CHAPTER 26

Emotions and Social Movements

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The study of emotions in politics and protest has emerged (or reemerged) in the past decade through a messy inductive process of recognizing the obvious: emotions of many sorts permeate political action. In grappling with the inadequacies of existing theories of politics, researchers grabbed pieces of emotion theory opportunistically where they could find them. Few existing approaches in the sociology of emotion have been applied systematically, much less compared, in this field, but almost all have found their way into the mix to some degree. This inductive and relatively atheoretical approach ~~may~~ make social movements a useful venue for comparing might theories of emotions developed in other settings.

We begin with a review of the place of emotions in the field of collective behavior and 100 then social movements over the past ~~one hundred~~ years, as they fell out of explanations in the 1970s, only to reemerge in the late 1990s (for more details, see Goodwin et al., 2000, ~~upon~~ from which we draw). We then look at recent research that has tried to specify the role of emotions in social movements and related forms of political action, categorizing this research crudely by the type of interactional setting in which the emotions are generated and displayed. Finally, we reach out to theoretical perspectives in the sociology of emotions, suggesting ways that research from movements could be extended to engage these theories more explicitly than it has in the past.

Aristotle launched the study of emotions and politics almost 2,400 years ago by examining the effects of orators on audiences—insights buried first by the rationalistic traditions of recent centuries and later by the structural predispositions of sociology. By pointing out the different interactive contexts of meaning and feeling (such as leaders and followers, recruiters and potential recruits, insiders and outsiders, pairs of opponents, and so on), we suggest Aristotle—and

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rhetoric—as a starting point for a rethinking of emotions that recognizes the strategic purposes that often lie behind them.

FEARING EMOTIONS: A BRIEF HISTORY

Crowds

Crowd-based theories dominated protest research until the 1960s, typically combining vague macrostructural strains with pejorative (often psychoanalytic) views of participants and their emotions. Emotions were considered the driving force of virtually all political action that occurred outside normal institutions. In nineteenth-century images of the mob, normal, reasoning individuals were thought to be transformed in the presence of a crowd, becoming angry, violent, impressionable, and generally unthinking. Crowds were assumed to create, through hypnotic processes such as contagion and suggestion, a kind of "primitive" group mind and group feelings, shared by all participants outside of their normal range of sensibilities, overwhelming their individual personalities and capacity for reason. Well into the twentieth century, crowds and their dynamics were conceived as the heart of protest movements, the core around which other forms of action were built. We see a stark contrast in this literature, as in so much Western thought, between emotions and rationality. In this vision, institutions were calmly reasonable, and crowds were emotional and irrational.

In the most influential expression of this pathologizing perspective, Le Bon (1960) described crowds as impulsive, irritable, suggestible, and credulous. They were guided primarily by unconscious motives and exhibited "very simple and very exaggerated" emotions: "A commencement of antipathy or disapprobation, which in the case of an isolated individual would not gain strength, becomes at once furious hatred in the case of an individual in a crowd" (p. 50). Given these traits, crowds are susceptible to the emotional appeals of demagogues. "Given to exaggeration in its feelings," wrote Le Bon, "a crowd is only impressed by excessive sentiments. An orator wishing to move a crowd must make an abusive use of violent affirmations. To exaggerate, to affirm, to resort to repetitions, and never to attempt to prove anything by reasoning are methods of argument well known to speakers at public meetings" (p. 51). Most social scientists of the early and mid-twentieth century, including Weber, Durkheim, Freud, and Smelser, accepted some version of Le Bon's viewpoint.

Fascism and communism prompted scholars to look for individuals peculiarly susceptible to mass movements. They were alienated (Kornhauser 1959), for example, or predisposed toward violence (Allport 1924). Others used Freudian psychology to show that participants were immature: narcissistic, latently homosexual, oral dependent, or anal retentive (Lasswell 1930, 1948). Lasswell was only the most explicit in elaborating a political "type" for whom politics was an effort to fulfill needs not met in private life. Hoffer (1951) similarly saw a desperate fanatic who needed to believe in *something*, no matter what. Because driven by inner needs, especially frustrations due to a lack of a stable identity or to "barren and insecure lives," Hoffer's "true believer" could never be satisfied, hoping to lose himself in a collective identity, a "mass movement," in which he believed with utter certainty. When one movement ended he moved on to another.

In protest, Smelser (1968) speculated, ambivalence toward one's father in the oedipal Stet crisis reemerges, split between two objects:

> On the one hand there is the unqualified love, worship, and submission to the leader of the movement, who articulates and symbolizes "the cause." On the other hand there is the unqualified suspicion, denigration, and desire to destroy the agent felt responsible for the moral decay of social life and standing in the way of reform, whether he be a vested interest or a political authority. (~~1968,~~ pp. 119–120)