

# SOCI 360

## SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND COMMUNITY CHANGE

PROFESSOR  
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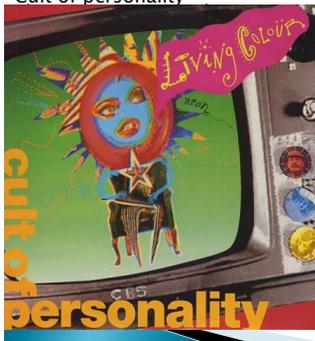
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Artist: Living Colour

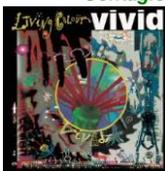
Song: **Cult of Personality**

Look into my eyes, what do you see?  
Cult of personality



be

Theme: **Mass  
Contagion**



Neon lights a Nobel prize  
A leader speaks, that leader dies  
You don't have to follow me  
**Only you can set you free**

You gave me fortune  
You gave me fame  
Gave me power in the old God's name  
I'm every person you need to be  
I'm the cult of personality  
Look into my eyes, what do you see?  
Cult of personality  
I know your anger, I know your dreams  
I've been everything you want to be  
I'm the cult of personality

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The most contrarian thing of  
all is not to oppose the crowd  
but to think for yourself



Charles Mackay



1814 - 1889



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## COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR (CB):

An assortment of theories from the 19<sup>th</sup> c. to the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. explaining moral panics, mob behavior, riots, etc.

### General Characteristics of CB Theory:

1. Represents the actions of **groups** of people (structures and institutions), not individuals.
2. Involve relationships that arise in **unusual circumstances**.
3. May involve behavior typically described as "**deviance**."
4. May mark the **beginnings** of more **organized** social behavior.
5. Exhibit **patterned behavior**, not the irrational behavior of crazed individuals.
6. Usually appear to be **highly emotional**, even volatile.
7. Involve people communicating extensively through **rumors**.

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## Early Theories of Collective Behavior

### Social Contagion Theory (Locher Chp 2)

Gustav LeBon, "The Crowd...", 1895 (p12)

- i. Trying to explain the violence of the **French Revolution**; (p12-13)
- ii. **Crowds diminish free-will**; all members of a crowd are diminished in their reasoning capacities to the least intelligent, roughest, and most violent. (p13)
- iii. Individuals feel **invincible and anonymous; suggestibility reigns** (p14)
- iv. **Critique**: overly literal view of contagion, not scientific, eschews free-will

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## Early Theories of Collective Behavior

### Social Contagion Theory (symbolic interaction)

Robert Park, "The Crowd and the Public", 1904 (p16)

- i. **Emergent interaction**: more attuned to others; circular reaction occurs, spreading contagion (p16)
- ii. **First to define "collective behavior"** (but vaguely) (p17)
- iii. **Crowd members act irrationally** (p17)
- iv. **Park contributes** more to an understanding of the *social nature* of crowd formation. (p18)

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## Early Theories of Collective Behavior

### Relative Deprivation Theory (symbolic interaction)

Herbert Blumer, "The Field of Collective Behavior", 1946 (p19)

- i. "Interpretive interaction" important role and behavior (p19)
- ii. *Milling, collective excitement and social contagion* are three processes by which individual rationality is compromised (p19)
- iii. Similar to "framing perspective"
- iv. Critique: definitions can be vague and difficult to operationalize (p21)

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## Relative Deprivation (RD) Approach

- ▶ **Relative deprivation:**
  - a conscious feeling of negative discrepancy between legitimate expectations and present actualities
  
- ▶ Before discontent is channeled into a social movement, people must feel they:
  - Have a right to their goals
  - Perceive they cannot attain goals through conventional means

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## Early Theories of Collective Behavior

### Mass Society Theory (social conflict)

William Kornhauser, "Politics of Mass Society", 1959 (p15)

- i. Developed by members of the "Frankfurt School" of sociology (Germany) to explain the turn to totalitarianism in early 20<sup>th</sup> c. Europe.
- ii. "Massification" requires *social marginalization* (alienation from social norms of work, family, politics, etc.).
- iii. Leads to populism and identity politics rather than democratic politics.
- iv. Promoted by Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, others (known as *Critical Theorists* in sociology).

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## William Kornhauser's Mass Society Theory

According to William Kornhauser's Mass Society theory, the antecedent to all social movements in mass society is **widespread social isolation and disconnection**: excessive (egoistic) individualism. The starting point for this theory is the concept of "**mass society**" – a state or condition that produces rife disengagement and isolation among individuals in late-modernity. These individuals then use social movements as a proxy for [their "need" for] social connection or integration. Longing for a deeper sense of connection to abate the increasing alienation of late-modernity and modern cities, isolated people are drawn to social movements where they find a sense of belonging and an alternative community to their disconnected ones.

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## On "The Politics of Mass Society"

"Mass society is a situation in which an aggregate of individuals are related to one another only by way of their relation to a common authority, especially the state...A population in this condition is not insulated in any way from the ruling group, nor yet from elements within itself...Social atomization engenders strong feelings of alienation and anxiety, and therefore the disposition to engage in extreme behavior to escape from these tensions. In **mass society** there is a heightened readiness to form hyper-attachments to symbols and leaders...People become available for mobilization by elites when they lack or lose an independent group life...The lack of autonomous relations generates widespread social alienation. Alienation heightens responsiveness to the appeal of **mass movements** because they provide occasions for expressing resentment against what is, as well as promises of a totally different world. In short, *people who are atomized readily become mobilized*. Since totalitarianism is a state of total mobilization, mass society is highly vulnerable to totalitarian movements and regimes."

-William Kornhauser, (1959, *The Politics of Mass Society*, The Free Press)

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### Kornhauser's Mass Society

		Availability of Non-Elites	
		Low	High
Accessibility of Elites	Low	Communal Society	Totalitarian Society
	High	Pluralist Society	Mass Society

- ▶ Available Non-elites: Lack of secondary, voluntary associations; mal-integration
- ▶ Accessible Elites: Vulnerability to non-elite influence, direct or mediated

Mass society emerges when small local groups and networks decline, leaving powerful elites and massive bureaucracies on one side and isolated individuals on the other. As Kornhauser wrote: "Mass society is objectively the *atomized* society, and subjectively the *alienated* population. Therefore, mass society is a system in which there is *high availability of a population for mobilization by elites*...[p]eople who are *atomized readily become mobilized*" (Kornhauser 1959: 33, emphasis in original).

Put slightly differently, mass society is one where "*both elites and non-elites lack social insulation; that is, when elites are accessible to direct intervention by non-elites, and when non-elites are available for direct mobilization by elites*" (Kornhauser 1959: 43, emphasis in original).

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/9780470674871.wbepm473>

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## Durkheim on Anomic Disruptions

"[Man] is governed not by a material environment brutally imposed on him, but by a conscience superior to his own, the superiority of which he feels. Because the greater, better part of his existence transcends the body, he escapes the body's yoke, but is subject to that of society. But when society is disturbed by some painful crisis or by beneficent but abrupt transitions, it is momentarily incapable of exercising this influence; thence come the sudden rise in the curve of suicides which we have pointed out above." (*Suicide*, pg. 252)



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## Theories of Collective Behavior

### Emergent Norm Theory (symbolic interaction)

Turner & Killian, 1957 (*Locher p24*)

- i. Maintains "rational" actors;
- ii. Confusing situations are left open to interpretation
- iii. People take their cues from others (*reference groups*) around them (*conformity* creates collective behavior)
- iv. Critique: too "psychological"; no connection to larger social processes, such as resource availability or politics (*p37*)



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## Emergent Norm Theory

- ▶ Postulates that people faced with an unusual situation can create meanings that define and direct the situation.
- ▶ Group norms govern collective behavior, but the norms that are obeyed are newly created as the group responds to its new situation.
- ▶ Members of the group follow norms—they just may be created on the spot.



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## Theories of Collective Behavior

### Structural Strain/Value-Added Theory (structural functionalism)

#### Neil Smelser, "Theory of Collective Behavior" (p30)

- i. Structural strains are social problems;
- ii. Generalized beliefs lead to collective behavior (p33)
- iii. Value-added model (structural conduciveness, strain, beliefs, precipitating factors, mobilization, social control) (p34)
- iv. Critique: Does not theorize the complex way beliefs come to be shaped by interpretation and definition (p37)

### Neil Smelser's "Theory of Collective Behavior"

The theory of collective behavior argues that social movements are a response to major interruptions in the natural operation of society. Writing on the origins of social movements under this paradigm, Gusfield (1970: 9) writes the following:

*"We describe social movements and collective action as responses to social change. To see them in this light emphasizes the disruptive and disturbing quality which new ideas, technologies, procedures, groups migration, and intrusions can have for people"* (Chicago: Rand McNally, New York: John Wiley).

Social changes engender strains on the population, and social movements is one way that people cope with the uncertainty and angst of rapid and unexpected alterations in social patterns according to Neil Smelser.

### Neil Smelser's "Theory of Collective Behavior:" Relative Deprivation Phase

The "Relative Deprivation" assumption of collective behavior theory assumes that a social movement is likely to develop when people perceive a gap between **what they feel their situations should be**, and **what their situations actually are**. Feeling deprived, people are more likely to form or join social movements. And these feelings of deprivations are punctuated by the strain of sudden, unexpected, and/or undesired social change. (See James Davies. 1962. "Toward a Theory of Revolution." *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1: 5-19 for a discussion of the **J-Curve Theory**.)

This theory argues that when an insufferable social condition improves but then looks like it might revert to its original state, the populace is more likely to take up collective behaviors -like social movements- to prevent this setback. Social movements, then, are the result of **expectations that are rising too fast.**

## Neil Smelser's "Theory of Collective Behavior:" Relative Deprivation Examples

"The history of social movements abounds with agitations on the part of groups who experience a real or apparent loss of wealth, power, or prestige. For example: (1) farmers' movements have arisen in periods of depression and declined in periods of prosperity. (2) Dissatisfactions over land distribution have also been at the root of numerous agrarian movements. (3) As we have seen, the revival of old movements and the initiation of new ones of among American laborers in the nineteenth century was closely related to their changing economic fortunes. (4) Movements to regulate speculation have been stimulated by the financial losses and market disorganization occasioned by financial crises. (5) The movement which culminated in the rise of the Progressive Party in the early twentieth century was based in large part on the apprehension that big business was acquiring too much economic and political power. (6) In the 1820s, many of the supporters of the anti-Masonry movement - among whose objectives was to prohibit Masons from holding public office - came from the ranks of ministers who felt their own religious influence waning and who resented the Masons' religious appeal." (Neil J. Smelser, 1962, *The Theory of Collective Behavior*, The Free Press)



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(The Anarchist Recipe for Social Protest)

## Six Determinants of Collective Behavior

Collective behavior are social actions, like social movements or public riots, that are a response to unstructured, ambiguous, or unstable situations. Neil Smelser, in his theory on the conditioning affect of **structural strain(s)** (*Theory of Collective Behavior* (1962), argued that collective behavior will emerge under these six conditions:

- **Structural conduciveness** (pre-existing conditions that make action likely)
- **Structural strain** (conditions that cause people to feel anxious)
- **Generalized beliefs** (beliefs about their & appropriate actions)
- **Precipitating factors** (incident that triggers collective action)
- **Mobilization for actions**
- **Failure of social control**



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