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SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOUR AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN MODERN ERA - A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

A social movement is a large group of people who are organized to promote or resist some social change. A social movement is typically based upon two factors - first, whom the movement is trying to change, and second, how much change a movement is advocating. Social movements can occur at the individual level or at the societal level, and they can advocate for either minor or radical changes. In 1966, cultural anthropologist David F. Aberle identified four kinds of social movements: alternative, redemptive, reformative, and revolutionary. In this lesson, we will discuss these social movements in terms of promoting social change.

Key Word : Social Movement and Collective Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Social movements can occur at the individual level or the societal level and can advocate for either minor or radical changes. This lesson will cover four kinds of social movements: alternative, redemptive, reformative, and revolutionary.

Alternative Social Movements

Alternative movements are do-it-yourself efforts that seek to change some aspects of an individual's behavior. The It Can Wait campaign is an example of an alternative social movement. AT&T's 'It Can Wait' public awareness campaign is an example of an alternative social movement. It is focused on a simple message: no text is worth dying for. This is a nationwide movement that has tremendous support.

Redemptive Social Movement

A redemptive social movement is one that seeks total personal transformation and is typically religious in nature. The spread of Christianity is a prime example of a redemptive social movement.

Reformative Social Movement

Reformative social movement is a social movement that seeks to change only some specific aspects of how society functions.

Social Movements and Social Change

In January 2011, Egypt erupted in protests against the stifling rule of longtime President Hosni Mubarak. The protests were sparked in part by the revolution in Tunisia, and, in turn, they inspired demonstrations throughout the Middle East in Libya, Syria, and beyond. This wave of protest movements travelled across national borders and seemed to spread like wildfire. The combination of deep unrest and disruptive technologies meant these social movements were ready to rise up and seek change.

What do Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals the anti-globalization movement, and the Tea Party have in common? Not much, you might think. But although they may be left-wing or right-wing, radical or conservative, highly organized or very diffused, they are all examples of social movements. Social movements are purposeful, organized groups striving to work toward a common goal.

Collective Behaviour

They might be more surprised when, as they sip their espressos, hundreds of young people start streaming into the picturesque square clutching pillows, and when someone gives a signal, they start pummeling each other in a massive free-for-all pillow fight. Spectators might lean forward, coffee forgotten, as feathers fly and more and more people join in. All around the square, others hang out of their windows or stop on the street, transfixed, to watch. After several minutes, the spectacle is over. With cheers and the occasional high-five, the crowd disperses, leaving only destroyed pillows and clouds of fluff in its wake.

Forms of Collective Behaviour

groups can also be identified in two other ways A mass is a relatively large and dispersed number of people with a common interest, whose members are largely unknown to one another and who are incapable of acting together in a concerted way to achieve objectives. In this sense, the audience of the television show Game of Thrones or of any mass medium (TV, radio, film, books) is a mass. A public, on the other hand, is an unorganized, relatively diffused group of people who share ideas on an issue, such as social conservatives. While these two types of crowds are similar, they are not the same. To distinguish between them, remember that members of a mass share interests whereas members of a public share ideas.

Theoretical Perspectives on Collective Behaviour

Early collective behaviour theories (Blumer 1969; Le Bon 1895) focused on the irrationality of crowds. Le Bon saw the tendency for crowds to break into riots or anti-Semitic pogroms as a product of the properties of crowds themselves: anonymity, contagion, and suggestibility. On their own, each individual would not be capable of acting in this manner, but as anonymous members of a crowd they were easily swept up in dynamics that carried them away. Eventually, those theorists who viewed crowds as uncontrolled groups of irrational people were supplanted by theorists who viewed the behaviour of some crowds as the rational behaviour of logical beings. In addition to the different types of crowds, collective

Emergent-Norm Perspective

Sociologists Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian (1993) built on earlier sociological ideas and developed what is known as emergent norm theory. They believe that the norms experienced by people in a crowd may be disparate and fluctuating. They emphasize the importance of these norms in shaping crowd behaviour, especially those norms that shift quickly in response to changing external factors. Emergent norm theory asserts that, in this circumstance, people perceive and respond to the crowd situation with their particular (individual) set of norms, which may change as the crowd experience evolves. This focus on the individual component of interaction reflects a symbolic interactionist perspective.

Value-Added Theory

The first condition is structural conduciveness, which describes when people are aware of the problem and have the opportunity to gather, ideally in an open area. Structural strain, the second condition, refers to people's expectations about the situation at hand being unmet, causing tension and strain. The next condition is the growth and spread of a generalized belief, wherein a problem is clearly identified and attributed to a person or group. Fourth, precipitating factors spur collective behaviour; this is the emergence of a dramatic event. The fifth condition is mobilization for action, when leaders emerge to direct a crowd to action. The final condition relates to action by the agents of social control. Called social control, it is the only way to end the collective behaviour episode.

Assembling Perspective

Interactionist sociologist Clark McPhail (1991) developed the assembling perspective, another system for understanding collective behaviour that credited individuals in crowds as rational beings. Unlike previous theories, this theory refocuses attention from collective behaviour to collective action. Remember that collective behaviour is a non-institutionalized gathering, whereas collective action is based on a shared interest.

Social Movements

Social movements are purposeful, organized groups striving to work toward a common social goal. While most of us learned about social movements in history classes, we tend to take for granted the fundamental changes they caused—and we may be completely unfamiliar with the trend toward global social movement

Levels of Social Movements

Movements happen in our towns, in our nation, and around the world. The following examples of social movements range from local to global. No doubt you can think of others on all of these levels, especially since modern technology has allowed us a near-constant stream of information about the quest for social change around the world.

Local

Winnipeg's inner city is well known for its poor aboriginal population, low levels of income and education, and concerns about drugs, gangs, and violence. Not surprisingly, it has been home to a number of social movements and grassroots community organizations over time. Currently, the Winnipeg Boldness Project is a social movement focused on providing investment in early childhood care in the Point Douglas community to try to break endemic cycles of poverty. Statistics show that 40 percent of Point Douglas children are not ready for school by age five and one in six are apprehended by child protection agencies.

Regional

At the other end of the political spectrum from the Winnipeg Boldness Project is the legacy of the numerous conservative and extreme right social movements of the 1980s and 1990s that advocated the independence of western Canada from the rest of the country. The Western Canada Concept, Western Independence Party, Confederation of Regions Party, and Western Block were all registered political parties representing social movements of western alienation. The National Energy Program of 1980 was one of the key catalysts for this movement because it was seen as a way of securing cheap oil and gas resources for central Canada at the expense of Alberta.

National

A prominent national social movement in recent years is Idle No More. A group of aboriginal women organized an event in Saskatchewan in November 2012 to protest the Conservative government's C-45 omnibus bill. The contentious features of the bill that concerned aboriginal people were the government's lack of consultation with them in provisions that changed the Indian Act, the Navigation Protection Act, and the Environmental Assessment Act.

Global

Despite their successes in bringing forth change on controversial topics, social movements are not always about volatile politicized issues. For example, the global movement called Slow Food focuses on how we eat as means of addressing contemporary quality-of-life issues. Slow Food, with the slogan "Good, Clean, Fair Food," is a global grassroots movement claiming supporters in 150 countries. The movement links community and environmental issues back to the question of what is on our plates and where it came from.

Types of Social Movements

We know that social movements can occur on the local, national, or even global stage. Are there other patterns or classifications that can help us understand them? Sociologist David Aberle (1966) addresses this question, developing categories that distinguish among social movements based on what they want to change and how much change they want. Reform movements seek to change something specific about the social structure. Examples include anti-nuclear groups, Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. Revolutionary movements seek to completely change every aspect of society. These would include Cuban 26th of July Movement, the 1960s counterculture movement, as well as anarchist collectives.

Stages of Social Movements

Later sociologists studied the life cycle of social movements—how they emerge, grow, and in some cases, die out. Blumer (1969) and Tilly (1978) outline a four-stage process. In the preliminary stage, people become aware of an issue and leaders emerge. This is followed by the coalescence stage when people join together and organize in order to publicize the issue and raise awareness. In the institutionalization stage, the movement no longer requires grassroots volunteerism: it is an established organization, typically peopled with a paid staff. When people fall away, adopt a new movement, the movement successfully brings about the change it sought, or people no longer take the issue seriously, the movement falls into the decline stage.

Resource Mobilization

Social movements will always be a part of society as long as there are aggrieved populations whose needs and interests are not being satisfied. However, grievances do not become social movements unless social movement actors are able to create viable organizations, mobilize resources, and attract large-scale followings. As people will always weigh their options and make rational choices about which movements to follow, social movements necessarily form under finite competitive conditions: competition for attention, financing, commitment, organizational skills, etc.

Collective behaviour and social movements

Social Change

Collective behaviour and social movements are just two of the forces driving social change, which is the change in society created through social movements as well as external factors like environmental shifts or technological innovations. Essentially, any disruptive shift in the status quo, be it intentional or random, human-caused or natural, can lead to social change. Below are some of the likely causes.

Causes of Social Change

Changes to technology, social institutions, population, and the environment, alone or in some combination, create change. Below, we will discuss how these act as agents of social change and we'll examine real-world examples. We will focus on four agents of change recognized by social scientists: technology, social institutions, population, and the environment.

Social Institutions

Each change in a single social institution leads to changes in all social institutions. For example, the industrialization of society meant that there was no longer a need for large families to produce enough manual labour to run a farm. Further, new job opportunities were in close proximity to urban centres where living space was at a premium. The result is that the average family size shrunk significantly.

Population

Population composition is changing at every level of society. Births increase in one nation and decrease in another. Some families delay childbirth while others start bringing children into their fold early. Population changes can be due to random external forces, like an epidemic, or shifts in other social institutions, as described above. But regardless of why and how it happens, population trends have a tremendous interrelated impact on all other aspects of society.

The Environment

Turning to human ecology, we know that individuals and the environment affect each other. As human populations move into more vulnerable areas, we see an increase in the number of people affected by natural disasters, and we see that human interaction with the environment increases the impact of those disasters. Part of this is simply the numbers: the more people there are on the planet, the more likely it is that people will be impacted by a natural disaster.

Modernization

Modernization describes the processes that increase the amount of specialization and differentiation of structure in societies resulting in the move from an undeveloped society to developed, technologically driven society (Irwin 1975). By this definition, the level of modernity within a society is judged by the sophistication of its technology, particularly as it relates to infrastructure, industry, and the like. However, it is important to note the inherent ethnocentric bias of such assessment. Why do we assume that those living in semi-peripheral and peripheral nations would find it so wonderful to become more like the core nations? Is modernization always positive?

CONCLUSION

Collective behaviour is non-institutionalized activity in which many people voluntarily engage. There are four different forms of collective behaviour: crowd, mass, public, and social movement. There are three main theories of collective behaviour. The first, the emergent-norm perspective, emphasizes the importance of social norms in crowd behaviour. Social movements are purposeful, organized groups, either with the goal of pushing toward change, giving political voice to those without it, or gathering for some other common purpose. There are numerous and varied causes of social change. Four common causes, as recognized by social scientists, are technology, social institutions, population, and the environment. All four of these areas can impact when and how society changes.

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