

Theories of Collective **Behaviour**

From CB to SM

The Field of Collective Behaviour

- Began with **G. LeBon** and was developed by symbolic interactionists.
- **Many theories** have developed to explain both collective behaviours and social movements.

Theoretical Foundations

- What is a theory? An explanation for a general class of phenomena .

- In contrast to a theory, **a paradigm** or perspective rarely spells out issues it merely suggests how the phenomenon can be looked at.

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Three Theories of Collective Behaviour

- 1. **CONTAGION-LE BONN**
functionalism
- 2. **CONVERGENCE-** Alport (1924)
symbolic interaction
- 3. **Emergent Norms-** Turner and Killian
functionalism & interaction

1. Contagion Theory

- Developed by **Gustav Lebon** -a major precursor of the field.
- Lebon subscribed to the law of mental unity.
- In The Crowd (1897) every individual is like an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his/her own will.
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LeBon: A French Aristocrat

- **The Crowd**
- Crowd and group mind
- The whole is greater than the sum of its parts
- **Crowds** take on a life of their own
- Collective consciousness (Durkheim)

Le Bon Contagion

- Le Bon's argued crowds foster anonymity and sometimes generate emotion...
- "the madding crowd" takes on a life of its own, apart from the thoughts and intentions of members.

3 Stages

- Le Bon held that crowds existed in three stages:
- submergence,
- contagion,
- and suggestion. [21](#)

- This is quite heavily induced by the anonymity of the crowd.
- **Contagion** refers to the propensity for individuals in a crowd to unquestioningly follow the predominant ideas and emotions of the crowd.

- In Le Bon's view, this effect is capable of **spreading between "submerged"** individuals much like a disease.
- **Suggestion** refers to the period in which the ideas and emotions of the crowd are primarily drawn from a shared racial unconscious.

- This behavior comes from an archaic shared unconscious and is therefore uncivilized in nature.
- It is limited by the moral and cognitive abilities of the least capable members

- .Le Bon believed that crowds could be a powerful force only for destruction.
- Additionally, Le Bon and others have indicated that crowd members feel a **lessened sense of legal culpability**, due to the difficulty in prosecuting individual members of a mob.[[]

- In many ways, his ideas sound like **Durkheim**.
- He suggests that while crowds can be capable of **disruption and chaos**.
- They are also **capable of lofty acts** of devotion and sacrifice. (see: altruistic suicide)
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- Overwhelmingly, however, **LeBon** emphasized the *negative side* of crowds such as riots in the streets, looting, violent strikes, revolutions etc.



- It is important to remember that LeBon was one of many **autocratic, right-wing**, anti-democratic thinkers who lived in France during the Paris Commune 1871.
- The Paris **Commune** Marx called the **“first modern revolution”**

- **LeBon's theory** is not taken that seriously today.
- **Simple contagion** suggests only “a gathering of individuals” who lack a common sentiment or focus....They lose their individualities and become overtaken by group mind.
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- **LeBon's theory** gave rise to the **transformation hypothesis** in which one person or a group of person's **infect** others with an intense mood.
- The result is **an epidemic** of collective excitement

Contagion Theory

- However, it must be noted that Le Bon often referred to the cliché of the irrational crowd,
- He tended to describe crowds as (irrational and criminal groups),
- He considered himself the founder of "crowd psychology"

Criticisms

- a. He did not elucidate the precise mechanism by which collectivities acquire “group mind”...

- b. He did suggest that group mind has something to do with urbanization and capitalism but **he was not specific.**

- c. It was **Robert Park and Herbert Blumer** (specifically Blumer) of the Chicago School who adds that group mind becomes contagious as a result of :a general **social unrest that becomes reciprocal-**

For Park and Blumer

- **Social unrest** gives rise to interactions such as milling, collective excitement and social contagion

Sum

- While **contagion theory** makes the assumption that all like-minded individuals will be swept away by others.....Converge in a crowd.

Freudian theory

- Sigmund Freud's crowd behavior theory primarily consists of the idea that becoming a member of a crowd serves to **unlock the unconscious mind.**

- This occurs because **the super-ego**, or moral center of consciousness, is displaced by the larger crowd, to be replaced by a charismatic crowd leader.

- McDougall argues similarly to Freud, saying that **simplistic emotions** are widespread, and complex emotions are rarer.

- In a crowd, the overall shared emotional experience reverts to the **least common denominator (LCD)**, leading to primitive levels of emotional expression.

- This organizational structure is that of the **"primal horde"** – pre-civilized society - and Freud states that one must rebel against the leader (re-instate the individual morality) in order to escape from it.

- Moscovici expanded on this idea, **discussing how dictators** such as Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin have used mass psychology to place themselves in this "horde leader" position

Convergence theory

- ...also known as the **predisposition hypothesis**, holds that the way people act in crowds is an expression or outgrowth of whom they are ordinarily associated.
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- Developed by **Floyd Allport** (1924) and later expanded upon by **Neil Miller** and **John Dollard** (1941) as "Learning Theory,"

- ...the **central argument** of all convergence theories is that collective behavior *reveals the otherwise hidden tendencies* of the individuals who take part in the episode.

Convergence Theory

- Convergence theory holds that crowd behavior is not a product of the crowd itself, but is carried into the crowd by particular individuals.
- Thus, crowds amount to a convergence of like-minded individuals.

- Being in a crowd simply **gives them an excuse to “reveal their true selves”**An early, crude version of convergence theory maintained that all **people have the potential** to engage in collective behaviour because in doing so, they are expressing their savage and brutal instincts.
- -young, aggressive =violence =mosh pit.

- Ie. Why do collective behaviours happen when rock concerts are cancelled and not operas.
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- To Lebon, all humans are basically animals in disguise...(also see functionalism and Hobbes)

Or are there cultural aspects ?

- A more sophisticated version of convergence theory holds that certain kinds of *people have the propensity* to engage in certain kinds of behaviour.
- I.e.. Certain people who go to rock concerts. Moshpits occur among like-minded individuals.

Crit's of Convergence

- a. it focuses on **disruption and irrational examples** (like contagion)
;convergence theorists have **not examined** the **broad range** of collective behaviours

- b. never bothered to look at examples that contradict their views

- c. assumes that 'like minded' people rely on **crowd animinity**-this has been found to be false
- Current studies find that crowds **are more hetrogenious** than convergence theorist suggest

Emergent Norm Theory

- **MORE COMPLEX THAN EITHER CONTAGION OR CONVERGENCE THEORIES>**

Irrational Crowds?

- Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian developed the emergent-norm theory of crowd dynamics.
- These researchers concede that social behavior is never entirely predictable, but neither are **crowds irrational.**

- . If similar interests may **draw people together**, distinctive patterns of behavior may emerge **in the crowd** itself.

Emergent Norm Theory

- **Decision-making**, then, plays a major role in crowd behavior, although casual observers of a crowd may not realize it.
- **Emergent-norm theory** points out that people in a crowd ‘take on different roles’.
- **Some step forward as leaders**; others become **lieutenants**, rank-and-file **followers**, inactive **bystanders** or even **opponents**.

Crowds as Emergent

- **Crowds begin as collectivities**, acting, and protest crowds – norms may be vague and changing as when, say, one person at a rock concert holds up a lit cigarette lighter to signal praise for the performers, followed by others. In short, people in **crowds** make their own rules as they go along.

Criticisms and Evidence

- **Berk (1974)** has used game theory to suggest that even during a panic in a burning theatre actors may conduct themselves **rationally**.
- This is a striking suggestion, given that panics have been described as the purest form of **collective behaviour**.

Berk

- **Berk** contends that if the members of the audience decide that it is **more rational** to run to the exits than to walk, the result may look like an animal-like stampede **without in actuality being irrational.**

Clark McPhail

- **Clark McPhail**, mentioned above, has examined many actual human gatherings. In , he concludes that such assemblies can be seen as lying along a number of dimensions, and that traditional stereotypes of emotionality and unanimity often do not describe what happens

Contemporary Theories CB's

- **Takes into account:**
- Localized Collectivities
- Dispersed Collectivities
- Types of Crowds
- Social Change

Localized Collectivities

- Crowds are **unorganized** collections of people who gather temporarily for a particular cause.

Dispersed Collectivities

- Are those who gather in a variety of places at the same time
- **Dispersed collectives** may have different appearances

Types of Crowds include

1. Casual crowds,
2. conventional crowds,
3. expressive crowds,
4. Acting Crowd
5. Angry Mob

Collective Behaviour Studies

- A key component of all collective behaviour theories is Social Change.

Social Change

- Can be defined as changes in typical features of society (eg. Institutions, norms and values) over time.
- **Social change** is on-going and inevitable.
- I.e. Changes to notions of deviance, changes in clothing preference etc.

Social Change

- Often results from collective behaviours
- **Collective behaviours** are not regulated by normal rules and expectations.
- Therefore, **something novel** happens. I.e Tianaman Square..

Social Change

- Is sometimes predictable, for example, when a country goes to war.
- However, much of social change is unpredictable such as the **unintended consequences** of computers.

Social Change

- One thing is certain...the rate of social change is accelerating...
- Some **forces of social change** include:
Technology, physical environments,
demographic shifts, economic competition,
war, ideas, government

Social Movements

- **Are one type of Collective Behaviour.**
- They comprise groups and individuals that provide continuous and organized efforts to bring about-or- resist social change.

- The emergence of grassroots social movements such as Greenpeace are proof that when people come together, they can effect change.

Features of Strong Social Movements

- 1. An effective organizational capacity
- 2. A clear position on their grievances and goals
- 3. Active engagement with existing power structures

Social Movements emerge from CBS

- **CBS include:**
- Riots, protest crowds, flash mobs, mass hysteria, disaster behaviours, fads, crazes,

Social Movements

- Are highly structured rational and enduring forms of collective behaviour.
- Most social movements **are established** to either stimulate or resist change.

Doherty (2002)

- Four characteristics of those who participate in social movements:
 - 1. They have a common identity
 - 2. They act at least partly outside traditional political institutions
 - 3. They rely on non-institutional networks of interaction
 - 4. They reject dominant forms of power

Two forms of Social Movements

- **1. Informal social movements** generally emerge in oppositions to a specific social issue.
- They generally possess a **charismatic leader**
- They often **lack in resources** but make it up in terms of passion.

Two forms of Social Movements

- 2. Formal Social Movements Large organizations that have existed for a long time
- Often have **large bureaucratic** structures and operate outside the mainstream NGOs
- These movements such as Greenpeace or pro-choice are well integrated into society

Types of Movements

- **Revolutionary**-peaceful (Quebec) or violent (Cuba)
- **Reformist**-Civil Rights and MADD
- **Reactionary**-seek to reverse direction I.e Henry Morgantaller Order of Canada
- **Religious**- Moonies, Scientology

Life Cycle of Social Movements

1. Emergence
2. Coalescence
3. Bureacratic/Institutional
4. Decline

Sociological Theories of Social Movements

- Sociologists offer a number of theories to explain:
 1. **when** social movements are likely to occur
 2. **And why** people are attracted to join them

Relative Deprivation Theory

- Holds that the origin of social movements resides in discontent and those who are dissatisfied with present conditions.
- **Subjective comparison**, relative poverty or when racial, ethnic, sexual, physical differences feel treated unfairly

Crits of R.D theory

- 1. Why does SM rarely happen among the poorest people?
- 2. Relative deprivation is difficult to measure.
- 3. Theory is less popular now than in the 1960s

Mass Society Theory

- Can be traced back to Durkheim's notion of organic solidarity.
- The forces of industrialization and urbanization leave people feeling disattached..
- Dimished ties...See Kornhauser (1959)

Crits of Mass Society Theory

- 1. It has been found (Thomson, 2005) that people do not lose ties in modern contexts-kinship and social solidarity may be found in mass society
- 2. Why is it that people who feel most connected are more likely to join with others...I.e Jack Layton..

Value Added Theory

- **1963 Neil Smelser** a functionalist
- His **value added theory** holds that six conditions must be met before a social movement can begin.

Value Added: Six Conditions

1. **Structural Conduciveness** -roadblock
Kansake Reserve-goal course on Native
burial ground
2. **Structural Strain** -a disturbance to a
smooth functioning society that can't be
tolerated..Oka Crisis.

3. **Growth of a generalized belief** -
understanding of how a movement will
solve the problem-Civil Rights

4. **Precipitating incident**-ie Rosa Parks bus
incident

5. **Mobilization to Action**-readiness for action, begin to act-bus boycott, lunch counter boycott.
6. **Social Control**-involvement of formal control agents such as police, politicians etc. The official response then invokes a collective response (how to work in the system?)

Resource Mobilization Theory

- **A New theory** -last 20years-investigates how social movements **gather resources** to further their goals.
- Successful movements depend on how members can **gather and use** resources

Resource Mobilization Theory

- Rudimentary resources such as computers, office space, photocopiers are easy to gather
- Greater difficulty in finding the right people-most movements require a charismatic leader

Crit's of RMT

- It focuses too heavily on resources, not enough on movement goals
- Fails to account for the influence of average people and their role in the movement

Political Process Theory

- **Overlaps with RMT**, political process theory emphasizes the dynamic relationship between social movement organizations and the larger political economic order.
- Doug McAdam (1999) examines the connection between local, prov and federal gov'ts and how they react to SMs.

- Some systems are more favourable to SMs than others.
- **Two findings:**
- 1. SMs are more likely to emerge in democratic societies
- 2. Weak governments are more vulnerable to SMs

Crits

- **Political process theory** fails to look at the realities of information flow
- Most gov'ts do not provide SMs with practical information to further efforts.
- The formal political actually obstructs the process in many cases. (Occupy)

Summary

- Theories of Collective Behaviours and Social Movements are connected.
- Each concern with how social change is possible
- CB's theories more about crowds, social movement theories more about complex organization

Summary

- **Social Movements** are one form of collective behaviour-more formal and more organized than fad, riots, spontaneous outburst etc
- Social movement produce social change
- Various theories exists to illustrate how SMs do this.