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Conceptual Problems in the Field of Collective Behavior

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TWO DECADES AGO, Herbert Blumer (1957: 151) wrote that the field of collective behavior “remains without a unifying conceptual scheme.” He commented that he saw “not many signs of even tentative advances in this direction.” This is even truer today with the weakening of the once dominant crisis-leads-to-collective behavior model and the diverse research that has grown out of the last decade’s events.

A major impediment to a better understanding of collective behavior- social movement phenomena remains the failure adequately to define the nature of the field. There is little agreement about how (and even if) collective behavior differs from noncollective behavior. There is a similar lack of agreement about how major types of collective behavior differ from each other. The external and internal boundaries of the field are not clearly enough defined. Many of the definitions we have are either too broad or too narrow. This has a number of negative consequences:

- a less cumulative research tradition than is the case for many areas of *sociology*;
- conceptual categories and explanations which are not sufficiently inclusive of the range of collective behavior phenomena;
- conceptual categories and explanations which are too inclusive, lumping together phenomena best kept distinct;
- lack of attention to elements that may be shared by different types of collective behavior (such as crowds and social movements) relative to “traditional behavior” or “noncollective behavior” and which justify treating the former within the same area of inquiry;

- failure to study systematically the varied relationships that can exist between different types of collective behavior;
- undue attention to the origins and consequences of collective behavior at the expense of attention to the dynamics and to the collective behavior “episode” as an element worthy of analysis in its own right;
- lack of research on the short-term and diffuse elements of collective behavior and lack of attention to important psychological questions and processes studied by the earliest theorists of collective behavior and later students responding to European totalitarianism;
- the failure to develop paradigms capable of ordering the diversity of phenomena and relationships offered by the field;
- failure to note systematically how the field of collective behavior is differentiated from and yet related to areas of inquiry such as social change, organization, deviance, and political sociology.

In this chapter I wish to document these problems by review and critique of major conceptualization efforts. I will then suggest a conceptualization of the field which I think avoids many of the current problems and which contains the pieces that new paradigms should order.

If we take as our initial standard whether collective behavior and social movements are first differentiated from noncollective behavior and then whether systematic differentiation is made among types of collective behavior, we can identify three common conceptualization errors.

Type I errors involve the failure to differentiate collective behavior and social movements from traditional behavior. The field is made to disappear by arguing that there is nothing unique to it. *Type II errors involve only the failure to differentiate social movements from traditional behavior.* Social movements are made a part of the study of organizational or political behavior and split off from collective behavior. *Type III errors involve the failure to differentiate social movements and collective behavior from each other,* although both are differentiated from conventional behavior. But avoiding these errors does not insure adequate conceptualization. I will first illustrate the three common conceptualization errors. I will then critique some attempts that differentiate collective behavior and social movements from each other, but still leave something to be desired with respect to criteria such as systematic derivation, comprehensiveness, specificity, mutual exclusivity, and common sense (including keeping elements of classification distinct from explanation).

The Denial of Difference: Type I Errors

Among recent efforts to deny differences between collective and conventional behavior (type I errors) is the work of McPhail (1978) and Couch (1968, 1970). Rather than seeking to define a field and its internal boundaries, they have worked in the opposite direction denying that there is anything unique here with respect to either conceptualization or explanation. Taken to an extreme, this turns Ralph Turner's (1964: 384) speculation that research may ultimately suggest "no special set of principles is required to deal with this subject matter" into a statement of fact.

McPhail (1978: 5) offers a sweeping critique and a definition which "is a more precise step in the direction of merging collective and social organization behavior." He writes approvingly of Park's definition of all of sociology as the science of collective behavior.

McPhail attacks previous theorists for their general failure to provide a specification of what they are attempting to explain. Many definitions are seen to be negative, telling us what collective behavior is not (structured or organized behavior) rather than what it is. McPhail overcomes this problem, but at a cost of a highly general and inclusive definition which creates other problems.

In the most general terms, collective behavior refers "to what human beings are doing with and in relation to one another" (McPhail, 1978: 4-5). Collective behavior is then practically synonymous with interaction in the proximity of another person or persons. Thus, he has the opposite problem of some whom he criticizes. McPhail does not go far enough in telling us what collective behavior isn't. We are thus not in a position to analyze variation in the historical phenomena that have so long stimulated interest in this area. McPhail makes an important contribution in clearly defining and developing a methodology for the systematic study of some generally unstudied aspects of proximate group behavior. But I think little is gained by going in the face of well-established convention in calling this "collective behavior," particularly when no new concepts are offered to deal with the themes of consistent interest to researchers over a sixty-year period.

The classification and understanding of collective behavior cannot be divorced from prior social structure and culture, or from its subsequent consequences. The meaning of this behavior to actors and others depends on its context.

A softer version that has contributed to the "no difference perspective" is Couch's (1968) article on the crowd, which is given the more general title "Collective Behavior: An Examination of Some Stereotypes."¹ Whatever his intent. Couch's article has contributed to efforts to deny or minimize differences between collective and noncollective behavior. In attempting to refute popular images of the crowd Couch argues that collective behavior is not pathological and bizarre (or at least no more so than noncollective behavior). But he does not tell us what collective behavior is.² In a later paper Couch (1970: 458) argues that

¹ In a similar vein, see Currie and Skolnick (1970).

² There is an empirical and conceptual question here. My concern in this chapter is primarily with the latter. However, it would be useful to treat as hypotheses at least some of the beliefs about crowds that Couch identifies. These could profit from systematic empirical inquiry contrasting the extent of their presence in crowds and other collectivities.

“there are no activities, relationships or beliefs unique to those situations commonly pointed to as instances of collective behavior.”

To the extent that the “nondifference” approach leads to demystifying phenomena undeservedly seen as exotic, more unified conceptual and explanatory approaches across sociology’s subject matter, and efforts to discover through empirical inquiry commonalities among phenomena previously seen as separate, it is a positive development. To the extent that the nondifference approach leads to denying that the field treats phenomena that are different in at least some ways and which are not adequately or explicitly dealt with elsewhere, and refuses to treat the possibility of modal differences (or even nondifferences) between collective and noncollective behavior as hypotheses to be tested, then it is negative.³

Social Movements Yes, Collective Behavior No: Type II Errors

A second classification error can be seen on the part of those theorists who argue (in some cases implicitly) that the distinction between elementary collective behavior and social movements is so great as to warrant their being separate fields. The study of social movements is to merge with the study of organizations and political sociology, while collective behavior remains the province of the exotic, residual, and psychological.

Traugott (1978: 49), for example, argues that the study of social movements should be broken off from the psychological contamination of collective behavior, with which it has “too long been locked in superficial and sterile association.” He argues that they should be separated because social movements possess social solidarity and an anti-institutional orientation which collective behavior is said to lack. The field of social movements should “concentrate its efforts upon social change accomplished by solidarity groups outside institutional channels” (Traugott, 1978: 46).

It is certainly important to study such value- or power-oriented movements even if (short of armed revolution) most social change by social movements (when present) involves a mixture of institutional and noninstitutional channels. Yet beyond clouding the issue of actors’ intentions as revealed in ideology versus the observed consequences, and limitations (to be noted) on social change as the defining criteria, I question whether his criteria empirically differentiate social movements from collective behavior. His distinction between social movements as anti-institutional and collective behavior as noninstitutional points up an important *conflict-oppositional* dimension of the phenomena. Yet this is not a dimension that can very clearly separate social movements from collective behavior. For example, social movements that seek to change persons rather than the social order (such as many religious cults) or that seek to bolster and renew the existing society

³ See also the critiques by Pfautz (1975), Zurcher (1979), and Aguirre and Quarantelli (1979).

(such as moral rearmament) can hardly be said to be anti-institutional. In the same way, some short-lived collective behavior phenomena such as rumors, looting, or being unable to go to work because of a mysterious ailment, can be very anti-institutional in either intent or outcome.

McCarthy and Zald (1979), while not systematically differentiating social movements from collective behavior, seek to move the former away from social psychology and back into the mainstream of political sociology.

In focusing on resources available to create social movement actions they downplay attention to what was the heart of traditional collective behavior— mass responses (the demand side). Like the modern corporations studied by Galbraith (1968), skilled social movement organizations are thought to be in a position to create demand (grievances). McCarthy and Zald (1973: 523) hypothesize that “the definition of grievances will expand to meet the funds and support personnel available.”

This work is important in showing how sociological approaches to conventional behavior can also help us to understand social movements. Recent social changes have contributed to the bureaucratization of social discontent and the increased prevalence of professional social movements. Their work has helped crystallize and structure much recent research and has weakened the strain-leads-to-collective-behavior model.⁴

Yet this emphasis can be taken too far. In focusing on social movements as organizations, resources, and rationality, attention to the special meaning, commitment, excitement, emergence, and fluidity that can surround a social movement (as other collective behavior phenomena) is likely dropped. It calls attention to structure rather than dynamics and environment rather than internal processes. Working for the NAACP is not strictly equivalent to working for General Motors. Nor is selling Krishna quite the same as selling Fuller brushes. There are likely to be differences in degree of routinization and ritualization and different bases of legitimacy. Social movements publicly present a component of disinterested moral superiority which justifies their claims and introduces contingencies on action.

Social movement participants can too easily be seen as only objects to be manipulated, or as wooden cost-benefit calculators, rather than as actors with a degree of autonomy responding to an environment often perceived as stressful. The market or demand for social movement actions must receive significant attention. It can generate a supply of social movement actions as well as the reverse.⁵

⁴ Though it is well to note that it represents a difference in emphasis rather than a complete break with the past. A close reading of Turner and Killian, Smelser, and the Langs certainly shows some attention to resource mobilization variables and collective behavior as related to broader political and economic aspects of society.

⁵ Some attention is given to this issue in McCarthy and Zald (1977). The question is one of relative emphasis.

How much, for example, could resource mobilization and cost-benefit analysis tell us about the actions of the Hungarian youth who threw rocks at Russian tanks during the Hungarian uprising or some of the spontaneous refusals to accept segregation that characterized parts of the early civil rights movement. I am also reminded of Berkeley FSM leader Mario Savio's "there is some shit we will not eat" speech. This was given to a large gathering of angry students that developed spontaneously in response to some particularly high-handed actions by the university administration. There is also an element of truth in the mid-1960s cartoon that showed a civil rights leader running behind a crowd of blacks and saying, "There go my people, I must lead them."

A strongly felt need may generate resources, as well as collective behavior. Having no tax-exempt foundations to turn to, Stalin robbed banks. A former IRA leader reports raising \$500,000 over a several-year period through bank and hotel robberies, and that robberies were a major source of their money (*Boston Globe*, September 3, 1979). Conversely, abundant resources in the hands of entrepreneurs, whether on the part of Edsel or the Moon movement, is no guarantee of success when mass support is sought.

There are at least three reasons why social movements and collective behavior should remain within the same general field. First, the two are often intertwined in such a way that to understand adequately the social movement one must analyze mass responses and particular episodes. Indeed, a major part of some social movements is a series of collective behavior incidents. A number of common patterns of relation can be identified (e.g., crowd behavior eventually leading to a more organized social movement; the social movement's strategic use of crowds; a division of labor between social movement organizations such as the legalistic NAACP and direct action SCLC; and crowds arising [internally or externally] in opposition to the social movement). Masses and publics can also have major implications for a social movement. Beyond questions of support or opposition, one must also look to them to understand the diffuse effects of a social movement and what Gusfield (1968) refers to as the "undirected" phase of a movement. There is a need to contrast systematically movements based on the extent and form of their interrelations with other types of collective behavior.

Second, even if they are not intertwined, they may "share (at least to a greater extent than is the case with traditional behavior) some similar characteristics with respect to the state of the social systems in which they appear, their organization, and psychological, cultural, and social processes.

Finally, the behaviors as such may also be conceptualized in a way that shows their analytical similarity, although the field has thus far failed to do this adequately. The similarity involves standing outside of conventional culture, though, as will be noted, in different ways. The field should not define away the stronger explanations which can emerge from including a wider range of phenomena.

Not Adequately Separating Social Movements from Collective Behavior: Type III Errors

Those arguing that social movements should be separated from the study of collective behavior generally start by criticizing conceptual efforts that lump them together. In so doing they identify what we can call type III errors. Herbert Blumer (1951) and his students, such as Turner and Killian (1972) and the Langs (1961), offer criteria for differentiating collective from noncollective behavior, but they tend to slide over (or at least do not give adequate systematic analytic attention to) the differentiating factors noted by McCarthy and Zald (1973) and Traugott (1978). Social movements and the other forms of collective behavior share some elements even while they may *differ* in important ways. Conceptualizing the field to deny either possibility restricts understanding. A conceptualization is needed which allows for both similarities and differences. Let us first consider Blumer's overall definition and then his subtypes.

For Blumer (1957: 130), collective behavior is beyond the area of "cultural prescription" and comes into existence and "develops along lines that are not laid out by preestablished social definitions." It involves organization and activity "formed or forged to meet undefined or unstructured situations." Whether we look at crowds, public opinion, fashion, shifts in popular interest in music, literature, entertainment, or the rise of a social movement, "the characteristic behavior of each such instance is not an expression of a pre-established prescription but is produced out of a forging process of inter-action."

Blumer's definition involves the coming together of specific values of two variables: (1) a group variable of an ecological nature—groups of large size;⁶ and (2) a type of behavior that is outside cultural prescriptions "produced out of a forging process of interaction."

Having defined collective behavior, Blumer (1951) offers additional internal definitions. A social movement is a collective effort to establish a new life. He specifies four basic elementary forms of collective behavior: the acting crowd, expressive crowd, mass, and public

There are few, if any, other fields of sociology where a field definition has had such staying power. Blumer was instrumental in laying out the field and training of most of its major students for several decades. (See papers in his honor in T. Shibutani [1970].) He identified elements of which contemporary students must find a way to take account. His essay is rightfully a classic. Yet with the hindsight of almost forty years of research and history to draw on, a number of limitations of Blumer's pioneering effort can be noted.

⁶ As Smelser (1962) notes, this actually bootlegs along variables involving feelings, communication, interaction, and forms of mobilization.

I will restrict my comments to the adequacy of his field definition rather than to his more frequently attacked causal mechanisms of circular reaction and contagion.

Blumer's definition of collective behavior as something limited to large groups rules out much activity that otherwise satisfies his other criteria of behavior outside of cultural prescriptions. Much collective behavior occurs in small groups. Indeed, given what we know about the importance of networks and interpersonal influence, the small group is a crucial place to look. For some purposes a distinction between large and small groups is worth making. However this should be as a variable whose consequences are to be explored, rather than as an initial criterion for classification. The latter results in excluding a vast amount of data.

For Blumer (1957: 130), collective behavior is partly defined in terms of what is thought to cause it. While not explicitly a part of his formal definition, the element of behavior "formed or forged to meet undefined or unstructured situations," in the context of the article, clearly enters as a definitional element. There is a latent causal model here. Here two elements (origins and the nature of the behavior) that must be kept empirically and analytically distinct are collapsed together. Questions of origin and motivation are important. However, the behavior to be explained cannot be defined in terms of what is thought to cause it.

The subtypes of collective behavior Blumer identifies are initially plausible and readily understandable because they stay so close to everyday language. Yet they do not lend themselves well to being operationally defined or to systematic inquiry. Nor are the interrelations among them specified. They are not very logically derived or analytically distinct.

Following Blumer, Turner and Killian (1972: 5) differentiate collective from noncollective behavior "according to the social norms that govern them." The groups wherein collective behavior occurs "are not guided in a straightforward fashion by the culture of the society." They lack defined procedures for selecting and identifying members and their "shared objective" is not defined in advance or arrived at by formal procedure. Popular language concepts such as crowds, fads, public and social movements are used to differentiate the field internally. "The same principles underlie the development of the various forms of collective behavior, and the same elementary processes are involved in all forms" (Turner and Killian, 1972: 101). While the search for what is shared by the various forms of collective behavior is important, so too is treatment of systematic difference. Emphasis on the absence of previously defined procedures and goals does not seem appropriate for the more enduring forms.

In a related fashion, the Langs (1961: 3-4) define collective dynamics as "transitory social phenomena." Such phenomena are "in a constant state of flux." They are "spontaneous and unstructured inasmuch as they are not organized and are not reducible to social structure." The Langs indicate that behavior having the characteristics of organization are to be excluded from their book, yet they end it with several chapters on social movements.

Not by Differentiation Alone: Other Conceptual Problems

Let us take Smelser and Weller and Quarantelli as examples of analysts who do attempt to separate collective from noncollective behavior and make analytical differentiations among the former.

Smelser (1963: 8-9) seeks to avoid certain of the problems faced by Blumer, while he still draws on some of Blumer's basic ideas. He extends Blumer's social movements as social change definition to all forms of collective behavior. The central definitional element is located in behavior which is mobilized on the "basis of a belief which redefines [changes] social action." The belief must be a generalized belief with special properties. Nor will any behavior growing out of a generalized belief about the need for change qualify as collective behavior. Smelser argues that the behavior must be noninstitutionalized and "to the degree to which it becomes institutionalized, it loses its distinctive (collective behavior) character." He follows Blumer's distinction between collective and culturally prescribed behavior in arguing that it is behavior "formed or forged to meet undefined or unstructured situations."

However, Smelser goes beyond Blumer in offering a more logical set of criteria for defining subtypes of collective behavior: these criteria, in turn, are related to his general definition of collective behavior. Applying Parsons' general delineation of the components of social action to differentiate among types of collective behavior on the basis of the levels at which change is sought yields five types: value- and norm-oriented social movements, hostile outbursts, crazes, and panics. His definition has the further advantage of being drawn from a general set of concepts that can also be applied to noncollective behavior.

Smelser's more systematic approach was a welcome addition to a loosely defined field. Yet he shares certain definitional problems with Blumer and also presents some new ones.

His definition is too restrictive in several ways. He combines elements that ought to be kept separate or used to form a typology. In requiring *both* a generalized belief and noninstitutionalized behavior, we are logically forced to *exclude* phenomena that most analysts would see as collective behavior. For example, (1) noninstitutionalized behavior (such as riotous behavior in victory or when social control is weakened) where a generalized belief is not present, and (2) situations where a generalized belief is present and where the behavior is institutionalized (e.g., groups such as the NAACP, whose major tactics are using the courts and lobbying, or the militant but law-abiding Socialist Workers' Party). It might be argued that these social movements qualify as collective behavior because the goals they seek are not institutionalized. Smelser is ambiguous here. A distinction between just what it is that is noninstitutionalized—means used or the future goals sought, or both—is needed.

This is related to the problem Blumer (1957: 130) faces in defining collective behavior as that which is "formed or forged to meet undefined or unstructured situations" and "not laid out by pre-established social definitions." Strict application of these criteria would require us to reject as collective behavior much social movement activity guided by

competing (rather than new) social definitions. Much change-seeking behavior is thoroughly rooted in protest traditions and may be in response to situations that are all too clearly defined and structured. Further, a movement's origins, as the resource mobilization perspective notes, may be from external sources not experiencing the strains or problematic situations the movement seeks to redress.

There can be little disagreement over the frequent importance of the elements Smelser identifies. However, whether, when, and which ones are "determinants" (rather than being unnecessary) or themselves determined by collective behavior is a question for research. A generalized belief or strain may result from, as well as be a cause of, collective behavior. To the extent that we focus only on cases where a generalized belief is initially present, we are prevented from exploring alternative causal relations among these elements.

The notion of social change is important to the definitions of both Blumer and Smelser. Though not necessarily intended, this often leads to ignoring the role of collective behavior in blocking change through backlash, countermovements, and proregime collective behavior activities. But beyond this, much collective behavior does not in-and-of-itself represent social change or resistance to it, as the term is generally understood. For example, episodes of the June Bug (Kerckhoff and Back, 1968), windshield pitting (Medalia and Larsen, 1958), Madonna (Tumin and Feldman, 1955), or flying saucer sightings and phantom anesthetists (Johnson, 1945) represent things that happen to people and do not directly involve "social change," as the term is conventionally used in sociology. A broader definition is needed which can encompass such phenomena.

I think the most successful conceptualization thus far is that of Weller and Quarantelli (1973). They offer a broader view of the field that goes beyond popular language categories by overlaying a variable that relates to groups (whether the collectivity involved consists of enduring or emergent social relationships) onto the variable traditionally used to define collective behavior as such—whether the norms guiding behavior are institutionalized (enduring or emergent). The central variable is *emergence* of either new norms or new social relationships. This specification is important, and I will draw from it later in the chapter in suggesting six areas that I think should constitute the field.

However, I think there are drawbacks in using this typology to define the field, beyond the issues around institutionalization-emergence as the only behavioral criteria. The typology mixes elements of structure and behavior and classification and explanation. These elements are initially best kept separate (but kept). For example, they use a variable that describes group structure or type of collectivity (enduring or emergent social relations) as if it were a variable that also describes behavior.⁷ The study of newly emerged groups engaged in *institutionalized activities* ought to be a part of this field, but their activities, strictly speaking, are not examples of collective *behavior*. In addition, combining variables of structure and behavior in a classification scheme may take attention away from

⁷ For example, they note (1973: 676), "Figure 1 represents three types of collectivities that contrast with those engaged in institutional behavior." Yet, according to their typology, one of these (the upper left quadrant) is defined as involving institutionalized behavior. Their preliminary discussion indicates awareness of the collectivity-behavior distinction as they ask, "What are the social properties of the collectivities that engage in collective behavior?" (p. 669). Yet they then proceed to define collective behavior by the presence of one such collectivity.

examining causal relations between them. For example, enduring or emergent social relations are likely to condition the type of norms that are present. Also, while the social aspects they note are crucial, there are other important social, as well as psychological, dimensions.

Six Major Interest Areas of the Field of Collective Behavior

The most common response to the field's conceptual problems is simply to study things that are interesting without worrying about where they fit within some broader framework. Much research in this tradition emerges in an inductive and reactive manner in response to behavior seen by the analyst to be bizarre, curious, threatening, or exemplary. However, to the extent that sociology aspires to be a science and to develop cumulative knowledge rather than being only a humanistic undertaking, precise definitions and deductively guided research are necessary. If current field definitions are lacking how should the field be conceptualized? I think the field needs to be conceptualized more broadly and that it currently suffers from being defined primarily by reference to collective behavior as a unique type of behavior. My major concern is not to offer a more comprehensive definition of what collective behavior as a type of behavior is (though I will be unable to resist the temptation). Instead, it is to suggest that the field should consist of six subareas. These emerge partly out of analytical considerations and partly out of taking what it is that people who identify with the field actually study (regardless of their formal definition of collective behavior).

We must distinguish between the actions illogically called “collective behavior” because of academic tradition, and the area or field of inquiry unfortunately also called collective behavior which involves much more than just the study of this type of behavior. In spite of its name, the field has had a strong interest in other areas that do not involve a focus on particular behavior as such. For some scholars, collective behavior has always been merely a vehicle for studying other phenomena such as social breakdown, types of interaction, symbolization, rumor, and social change. The greater integration of collective and noncollective behavior approaches and the great weakening of the field’s dominant paradigm in recent decades has meant an uncoupling of elements previously treated as central parts of collective behavior as behavior.

We can identify six salient subareas of the field, only one of which involves the direct study of a type of behavior meeting the criteria of “collective behavior.” How and the extent to which the other five areas relate to what sociologists have traditionally studied as collective (and noncollective) behavior is an important research question. But it cannot be decided a priori, nor is this the field’s only question.

The six areas involve:

1. An interest in social systems which are in a pronounced state of breakdown, strain, malintegration, crisis, or disruption. This can be seen on a continuum from a well-integrated social system with culture and resources adequate to goal attainment to a poorly integrated social system.⁸
2. An interest in a particular type of *group structure* which is either relatively undifferentiated *or* newly emerged (or both). These can be seen on continua from formally organized and/or well-established groups with a complex division of labor and role specialization where it is known who belongs and who doesn't and who will play what roles to their opposites such as publics, masses, and some assemblies and new groups.
3. An interest in the cultural processes involved in the development and communication of collective definitions. This includes collective images, symbolization, ideology, and rumor. The mass and the public are central here but this area applies to other types of group structure as well.
4. An interest in a particular type of social influence and interaction which in Harold Pfautz' (1975) words is "direct, immediate, visual and thus highly involving... rather than indirect, mediate, conceptualized and thus relatively dissociating."
5. An interest in psychology states collectively experienced by individuals such as panic, hysteria, hypnotic states, visions, extreme suggestibility, and heightened emotion. This needs refinement and is clearly of a different level than the others. While it is fashionable to argue for the purity of a sociological approach uncontaminated by anything that hints of psychology, this area perhaps more than almost any other in sociology requires trying to integrate the social and the psychological. There is much for sociologists as sociologists to study here, given the collective character of these individual responses.
6. An interest in collective behavior as such.⁹ The latter can be defined as group behavior outside of, or in a special relationship to, traditional culture in one or more of the following ways:
 - a. behavior not specifically defined in the traditional culture such as much fad behavior or innovative behavior in disasters. This ought to be seen on a continuum from behavior in situations where the culture offers almost no guidelines to situations that are highly structured and determined by culture. At the midpoint, showing elements of both collective and conventional behavior, are contexts that are culturally defined to have a high degree of indeterminacy and uncertainty with respect to development and specific

⁸ For the present, I wish to ignore the central and unresolved issue of how such "objective" states relate to perceptions of crisis, strain, and breakdown.

⁹ This is the behavior as such that is commonly referred to as "collective behavior." This name is of course a distortion, as many observers have noted, since any group activity can logically be seen as "collective behavior," and as noted that field involves much more than the study of behavior as such. For reasons that might well be studied by students of collective behavior it is unlikely that this poorly named field will be renamed.

outcome, such as contests. Contrast, for example, the relatively clear specifications about who will wear the crown in England with the use of an election for choosing rulers.

- b. behavior defined in the culture but which is prohibited (e.g., looting during a blackout) or which has lost its cultural supports (e.g., collective defenses such as those studied by Wilsnack [1979]).
- c. behavior directed toward institutionalizing alternative forms of action (irrespective of whether or not conventional means are used and how new the goals sought are to the culture). The study of social movements and responses to them is placed in this latter subcategory.

Past definitions (when not seeing collective behavior in terms of what is thought to cause it, a type of group structure, or the use of noninstitutionalized means) have used either the absence of traditional cultural patterns or change-seeking orientations. Both are needed. In addition, a component of culturally sanctioned indeterminacy must be added. I am aware that to extend the field of collective behavior to this residual area represents a considerable broadening and perhaps undue looseness. I do this hesitatingly and tentatively. But we need a way to deal with actions which are neither outside of culture nor seeking change. Aspects of political conventions (with their bandwagon effects) or sporting events (which are affected by team morale and home court audiences) are thus logically included.

At the most general level, collective behavior is group behavior which stands outside of, or in an indeterminate position with respect to, conventional culture and the institutionalized practices that flow from it—either because the behavior is new to the culture, prohibited or not supported by it, seeks goals that are not institutionalized, or has a high degree of culturally sanctioned openness with respect to either (or both) specific means or outcomes.

The definition in (6) above may be a bit unwieldy and general. The first two elements include the point of view of the observer and the third that of the actor. Nevertheless, it offers one way to include the diverse phenomena studied by those identifying with the field. The definition differentiates collective behavior (including social movements) from traditional behavior. And it does offer one way of internally differentiating types of collective behavior (though [6c] may overlap with either [6a] or [6b]). But it does not do a very good job of this. Being able to label a type III error does not preclude one from committing it! There is a need to build in a number of crucial dimensions to classify types of collective behavior such as persistence in time, type of structure, and nature of the means used and goals sought.¹⁰ The case remains to be made that popular language concepts such as crowds, fads, or panic are the best way to capture the field's internal variation.

¹⁰ Another need is to indicate how the field overlaps with (and yet is distinct from) the study of social change, politics, deviance, sports, and social psychology. While the field shares elements with each of these it does not encompass them, or vice versa.

I would prefer to work in a more deductive and then empirical fashion, listing and combining the major dimensions by which collective behavior may be contrasted and then seeing how and with what frequency the boxes get filled in. I think it is premature to foreclose on the basic types of collective behavior.

SOME IMPLICATIONS

I have suggested that this field should consist of six subareas with relatively autonomous status. It may seem heretical to suggest that the field of collective behavior should not have as its main (or only) concern the study of collective behavior as behavior. But if we look both at what it is that people who identify with the field or draw upon its traditions study and what they discover, the conclusion is hard to avoid.

I suggest a broadening of the field and an uncoupling of elements (particularly the system state, group structure, and behavior aspects) that until the later 1960s were thought by a majority of students to be empirically and temporally linked. There was a dominant paradigm in which I would include most of those in the Blumerian, as well as in the Parsonian, tradition. Simply stated, it assumed that breakdown or strain in the social system could lead to ideological critiques and certain types of group structures (publics, crowds) which might in turn give rise to more formally organized claims-making groups (social movements). These (crowds, social movements) were the group context within which activities not governed by traditional norms occur (collective behavior) and were a major mechanism of social change. Certain social and cultural processes (rumor, ideological short-circuiting) and psychological states (heightened suggestibility) were thought by many, though not by all observers, to be disproportionately present under such conditions.

This paradigm is no longer dominant. It has been shown to be a limiting case. While its elements may occur together in the sequence specified, there is increasing evidence of their independence and of alternative linkages. Thus while system breakdown, strain, or crisis may lead to collective behavior, they are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions. Much of the large-scale empirical work, such as that by Tilly and his students, has failed to find the expected relationships between strain and collective behavior. This is also true for much of the research on individual mobilization (McPhail, 1971; Heirich, 1977). Work on the professional social movement (McCarthy and Zald, 1973) and riots in victory (Marx, 1970) offers other examples of collective behavior without strain or crisis as they are usually defined. Nor is ideology a necessary condition. It may grow out of as well as precede collective behavior.

Beyond cases of collective behavior without crisis or ideology, we must take account of situations when causality goes in the opposite direction. For example, collective behavior such as a general strike, boycott, or civil disobedience may cause strain and breakdown instead of the reverse.¹¹ There may be another connection as well. To go back to an old idea from Durkheim, collective behavior and expressive actions may prevent breakdown and malintegration by offering a safety valve and a means of reaffirming shared standards. A major task for the field is to study alternative patterns that may exist among the six areas.

Furthermore, the elements specified may be joined in varying ways and degrees, but without the occurrence of "collective behavior" (as defined in area [6] above). Thus, in disaster situations we are likely to see systems in a state of crisis (area [1] and emergent groups area [2]), but we will not necessarily see widespread collective behavior. Quarantelli (1975) and other students of disaster have indicated the surprising degree to which behavior in disasters stays within conventional cultural bounds. But this is certainly not grounds for excluding disaster or crisis research from the field.

The study of assemblies (McPhail and Miller, 1973) is an important part of this field but only a small fraction of these result in collective behavior. Much more common, however, is the linkage with the social-psychological influence processes of area (4). For example, audience crying or laughing is culturally defined. Yet their release can be very much conditioned by the immediate presence and behavior of others. Contrast how much more one is likely to laugh at a comedy when the theatre is full than when it is empty. The behavior seems to stem to a greater extent from heightened, immediate interpersonal influences than is the case of such behavior in more differentiated or established groups. Collective behavior processes are present in audience contexts, usually without collective behavior.

The specification of these six areas is partly a result of tradition. I think that they encompass most of what those identifying with the field study. Some of them are also residual, involving areas that do not have an adequate (or distinct) home elsewhere in sociology. Many of the specific topics, of course, reflect whatever happens to be newsworthy in a given time period. But I think there is a logic to defining the field this way that goes beyond tradition, the need to house homeless intellectual issues, or contemporary events. The tradition itself is not completely arbitrary. It has both logical and empirical sources.

As noted, collective behavior phenomena tend to stand in a special relation to conventional culture; and process and emergence, as well as institutionalization and routinization, are central cross-cutting analytical themes. They are often important elements in broader, and rather poorly understood, societal processes of breakdown and rejuvenation. Much institutionalized behavior becomes maladaptive over time. The

¹¹ Though if we adopt the longer-term cyclical view inherent in the perspective of many classical theorists this becomes a dialectical chicken-and-egg problem. Thus, today's collective behavior solutions when successfully institutionalized over a long period of time can become dysfunctional. The resultant strains can lead to a new collective behavior aided solution, which in turn will eventually lead to new strains, and so on.

collective behavior which may arise in response to it tends to become routinized and institutionalized.

Less abstractly, as the examples in the preceding paragraphs suggest, the six subareas are also likely to occur together empirically (though, to be sure, in varying combinations and rarely all together) to a greater extent than is the case of their opposites, or many other areas of sociology.

The reasons for this go much beyond any overlap in definition. Thus, in emergent and/or undifferentiated groups not bound by traditional standards, there is obviously more "room" for rumor, heightened interpersonal influence processes, and innovative behavior. As Le Bon and others have argued, the anonymity or sense of power of such groups in face-to-face contact may be conducive to acting contrary to conventional standards. Parallel or imitative behavior is made easier by the immediate presence of large numbers of others.

Chance elements play a more important role in affecting behavior. Restricted information and a sense of immediacy may give the behavior a cruder quality than is the case with groups that are more differentiated and have continuity. The pressure within social systems experiencing pronounced strain or breakdown can obviously help generate collective behavior (though the link between objective system states, perceptions, and collective behavior is one of the field's major unresolved questions).

I think the field's most pressing theoretical need is the development of new models beyond that of strain-collective behavior. The theoretical and research challenge ahead is to understand the variety of ways and conditions under which the six elements can relate.

While it is important to explore the extent of these links, the empirical phenomena of interest are nevertheless sufficiently complex and independent to warrant each area standing on its own.

In conclusion, I suggest that the field of collective behavior consist of studying the origins, dynamics, consequences, and interrelations of these six areas. Only one of these is an effort to understand collective behavior as such. I feel more confident of my critique of the field's internal and external definitional problems and of the need to uncouple the analytical elements from a single causal model, than I do with my suggested tentative solutions. Much conceptual work remains to be done with respect to elaboration of the subfields, relations with other areas of sociology, and development and documentation of the variety of causal paths that may be present. But, hopefully, several of the field's major problems have been documented and we have pointed toward one possible solution.

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