lead to participation in collective actions, such as social movements.

*See also*: Attitudes and Behavior; Civil Rights Movement, The; Conflict and Conflict Resolution, Social Psychology of; Ethnic and Racial Social Movements; Feminist Movements; Gay/Lesbian Movements; Intergroup Relations, Social Psychology of; Justice: Social Psychological Perspectives; Labor Movements and Gender; Labor Movements, History of; Media and Social Movements; National Liberation Movements; New Religious Movements; Parties/Movements: Extreme Right; Peace Movements; Peace Movements, History of; Right-wing Movements in the United States: Women and Gender; Science and Social Movements; Social Categorization, Psychology of; Social Identity, Psychology of; Social Movements and Gender; Social Movements: Environmental Movements; Social Movements, Geography of; Social Movements, History of: General; Social Movements: Resource Mobilization Theory; Social Movements, Sociology of; Social Psychology; Stigma, Social Psychology of; Youth Movements; Youth Movements, History of

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# Social Movements: Resource Mobilization Theory

Resource mobilization theory (RMT) is premised on the idea that the central factor shaping the rise, development, and outcome of social movements is resources. 'Resource' here is taken broadly to mean any social, political, or economic asset or capacity that can contribute to collective action. Thus, solidarities and cultural outlooks of groups that enable them to act collectively as well as individual resources, such as communication skills, discretionary time-schedules, and independence from negative constraints, as well as organizational resources (e.g., leadership, meeting and communication facilities, and an *esprit de corps*) are relevant. Drawing on a rational choice approach to collective action, RMT views social movements as collective attempts to bring about change in social institutions and the distribution of socially valued goods. Typically hailed as the dominant paradigm in contemporary social movement research, some have contended that it is opposed by a rival 'new social movement' approach (Dalton and Kuechler 1990) but recent developments (discussed below) have shown that most arguments about the formation of collective identities and the role of values and social networks in collective action can be integrated into RMT. Research informed by RMT has focused on three major issues: (a) the microprocesses giving rise to individual participation; (b) organizational processes shaping mobilization; and (c) the political opportunities that guide social movement development and outcomes.

## 1. Collective Goods and Individual Participation

Early RMT argued that grievances stemming from structural strains and relative deprivation are secondary or possibly irrelevant to movement partici-

pation and that what changes, giving rise to social movements, is the availability of resources (McCarthy and Zald 1987, Jenkins and Perrow 1977). This assumption, however, has been questioned as researchers have shown that grievances in the sense of articulated collective claims about social injustice, including suddenly imposed grievances (Walsh and Warland 1983), are critical to individual participation. Drawing on rational choice assumptions, some point to the utility calculations of participants, arguing that they respond to perceived costs and benefits (Opp 1989), including the incentives of solidarity and self-esteem flowing from acting on principle. A major focus of debate has been Olson's (1971) theory of collective action according to which selective incentives (i.e. individual benefits) are critical to participation while collective goods *per se* create free riding. Arguing against this selective incentive thesis, Klandermans (1995) shows that most free riding is due to ignorance, high perceived costs in terms of work and family obligations, weak integration into interpersonal networks which provide both information and solidary incentives, and the perceived irrelevance of participation. Marwell and Oliver (1993) argue that free riding is an option only when individuals perceive that their contributions to the collective good follows a decelerating production function (i.e., each contribution makes others' subsequent contributions less worthwhile). Mass mobilization follows an accelerating production function (i.e., each contribution makes the next one more worthwhile). Hence, there may be large start-up costs to collective action but there is no point of diminishing returns. Thus, the key questions are expectations about the number of likely participants and the likelihood that the goal will be achieved.

RMT argues that collective identity and solidarity stemming from interpersonal networks provide for participation. Marwell and Oliver (1993) contend that organizers (or movement entrepreneurs) pay much of the start-up costs by building solidary networks, developing injustice frames (Snow et al. 1986), and creating collective perceptions of an accelerating production function. Klandermans (1997) shows that both selective and collective incentives matter with some movements depending more on selective incentives and others on collective commitments to movement goals. Thus, the women's movement and unions rely more on selective incentives while purposive commitments are paramount to the peace movement.

## 2. Organizational Processes

Zald and McCarthy (1987) argue that contemporary movements are professionalized, led and maintained by paid full-time staff with minimal 'grassroots' support. 'Conscience constituents' in the sense of sympathetic bystanders, wealthy patrons, and institutional sponsors are the major contributors to these movements. 'Speaking for' rather than mobilizing the aggrieved, grassroots grievances are seen as secondary if not irrelevant to these movements. Mass media (including direct mail solicitation and the Internet) has lowered organizing costs and the development of professional advocacy careers and training schools provide a ready supply of movement entrepreneurs. Thus, there has been a proliferation of professional movements, as in the environmental movement, sections of the women's movement, the peace and human rights campaigns, and other 'public interest' causes (Berry 1997). Drawing on organizational ecology theory, the increased density of social movement organizations (or SMOs) creates organizational survival problems with increased SMO mortality (Minkoff 1995). Similarly, issue attention cycles limit the ability of professional movement entrepreneurs to mobilize external support, forcing them to migrate among causes as public attention.

This argument, however, has been criticized for overstating the importance of professionalization and misdiagnosing its origins. Many contemporary movements are based indigenously on the voluntary labor of direct beneficiaries who are integrated by loosely structured networks, strong collective identities, and volunteer organizers. Morris (1984) shows that the Southern civil rights movement was centered organizationally in African–American churches and organized by a loosely knit coalition of ministers and college students. While external institutional resources may be central to the professionalization of movements, these contributions are often spurred by indigenous protests. Thus, the civil rights protests mobilized by the more militant groups spurred foundations and government officials to donate to the more moderate SMOs, creating a 'radical flank' effect (Haines 1986). Professionalization did not, however, demobilize these movements but rather channeled them into more moderate institutional activities, including the implementation of public policy gains (Jenkins and Eckert 1986). Thus, the professional model is most relevant for post-movement SMOs that have become institutionalized interest associations and 'public interest' movements that lack cohesive constituencies, such as the environmental, consumer, and general human rights movements.

## 3. Political Opportunities

A core rational choice idea is that participants respond to perceived costs and the likelihood of success. Thus, movement development should be shaped by political opportunities. Drawing on Piven and Cloward's (1977) thesis that elite divisions legitimize movement demands and thus facilitate protest and Tilly's (1978)

arguments about elite-challenger coalitions that lead to revolutionary situations, McAdam (1982) showed that competition between Democratic and Republican Presidential candidates for the African–American vote facilitated the rise of the civil rights movement. Jenkins (1985) showed that a dominant left-center governing coalition removed political obstacles to farm worker unionization and strengthened the institutional sponsors of the United Farm Worker Union, thus giving it more organizing space. Kriesi et al. (1995) show in a comparison of Western Europe that decentralized federal states, left-center governments, and strong alliances with unions facilitate the rise of the environmental and women's movements but opportunities mattered little for the more culturally-oriented homosexual and counter-cultural movements. Distinguishing between 'early riser' and 'late riser' movements that develop within a general protest cycle, Tarrow (1998) argues that 'late risers' are more successful because they can benefit by the policy precedents and resources created by 'early riser' challenges.

In a widely cited analysis, Gamson (1975/1990) argues that opportunities along with strategies are central to movement outcomes. Movements that 'think small' in terms of narrow incremental gains, use formal organization and thus avoid schisms, have allies, use unruly and violent tactics, and organize during political crisis periods are more likely to secure political acceptance and tangible benefits. By contrast, movements that attempt to overthrow their targets, rely on decentralized informal organization, lack political allies, use conventional tactics, and organize during periods of stability are less successful.

Subsequent research has focused largely on small-scale policy changes, such as the passage of favorable legislation and public expenditure showing that the resources under movement control (especially disruptive protest) combined with political opportunities are central to bringing about favorable policy outcomes (Jenkins 1985, Amenta 1998). Cress and Snow (2000) show that combinations of favorable strategies and opportunities are critical to the policy victories of homeless movements in US cities. Burstein (1985) argues that favorable public opinion is the key factor in equal employment legislation with nonviolent protest serving merely as a catalyst for greater public support. However, violent and highly disruptive protest often creates public opinion backlashes, making it more difficult for movements to gain favorable policies and raising the possibility of political repression.

It is also important to examine the broader impact of movements on culture and social institutions. Thus, expanding on Gamson's (1975/1990) typology of movement 'acceptance' and 'tangible gains,' movements also create new cultural codes and collective identities, such as in the women's and counter-cultural youth movements. The women's movement made it more legitimate for women to pursue full-time careers, to treat motherhood as optional, and promoted changes in social institutions from schools to collegiate sports and family practices that insured broader social inclusiveness. Movement participation also has profound biographical consequences, creating 'bridge-burning' experiences that channel activists into specific adult careers and transform their personal lives. Thus, McAdam (1988) shows that the adult lives of the white 'summer of 1964' student activists who went South to aid the civil rights movement were changed dramatically, leading most to embark on careers in the law, academe, and social work that allowed them to act on their political activist beliefs and leading to life course experiences, such as lower marital stability, geographic mobility, and lower income.

A major problem in inferring the effects of social movements is distinguishing between authentic movement impacts vs. ongoing social changes that are contributing simultaneously to both movement mobilization and changes reflecting the proclaimed goals of the movement. Most research is 'movement-centered' in that it takes the activities of the movement as central and focuses on the ostensive impact (e.g., public policy changes) of movement activity. It thus neglects the broader context in which movements emerge. Some contend, however, that these changes would have occurred without the movement or that, by working through movement activity, these deeper social changes are more important. Thus, for example, the changes in work and family typically attributed to the women's movement are also rooted in deeper cultural changes emphasizing individual autonomy and in the structural growth of service sector employment where most women have found work. Thus, while the women's movement may be central in these changes, evaluating how important it is relative to broader social changes that have also facilitated the women's movement is complex and difficult. Another complexity is that movement impact is often indirect and unintended. Thus, the women's movement encouraged more women to go into professional careers, which reinforced the number of feminist activists and legislators, which in turn strengthened pressures for feminist legislation, and so on. Similarly, social revolutions rarely have the outcomes intended by revolutionary leaders but, nonetheless, may have major unintended impacts on people's lives and the societies in which they live. Thus, RMT currently is being expanded by research on movement impact as well as by efforts to assess the social and cultural processes involved in mobilization.

*See also*: Action, Collective; Collective Behavior, Sociology of; Leadership in Organizations, Sociology of; Organizations, Sociology of; Political Sociology; Social Movements, Sociology of

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# Social Movements, Sociology of

For the whole set of actions and events subsumed under the heading of social movements, the problem of boundary demarcation is not to be taken lightly.

Social movements unquestionably are, as Hanspeter Kriesi (1988, p. 350) puts it, 'elusive phenomena with unclear boundaries in time and space.' Furthermore, the question is not a mere empirical one to be solved, in each case, by deciding when a social movement begins and when it ends, or by circumscribing the social field in which it takes place and evolves. Social movements are also hard to grasp conceptually. First of all, even if a social movement as such cannot be equated with an organized group (or several ones), it has distinctively collective features: in this respect, Heberle (1951) had grounds for defining it 'as a kind of social collective.' Second, the scholar must be aware of two pitfalls: on the one hand, it is mistaken to consider a social movement to be a self-perpetuating crowd, for a crowd totally lacks mechanisms for sustaining association between people; on the other hand, it is an unduly narrow view of social movements to conceive them as necessarily linked to class-based actions, although the history of the concept can, as we will see, account for this usage. Finally, drawing the line between social movements and other close phenomena is, as a general rule, difficult, and that is why Turner and Killian ([1957] 1987) characterized these phenomena as 'quasi movements.' A classical instance of these borderline cases is to be found in some religious movements, such as messianic and millenarian sects: at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is generally agreed upon that they both fall within the ambit of social movements when they set up meetings for voicing protest and aim at establishing a new type of social order.

What emerges from this view is perhaps the main criterion for defining a social movement, that is, its critical relation to social change. Herbert Blumer (1946, p. 199) aptly dwelt on this point when he suggested that social movements should be viewed 'as collective enterprises to establish a new order of life,' and his concise wording may still be used as a starting-point. But social movements may differ both in the direction and the nature of the change aimed at: some act 'to promote a change,' some others 'to resist' it, in the words of Turner and Killian ([1957] 1987); and the change claimed sometimes is a partial one, and sometimes implies a transformation of the whole social order.

A second distinctive feature of social movements is the use of uninstitutionalized means by participants, at least in some occasions and situations. A third one is also worth noting: the actions of a social movement are protest-oriented and even contest-oriented; therefore they have political relevance. We are now in a position to state an elementary, although tentative, definition of a social movement: it is 'a collective enterprise of protest and contention which aims at bringing about changes of varying importance in the social and/or political structure by the frequent but not necessarily exclusive use of uninstitutionalized means' (Chazel 1992, p. 270).