group success decline.

As discussed above, the biggest challenges associated with studying framing, emotions, and collective identity are quantifying individual feelings and state of beings as well as parsing one process from another. The latter is particularly important as framing, emotional expression, and collective identity are overlapping and mutually reinforcing processes, which can make it difficult for sociologists to determine causality when analyzing the success and failure of movements.

New Directions in Sociological Research

Sociologists continue to explore structure, agency, and their effects on social movements. In this section we discuss the burgeoning research on the movement-media relationship, social movement strategy, and important work being done by European sociologists. In terms of the latter, we highlight the unique contributions of European sociologists to the study of social movements and discuss one particularly promising line of research—the recent work on social movement diffusion.

Mass Media and Social Movements

Sociologists have long been interested in the role of mass media in the course and content of movements. Sociologists who study the relationship between media and social movements are interested in the extent to which activists can use mass media to expand the debate around an issue, energize a movement by mobilizing a

population, and increase movement and organizational legitimacy with authorities (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Vliegenthart et al. 2005). In fact, sociologists have found that media coverage occasionally can take the place of social movement organizations insofar as it can effectively mobilize citizens to action on behalf of a cause. For example, Walgrave and Manssens (2000) found that media coverage spurred a 300,000 person turn-out for the White March in Belgium, supplanting the need for conventional organizational infrastructure.

Early research on the movement-media relationship predominantly focused on how the political economy of media (e.g., the focus on profit-making) and organizational processes (e.g., how journalists identified and cover news) affected the coverage of protest events (McCarthy et al. 1996; Myers and Caniglia 2004; Oliver and Myers 1999; Rucht et al. 1998; Smith et al. 2001). Sociologists and communication scholars alike found that the structure of the news media industry affected when (and how) ideas and activists were covered. For instance, journalists make decisions about what stories to cover and what angle to pursue based on what is most efficient (Tuchman 1973), fit with conventional institutional narratives (Gitlin 1980), and whether the proposed coverage harmonizes with past coverage (Bennett 1996; Jensen 2005). Activists and movement organizations that did not understand these journalistic norms and processes often found themselves, their ideas, and their events discussed unfavorably in the nightly news. This is true of news media in the U.S. and abroad as it relates to coverage of the women's movement (Barker-Plummer 2002; van Zoonen 1992).

Several scholars, however, highlighted the methodological problems associated with using newspaper data as source. For instance, selection bias, or the journalistic norms and occupational processes that determine what events are deemed newsworthy as well as how they are presented to the public, make newspapers a poor source of data on protest activity (see for example Earl et al. 2004; Strawn 2008). Consequently, sociologists turned their attention to other aspects of

the movement-media relationship (for a notable exception, see Amenta et al. 2009) analyzing how social movement organizations build (or negate) their legitimacy with media outlets (Rohlinger and Brown 2013; Ryan 1991; Ryan et al. 2005; Sobieraj 2010, 2011), how movements use different mediums such as books, music, and art to cultivate collective identities and spur mobilization (Isaac 2012; Roscigno and Danaher 2001; Roy 2010), the extent to which visuals of movements reinforce or challenge narratives about activists and activism (Corrigall-Brown and Wilkes 2012; Doerr et al. 2013; Rohlinger and Klein 2012), and the role of media (and other actors) in the diffusion and prominence of movement ideas (Andrews and Caren 2010; Banerjee 2013; Davenport 2009; Myers 2000; Rohlinger et al. 2012).

Internet Communication Technologies (ICTs) have dramatically altered how activists communicate with the general public (Earl and Kimport 2011). Movement actors can create websites, open social media accounts, and even produce alternative forums in an effort to communicate their issues and goals to a larger audience (Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Earl et al. 2010). ICTs are appealing because activists have more control over how their ideas and issues are presented to the public (Lievrouw 2011). Of course, ICTs do not operate in isolation. There is evidence that the ideas activists circulate in virtual spaces, given the right conditions, can get picked up by mainstream outlets (Bail 2015; Rohlinger and Brown 2013). Organizational websites, online forums, and social media play an important role in mobilization as well (Earl and Kimport 2011; Fisher et al. 2005). ICTs help activists organize protests and mobilize citizens into movements such as Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party movement (Castells 2012; Gerbaudo 2012; Rohlinger and Bunnage 2015).

While ICTs reduce participation costs and barriers to entry, sociologists do not universally argue that ICTs turn movement processes on their head (for a review see Earl and Kimport 2011). It is clear that ICTs challenge how sociologists think about leadership, organization, mobilization, and collective identity, but it is also

clear that these lessons do not apply to all movements in all cases (Crossley 2015; Earl 2006; Earl and Schussman 2003; Fisher et al. 2005; Rohlinger et al. 2015). Likewise, while the emergence of ICTs have accelerated cross-pollination between sociology and communication studies, there is little consensus around how commercial communication structures such as Twitter and Facebook inhibit activism or whether legacy, brick and mortar social movement organizations', such as National Organization for Women, approach to activism is fundamentally changed by new technology. How these debates are resolved matters because it will affect how scholars conceptualize and study social movement phenomena (Monterde et al. 2015).

Given the continued evolution of ICTs and how citizens and activists use them, the movement-media relationship is ripe for research. The rise of ICTs, for instance, may have important implications for organizations and movement messages. At the organizational level, scholars should consider if social media grow organizations and their strength or if these social connections online make survival in an increasingly crowded movement environment more difficult. More importantly, scholars need to examine how ICTs affect individual participation and individual understandings of political change. At the level of messages, ICTs may fundamentally change the nature of movement frames and their use in mobilization processes. Social media platforms with character limits encourage less elaborated frames and, possibly, more experimentation with messaging as activists try to keep their ideas trending. Moreover, efforts to keep trending may be helped (or hurt) by the commercial imperatives of popular platforms like Facebook, which actively censor content.

Studying Strategy

Strategy is the lifeblood of social movements. Yet, until recently, it was understudied (see Maney et al. 2012 for a review). Current

scholarly approaches to strategy are integrative and consider how strategy is influenced by both structure and agency (McCammon 2012). For example, Jasper (2012) argues that sociologists should analyze choice points, or crossroads at which activists can exercise agency and select into some strategy while foregoing others. Their choices, he argues, are influenced by structural phenomenon such as political opportunity but also by movement culture and participants. A key benefit of this more relational approach to understanding strategy is that sociologists have tools for understanding when activist groups seem not to act in their best interest as well as those moments when activists choose not to act at all (Jasper 2006; Rohlinger 2015). As a consequence, there is a growing body of work analyzing everything from new insights into when and why nonviolent civil resistance works (Nepstad 2011, 2013; Schock 2015) to how activists affect change in both political and non-political institutions such as educational institutions and corporations (Binder 2002; Davis et al. 2005; King and Soule 2007; Maney et al. 2012; McCammon 2012; Raeburn 2004).

It remains unclear whether a dominant approach for studying strategy will emerge. Current research focuses on micro, meso, and macro level decision-making. For example, Jasper (2004, 2012) emphasizes the importance of agency and individual decision-making. He argues that sociologists should analyze choice points because they reveal the dilemmas, or multiple options available each with a long list of potential risks, costs, and benefits, activists face. The value of this focus, he suggests, is that it sheds light on strategy more generally and explains actions that seem to counter movement goals. Additionally, the attention to individual decision-making reminds scholars that activists do not know the consequences of their choices in the heat of the moment. They can only trace these consequences retrospectively and examine the implications of past decisions in light of current organizational and political realities.

In contrast, Fligstein and McAdam (2012: 3) adopt a meso level approach and focus on “strategic action fields” where individual and

collective actors interact “...with knowledge of one another under a set of common understandings about the purposes of the field, the relationships in the field (including who has power and why), and the field’s rules.” This focus, they argue, allows them to account for both stability and change because it illuminates when movement actors reinforce the status quo and when they challenge it. Fields are relatively stable. However, there are times when “external shocks” such as economic decline cause a “rupture” (Sewell 1996) in a strategic action field, which throws the rules of interaction (and their consequences) into question. For example, globalization and internationalization transform the fields in which social movement organizations are embedded by creating new institutional actors and contexts as well as forming new domains of knowledge and expertise (Smith 2005). Unsettled fields are ripe for creative innovation but make strategic decision-making more difficult. Armstrong (2005), for instance, found that gay and lesbian organizations in San Francisco had trouble selecting frames and acting strategically when the field was in flux.

It is worth noting that strategic action field theory draws heavily on new institutionalism, whose development can be attributed to sociologists and business administration scholars alike. New institutionalism explains the regularities in individual or organizational action by situating actors within a larger field of action, conceptualizes a field as a structured social space that is comprised of a network of relationships among actors with more or less power, argues that fields are relatively coherent because the actors operating in a given field are oriented toward a particular value or prize and agree on the “rules of the game” by which these values are accumulated, and suggests that forces external to the field can affect the “rules of the game” and field output (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). While new institutionalists often highlight the processes through which organizations in a field come to resemble one another (Scott 2003; Zucker 1987), or isomorphism, strategic action field theory emphasizes when (and why) institutional change occurs.

Efforts to further specify the mechanisms and contexts that affect strategy are likely in the coming decade. This research will potentially benefit scholars studying social movements, organizations, and corporations because, while the individuals and groups seeking change may vary wildly, the mechanisms of organizational and institutional change are not fundamentally different (Davis et al. 2005; Soule 2010). First, this research it will help social scientists better understand the relationship between social movements and their corporate targets amid changing economic, political, and regulatory contexts. Second, it will illuminate the mechanisms available for individuals to affect change within corporations, movement groups, and other kinds of organizations. Finally, it will highlight when strategic concerns over processes internal to organizations such as collective or organizational identity trump concerns over political or economic gain.

Advances in European Research on Social Movements

Generally speaking, American sociologists who study social movements are siloed from their European counterparts. While there have been trans-Atlantic efforts to unify the field (for an early example see Klandermans et al. 1988), progress has been slowed by the persistence of American scholars in theorizing exclusively about American movements and their effects on the American context (Accornero and Fillieule 2016), and the tendency of European scholarship to elude easy classification (Rucht 1991). That said, there are at least three ways in which European social movement research is distinct from American research that deserve mention. First, European scholars routinely engage in comparative analyses (Ancelovici et al. 2016; Della Porta 2016; Giugni and Lorenzini 2016; Neveu 2016; Sommier et al. 2008); an empirical trend that is not clear in American scholarship. For instance, American scholars occasionally compare how like-minded social movement groups (e.g., Benford 1993; Blee 2002;

Staggenborg 1991) and opposing activist organizations respond to one another (e.g., McCaffery and Keys 2000; Rohlinger 2002, 2015) during a given historical moment. European scholars, in contrast, routinely look for similarities among movements, such as those operating on the extreme right, in a cross national context (Caiani and Borri 2016; Caiani et al. 2012; Klandermans and Mayer 2006; Rydgren 2012). Second, European scholars consistently use a social psychological approach to study social movements and those participating in them, generating more thorough understandings how political socialization, commitment, and political culture affect individuals' willingness to participate in collective action than American scholars (Accornero and Fillieule 2016; i.e. Klandermans 2014). For example, van Leeuwen et al. (2016) analyze how protestors' perceptions of demonstrations as they occur shape their willingness to engage in collective action in the future. Third, European scholars consistently make power a visible variable in their analyses of social movements. While American sociologists are interested in how challengers with limited power affect institutional change, power often is treated as an omnipresent constant (as discussed in the criticism of framing) rather than something that has various, shifting forms, some of which are difficult to see (Accornero and Fillieule 2016; i.e. Doherty et al. 2016 and Simms et al. 2013).

One exciting development in European scholarship is the increased specification of social movement diffusion.¹ For example, in their edited volume Mattoni and della Porta (2014) usefully distinguish "thick" from "thin" diffusion and outline what these differences mean for movement continuity as well as the transmission

¹European scholarship on the policing of protest also has increased precipitously over the last decade (see Bosi et al. 2014; Combes and Fillieule 2011; Della Porta 2016; Della Porta and Reiter 1998; Della Porta et al. 2006; Fillieule and Della Porta 2006) as has analyses of contemporary mobilizations in the wake of the Great Recession in 2008. In regard to the latter there seems to be a tentative consensus that some of the "movements of the crisis" are best conceptualized as national-level cycles of contention (Kousis 2016; Nez 2016; Oikonomakis and Roos 2016; Sommier 2016).

of ideas and tactics across political contexts. Thick diffusion spreads ideas and tactics through organizations, people, and technology. More specifically, thick diffusion relies on dense organizational networks, activist mailing lists and websites, and annual, face-to-face gatherings to discuss and develop ideas and tactics, which can be transmitted across time and space. In contrast, thin diffusion relies on individual activists (rather than organizations), commercial social media platforms such as Facebook, and irregular meetings to diffuse tactical repertoires, frames, and ideas. Thin diffusion, consequently, is “rhizomatic”—or non-linear and reiterative—and blurs the boundaries between who transmits emergent practices and who adopts them (for another example of the concept of rhizomes applied to social movements see Khasnabish 2013). These different diffusion patterns, they argue, explain why social movements sometimes do not emerge in seemingly facilitative contexts (in their volume see the chapters by Navratil and Cisar 2014; Sotirakopoulos and Rootes 2014; Zamponi and Daphi 2014).

This more nuanced understanding of diffusion may be very relevant in the coming years. The election of Donald Trump in the United States, the UK’s Brexit vote, and the pending status of Angela Merkel in Germany seem to portend a surge of conservatism in the West. While only time will tell if this rise in conservatism will spur massive right-wing mobilization as well as whether left-wing movements will draw on the expertise of their colleagues across the pond to mobilize against conservative forces, understanding the processes that distinguish transnational movements that succeed from those that fail is invaluable and worthy of further investigation.

Conclusion: A View of the Field in America

Sociologists generally care about social stability and change. They focus their attention on social institutions and interaction in an effort to identify the processes, mechanisms, and conditions that

influence both. While sociologists who study social movements focus explicitly on when, why, and how change occurs, it is clear that there is not a singular (or simple) explanation. Despite the messiness of social movements, sociological research has advanced scholarly understandings of movement emergence, continuity, and decline in at least two ways.

First, sociologists make power central to understanding social structure, which helps scholars understand when institutional change is possible. Both resource mobilization theory and political process theory understood that structure is comprised of networks of patterned relationships and interdependencies that are vulnerable to change and, consequently, provide activists opportunities to affect political processes. Elections, for example, invariably advantage one set of grievances and related movements over others. The window of opportunity to influence politicians and policy processes, however, may be relatively short-lived as other demands (or a different election outcome) affect the ability of activist groups to forward their goals (Tarrow 2011).

Second, sociologists embed activists in a larger organizational, institutional, and cultural context in order to highlight the importance of interaction to the course and content of social movements. While it is easy to credit (or blame) particular organizations and leaders for movement success (of failures), sociological research clearly shows that an relational approach, which allows for multiple levels of analysis and a more thorough explanation of the dynamics of participation, is necessary for understanding social change. Attention to framing, emotion, and collective identity helps to explain how collective claims are constructed, why some mobilization efforts succeed and others fail, and how social movement strategies, targets, and goals are determined in relation to larger publics.

Although this chapter emphasizes American sociological research on social movements, it is important to note that scholars interested in social change are in conversation with one another regardless of the continent or discipline. In fact, a striking feature of sociological work is its

tendency to be interdisciplinary and include concepts (and co-authors) from business administration, communications, and political science. The cross pollination of ideas and theoretical orientations is likely to continue, if not accelerate, in the coming decade. After all, whether scholars focus on what factors act as an impetus to spur mobilization, facilitative institutional arrangements, or the relative importance and forms of ideological, tactical, and material resources, they all seek to understand when and why citizens join together and try to change the world.

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