

SOCIAL GROUPS AND COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this chapter you will be able to do the following:

- Differentiate between types of organizations.
- Surmise the functions of groups within a society.
- Define collective behavior.
- Differentiate between types of crowds.
- Define and classify social movements.
- Apply theories of collective behavior.

WHY DO SOCIETIES CHANGE OR REMAIN SAME?

Throughout Sociology's history, Sociologists have wanted to understand why societies changed or remained the same. Comte referred to **social statics**, *or the study of social structure and how it influences social stability* and **social dynamics**, *the study of social structure and how it influences social change*. A modern example of social statics might be the government bailout manipulation of the economy to establish economic security in volatile markets. On the other hand, an example of social dynamics might be the impact that social movements such as the Tea Party and Occupy are having on how average people think about the heavy influence of corporations in politics.

Émile Durkheim's concept of anomie focused on how daily norms (or the relative lack thereof) influenced the daily expectations and obligations of society's members. In the village with an agricultural society, most people knew what everyone else did for a living, and most shared in common similar daily life patterns. These villages illustrate Émile Durkheim's idea of mechanical solidarity.

Mechanical solidarity *is a shared consciousness among society's members who each have a similar form of livelihood*. As industrialization emerged it transformed rural communities, while developing urban areas into factory-based, highly populated cities, norms became much more ambiguous. Furthermore, populations became diverse as well as the social roles in which members engaged. As the different parts of society took charge of fulfilling the various roles for the community, the sectors became interdependent. Durkheim called this **organic solidarity**, *which is a sense of interdependence on the specializations of occupations in modern society*. The sense of solidarity comes from fulfilling one's responsibilities, while benefitting from other's fulfilling theirs. Those in larger cities had less regulated and organized patterns and could no longer provide for the majority of their individual needs—they became much more dependent on each other's specializations. Like a living organism, such as the human body, the various body parts and organs play specific roles to keep the body happy. The organs depend on each other to fulfil the ultimate goal of keeping the human healthy. As Durkheim witnessed rapid social change that accompanied the Industrial Revolution, he attributed much of the personal challenge

that came with it to anomie and the difficult and often fuzzy normative regulation of social life.

This brings us to an important and related issue—how a society functions and dysfunctions impacts the individual. Karl Marx argued the concept of **alienation**, *which is the resulting influence of industrialization on society's members where they feel disconnected and powerless in the final direction of their destinies*. To Marx, the social systems that powerful people created in turn controlled the pattern of everyone's social life, powerful and powerless.

A later German sociologist named **Ferdinand Tönnies** (1855-1936) wrote about two types of community experiences that were polar opposites. **Gemeinschaft** (*Guh-mine-shoft*) means intimate community and **Gesellschaft** (*Guh-zell-shoft*) means impersonal associations. His observations, like Durkheim's and Marx's, were based in the transition from rural to urban, agricultural to industrial, and small to large societies.

Gemeinschaft comes with a feeling of community togetherness and inter-relational mutual bonds where individuals and families are independent and for the most part self-sufficient. Gesellschaft, however, comes with a feeling of individuality in the context of large urban populations and a heavy dependence upon the specialties of others (mutual inter-dependence) to meet everyone's needs.

People living in both large and small cities have a social connection with others called **social cohesion** *which is the degree to which members of a group or a society feel united by shared values and other social bonds*. The study of social cohesion has become much more complex as societies have grown in number, diversity, and technological sophistication. **Social structure** *refers to the recurring patterns of behavior in society that people create through their interactions and relationships*. As explained above, social structure of course can be literally considered (like the anatomy of a human body specifically defines parts and how they are related to one another), or figuratively considered where social institutions, laws, processes, and cultures shape the actions of those who live in these societies.

A **status** *is a position within the social structure*. There are three types of status considerations: An **ascribed status** *is present at birth and is said to be unchangeable* (race or sex); **achieved status** *is attained through one's choices and efforts* (college student, movie star, teacher, or athlete); and **master status** *is a status which stands out above our other statuses and which distracts others from really seeing who we are*. Each status comes with attendant roles. **Roles** *are the rights and responsibilities attached to a status*. For your status of college student, you have to read the book, study, complete assignments, take exams, interact with other students, counselors, professors, and others, register for classes, and do many other things. This one status can place a rather heavy burden on you. **Role strain** *is the burden one feels within any given status*. When studying for your history exam takes up too much of your time that you don't get to do your best work on your essay for English you are experiencing role strain. *When the roles in one status come into conflict with the roles in other statuses, role conflict* occurs. If your boss tells you that you must work tomorrow from 11:00 AM until 7:30 PM, but you have Sociology class at 11:10 AM, Geology

at 12:50 PM, and Theater at 2:20 PM, that's role conflict. To complicate matters you also have a dinner date for 6:00 PM.

WHAT ARE SOCIETY'S COMPONENT PARTS?

What are core parts of our social structure? The first and most important unit of measure in Sociology is the group. In Sociology, a **group** is usually defined as a collection consisting of a number of people who share certain aspects, interact with one another, accept rights and obligations as members of the group, and share a common identity. Using this definition, society can appear as a large group. While an aggregate comprises a number of people in the same place at the same time, and a category is a group of people who share the same status, a group in Sociology exhibits cohesiveness to a larger degree. Aspects that members in the group share may include interests, values, or kinship. People in the same movie theater, people at the same bus stop, and even people at a football game are considered aggregates, not groups. Every time you are at the bus stop there is a different configuration of people there. College students, World of Warcraft game players, and people who like football are categories, not groups. You will probably never be in the physical presence of all of those who share your status.

Primary groups consist of small groups with intimate face-to-face contact, and they commonly last for years. **Secondary groups**, in contrast to primary groups, are larger groups whose relationships are formal and institutional; some of them may last for years, but some may disband after a short time.¹ Your family is a primary group, but this class is a secondary group.

Figure 1. Photo of the Semi-Annual UVU Behavioral Science Poster Symposium.²



In the photo in Figure 1 the professor on the left, Dr. Bret Breton, posed for this photo with two of his undergraduate students. Twice a year the Utah Valley University holds a student research symposium where students present findings from their research studies. For six hours their posters are displayed and they answer questions and discuss their findings with any of the 26,000 students who attend Utah Valley University (a category of student). Throughout the day, clusters of students stand around tables (aggregates), while research team members (groups) talk about what they did and what they learned while doing it.

WHY ARE GROUPS CRUCIAL TO SOCIETY?

Groups come in varying sizes. **Dyads** are a group of two people, and **triads** are a group of three people. The number of people in a group plays an important structural role in the nature of the group's functioning. Dyads are the simplest groups because two people have only one relationship between them. Triads have three relationships. A group of four has six relationships; five has 10; six has 15; seven has 21. With each additional person, the group becomes more complicated. When triads form,



it looks much like a triangle and these typically take much more energy than dyads. A newly married couple experiences great freedoms and opportunities to nurture their marital relationship. A triad forms when their first child is born. They experience a tremendous incursion upon their marital relationship from the child and the care demanded by the child. As Bill Cosby said in his book *Fatherhood*, "Children by their very nature are designed to ruin your marriage."³

You can begin to see how the functional approach to studying groups provides insight into how group structure, function, and dysfunction affect the everyday lives of group members. **Sociometry** is the study of groups and their structures.⁴ To solve problems you might be hired to come into an organization, examine the organization's groups and functions or dysfunctions, and then eventually create strategies for enhancing the quality of the groups' interactions or expanding the groups' social networks in a beneficial way.

Each group has a set of norms that governs its interactions. These norms are typically very similar to the norms of the broader social climate, but sometimes include specific rules for behavior that apply only to that group. Within groups there is a trust that operates that helps bond the members of the group. There are two types of trust experienced within groups: **calculative trust** is trust based on performance and competence (common in instrumental relationships), and **normative trust**, which is trust based on a sense of belonging and feelings (found typically in families and communities). Calculative is more common in modern societies while normative is more common in small, traditional societies.

With your friends, have you noticed that one or two tend to be informally in charge of the details? You might be the one who calls everyone and makes reservations or buys the tickets for the others. If so, you would have the informal status of "organizer." The organizer is the leader of the group. In primary groups, the leader is usually an **expressive leader**, one who is concerned with who the people in the group are and making sure they are well tended. Does your group's organizer try to be sure she picks the most convenient date for your activities? She wants everyone to be happy and to be able to attend that snowboarding trip. Secondary groups, which are more task-oriented, have **instrumental**

leaders *who are concerned with accomplishing tasks.* They are concerned with what position the group's members hold. Think about your job, or a hypothetical job if you have never had a job, and who is responsible for what. The manager makes sure everyone fulfills his and her duties; she doesn't care too much about how you feel because she just wants to get the job done.

FORMAL ORGANIZATIONS

Society *is defined as a population of people who share the same geographic territory and culture.* In Sociology, this typically refers to an entire country or community. Average people tend to use the word society differently than do sociologists. You might be thinking about the difference in the American Humane Society,⁵ the American Cancer Society,⁶ or the Society of Plastics Engineers⁷ and U.S. mainstream society.

In the sociological definition of society, the three organizations listed above are not societies. They are **organizations** *or formalized groups of individuals who work toward a common organizational (and often personal) set of goals.*

There are three types of organizations: **Normative organizations** *are organizations that people join because they perceive their goals as being socially or morally worthwhile* (e.g., the American Humane Society, Greenpeace, MADD-Mothers Against Drunk Driving). Much of the work in these types of organizations is done by volunteers. For example, Habitat for Humanity has some paid employees to keep the organization going, but most of the work is done by volunteers.⁸ **Coercive organizations** *are organizations where people typically are forced to do the work against their will* (e.g., prison). **Utilitarian organizations** *are organizations where people do the work because of some tangible benefit that they expect to receive* (e.g., Barnes and Noble, an accounting firm). In other words, people are paid to do the work. This is probably the organization you are most familiar with.

All organizations exist within the structures of a broader society and are created and modified based on the changing needs of the society. These organizations are influenced by, and serve to support, the major social institutions in a society, such as political, economic, family, education, and religions.

WHAT ARE COLLECTIVE BEHAVIORS?



Imagine a football game where the teams never huddled before each play. That's the way things were in college football until a bright Gallaudet University (a university that serves the Deaf community) quarterback noticed that the other teams were trying to spy on their sign language signals. Thus, in the late 1800s the circular football huddle was born.⁹ This is

an example of how one person or one group can make a lasting change in a society.

In the case of Gallaudet, as with the Civil Rights Movement, Women's Suffrage Movement, and many other social movements, Sociology opens a world of understanding about why and how collective behaviors, such as social movements, accomplish their goals. **Collective behaviors** are *unusual or non-routine behaviors that large numbers of people participate in*. There are a variety of types of collective behaviors. When something catches on for a short season of intense interest, we call it a fad. A **fad** is *a novel form of behavior that catches on in popularity but quickly fades*. Feather-locks, where women weave feathers into their hair, is an example of a fad.¹² A **fashion** on the other hand is *something that is longer lived and often cycles throughout history* (bell bottoms, car styles, and sexual abstinence have all cycled throughout history).



A **mass** is *a large number of people oriented toward a set of shared symbols or social objects*. The Super Bowl draws an enormous mass of viewers in the U.S. and the world—over 130 million in the U.S. alone.¹³ World Cup of Soccer tends to draw over one billion each year.¹⁴ That's a tremendous number of people in a mass of fans and viewers worldwide.

Crowds are *a number of people in the same space at the same time*. They are not always groups who share a common identity, have roles, and meet together often, but they are typically gathered for the same thing (e.g., football game).

Social movements are *intentional efforts by groups in a society to bring about or resist social change*. Social movements are more organized and goal driven than crowd behaviors.

THE WHY AND HOW OF CROWD BEHAVIORS

There have been a number of core research studies on how and why crowds behave as they do. Keep in mind that a crowd at a bus stop that gets on the bus does not necessarily qualify as having participated in collective behavior because of the brevity of their time together and the purpose in which they share the same public space. A group like this would likely be identified as a social aggregate. A social **aggregate** is made up of *people who temporarily happen to be in physical proximity, but share little else*.

Gustav Le Bon (1841-1931) was a French Social Psychologist who studied crowds in his work.¹⁵ Le Bon believed that when a crowd came together their individual conscious merges into one large collective conscious. Le Bon's **Contagion Theory** claimed that *in a crowd people get caught up in the collective mind of the crowd and evade personal*

responsibility for their actions. This helps to explain riots where individuals do things they wouldn't do under ordinary circumstances (e.g., set buildings and cars on fire).

Another argument, Convergence Theory, proved to be a better explanation of crowd behavior. The **Convergence Theory** *claims that motivations are not born in the crowd but develop in individuals who carry them to the crowd.* The crowd may provide an outlet for relieving their frustration. By themselves, it would be difficult to act out. Together in the group it becomes much easier with other like-minded people. In other words angry people who feel victimized by a racial injustice might come together (e.g., the KKK) and collectively their emotions would contribute to collective actions that probably would not occur if such people were by themselves.

Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian's **Emergent Norm Theory** *claims that as crowds form and people interact, new norms develop in the crowd and facilitate certain actions.*¹⁶ In other words, events and emotions develop within the crowd while they are together. For example, in Bolivia a drunken man was discovered beating a woman on a neighborhood street. A few men came and stopped him and restrained him until the police arrived. Word spread to the adult son of the beating victim, and he and his friends came to defend her honor. They overpowered the original bystanders and began beating the drunken man. The drunken man's family heard about the new beating of the drunk, and an all out mob-on-mob brawl ensued. The police arrived and rescued the drunk.

To understand crowds and how they function you need to think about them in terms of how they came to be a crowd, how they compare or contrast to other crowds, and fundamentally what the crowd did or did not do together. Consider a more normal circumstance of a crowd at Utah Valley University which started out as Utah Valley Community College. On July 1st, 2008, a huge crowd gathered for the formal dedication ceremony and ribbon cutting. Hundreds of people came to see state and national dignitaries and local personalities deliver speeches that would resonate throughout the campus (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Collective Behavior at Utah Valley University.



This crowd came together to celebrate a new era of campus and community connection. It was a **conventional crowd**, a crowd that gathers for a typical event that is routine in nature (e.g., a play). An **expressive crowd** is a crowd gathered to express an emotion (e.g., Woodstock, the Million Man March, or the 9-11 Memorial Services). **Solidaristic crowds** are crowds that gather as an act of social unity (e.g., Breast Cancer awareness events). All three of these types of crowds are safe, non-violent, and mostly predictable in terms of what they accomplish.

Acting crowds are crowds that are emotionally charged against an event or goal. Some become mobs, but not all of them. This might happen when a large number of fans exit an arena after their team won or lost. For example, sometimes when they see police arresting another fan, their emotions become more anger-centered and they collectively move against the police. The fact that the other fan may have been robbing someone at knife point may or may not matter if the others perceive an injustice or overbearing police action. Generally speaking, acting crowds are more dangerous than other crowds.

Some crowds evolve into **riots**, *large numbers of people who act violently in protest against some authority or action of others* (typically governmental or corporate authority). Fans whose team won or lost, employees laid off from work, neighbors who are angry about a police action, and other scenarios are connected to typical riots. Very few riots are purely protestive in nature. Some would argue that the 1992 Los Angeles Riots became commodity riots, where the original issue is forgotten as locals loot businesses and stores for commodities. Others would argue that the verdict acquitting the police officers who had beaten Rodney King stirred anger against injustices that members of the rioting communities had kept suppressed for many years.¹⁷

On September 11, 2001 governmental, corporate, and private organizations closed their doors and put their very best security at protecting their people and property. **Panic** occurs when crowds or masses react suddenly to perceived entrapment, exclusion, or danger. Panics can impact masses and crowds. In the 9-11 attacks the panic may have saved lives and property had the terrorists' threats been broader than they really were.

THE WHY AND HOW OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

On a larger scale and with more social impact, is the phenomenon of a social movement. Social movements often start as grassroots organizations, and sometimes are more radical when they start off. They seek to make more sweeping changes in a shorter period of time. However, movements that gain successes often become institutionalized, following a more formalized, instrumental-rational structure. This movement turns into an established organization with a hierarchical leadership structure. As an established organization, with a paid staff and volunteers, their goals often become influencing government policy on their orienting issue, and raising funds to stay afloat or expand. They tend to have the same intensity of organizational leadership that might be found in a government or business organization.

The Second Wave of the Feminist Movement that took place between the late 1960s to as late as the mid-1980s, serves as a good example. At the grassroots level, most of the women and men participating in this movement did not belong to formal organizations, but organized by meeting and talking to others who similarly felt oppressed by the lack of equality between the sexes. Dialoguing in consciousness-raising groups was their primary method of organizing and getting their message out.

Though many women participated, they had different goals in mind. Liberal Feminists settled for legislative equality with men, demanding access to equal opportunities in the workplace. Other activists, Radical and Socialist/Marxist Feminists, sought more fundamental change, such as men and women taking an equal share in raising the family, cooking and cleaning, and in being the family breadwinner. Furthermore, they sought cultural change, such as a change in sexual mores so that women were not vilified for having sex before marriage, while men were congratulated for their conquests. In 1966, the Liberal Feminists founded the National Organization for Women (NOW), while the Radical Feminists formed other organizations such as the Redstockings, the Feminists, New York Radical Feminists,¹⁹ and Radical Women.²⁰

Messianic movements *seek to bring about social change with the promise of miraculous intervention.* Almost always these movements are led by a rather charismatic leader and followed by people inclined to need or want to be a part of something exceptional in their lives. **Charisma** *means having an outstanding personality that magnetically attracts others to you.* There have been positive charismatic leaders, as well as very dangerous ones. Mohandas Gandhi is regarded as a positive charismatic leader. He led India through the successful, non-violent resistance movement against British colonial rule that led to India's independence.²¹ In recent years there have been three very similar messianic movements whose charismatic leaders were born and raised in the U.S., but were not very successful in their individual lives and ended up leading large numbers of people to their mortal demise (See Figure 1 for a comparison of Messianic movements). Messianic leaders are often really leaders of cults. A **cult** is defined as *a newer religion with few followers whose teachings are perceived to be at odds with the dominant culture and religion.*

Although the details vary, these movements are very similar in terms of what gets accomplished and in terms of how their end was voluntarily self-destructive. Some people not well-integrated with mainstream society feel threatened by social change, especially when their definition of what keeps society together, of what makes a "good" society, or what they believe God would be happy or unhappy with, leads them to distrust the collective direction of mainstream society.

The messianic or cult leaders Jim Jones of the People's Temple, David Koresh of the Branch Davidians, and Marshal Applewhite of the Heaven's Gate groups all had similar social processes at play, even though there was no apparent connection between leaders of the groups.²² Eventually the leaders, who have enough leadership skills to get the group together and manage them, but not enough leadership skills to negotiate their interactions with social organizations outside of their compounds, run out of options and are content with suicide and murder. It is important to note that suicide may be in conformity with their belief system.

Figure 1. A Comparison of Jones, Koresh, and Applewhite Messianic Movements.²⁴

<u>Jimmy Jones and the Jonestown Massacre, 1978</u>	<u>David Koresh, and the Waco Standoff, 1993</u>	<u>Marshall Applewhite, 1997 Heaven's Gate Mass Suicide</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -People's Temple religious cult -Guyana (next to Brazil) -Numbers involved, about 900 -Cohesive Social Movement -United against the senseless state of the world -Isolated selves far away from homeland -Sexual relations issue in rules of behavior -Killed US Congressman Ryan and 4 others -Level of average member belief and commitment to goals of social movement at its highest -All 909 voluntarily drank Cyanide-laced, sedative enhanced Flavor Aid -Leader was apocalyptic visionary (Google: Jim Jones, People's Temple, Jonestown Guyana, and "Drink the poison cool aid" for more information) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Branch Davidian religious cult -Mt. Carmel, 10 miles outside of Waco, Texas -Number involved, about 3-400 -United in preparation of millennium (movement) -Koresh overtook original founder -Isolated selves -Sexual relations issues Koresh and girls/women -Stockpiled guns and ammo -Locked selves in siege after law enforcement tried to make arrest (51 days) -Level of average member at mid-level, some defected and helped authorities -76 or original group died, some killed by Koresh -Leader was Messiah-type with command of Bible scripture (Google: David Koresh, Branch Davidians, Waco Massacre for more information) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Heaven's Gate religious cult -Rancho Santa Fe, CA -Number involved, about 93 -Millennial social movement -Suicide in effort to have souls transported in tail of Hale-Bop comet (by aliens) -Isolated in luxury mansion -Sexual relations issues (castration for males) -Level of average member belief and commitment to goals very high among those who stayed, some left -39 of original 93 suicided by arsenic, cyanide, and alcohol wearing Nike tennis shoes and sports apparel -Leader was Messiah-type with galaxy connections to aliens who captured souls in spaceship behind comet (Google: Marshal Applewhite, Heaven's Gate, and Mass suicide for more information)

There are other types of movements that can be classified in terms of their function, similarities, or differences. A **revolutionary movement** *seeks to overthrow existing institutions and class systems while replacing them with new ones*. The American, French, Mexican, and other national revolutions fall under this category. A **reformist movement** *seeks partial changes in only a few institutions on behalf of interest groups*. In the U.S., the Liberal Feminist, children's rights, and some animal protection movements are indicative of this type movement. Most efforts work within existing political channels.

A **conservative movement** *seeks to uphold the values and institutions of society and generally resist attempts to alter them*. The conservative right movement in the U.S. falls under this category. A **reactionary movement** *seeks to return the institutions and values of the past by doing away with existing ones*. The Ku Klux Klan is an example of a reactionary movement. An **expressive movement** *seeks to allow for expression of personal concerns and beliefs, often tied to a new form of artistic expression*. Punks, Goths, and Emos are examples of this type.

THEORIES OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The **Relative Deprivation Theory** claims that people who feel relatively deprived in comparison to some other group or institution engage in social movements to equalize things. Movements are more supported when members feel that compared to others they are worse off and a balance needs to be struck. The **Structural-Strain Theory** claims that social problems/strains on the current social structure, combined with discontent, lead to movements. Such is the case with the spread of American liberal values across the world via satellite TV, as well as political and economic intrusions that benefit Western nations. Many conservative cultures worldwide find the U.S. and other Western nations repulsive in their values on women's roles, sexuality, and crime. This unites many people in many diverse societies to become like-minded in their values. The **Resource Mobilization Theory** maintains that a social movement succeeds or fails based on people's ability to gather and organize resources. The environmental movement has made tremendous collective progress because of the vast numbers of key educational, governmental, and social leaders who bring resources to bear on social change.

¹ [http://www.knowledgerush.com/kr/encyclopedia/Group \(sociology\)](http://www.knowledgerush.com/kr/encyclopedia/Group_(sociology))

² © 2007 Ron J. Hammond, Ph.D.

³ 1987, Doubleday

⁴ Google Jacob L. Moreno for its founder.

⁵ <http://www.humanesociety.org>

⁶ <http://www.cancer.org/index>

⁷ <http://www.4spe.org>

⁸ <http://www.habitat.org/>

⁹ Gallaudet on Wikipedia, 2008

¹² <http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/43265020/ns/today-style/t/bait-switch-hair-extension-fad-angers-anglers/#.TxJKGyNibEU>

¹³ www.NFL.com

¹⁴ www.FIFA.com

¹⁵ The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind.

¹⁶ See Collective Behavior (1993) 4th edition. Prentice Hall

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LA_Riots

¹⁹ Tong, Rosemarie. 2009. *Feminist Thought – A More Comprehensive Introduction* 3rd ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. Originally published in 1989.

²⁰ Radical Women. 2001. *The Radical Women Manifesto – Socialist Feminist Theory, Program and Institutional Structure*. Seattle, WA: Red Letter Press.

²¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gandhi>

²² Google "Cults that end in suicide" to read about these cults all over the world

²⁴ © 2009 Developed by Ron J. Hammond, Ph.D.