



Collective Behavior and Social Movements

In this chapter, you will learn about:

- how and why people in crowds and mobs behave as they do
- forms of mass behavior
- why social movements occur
- how social movements work

In the last months of the 20th century, people were preparing for the new millennium. Many were concerned with what they called “Y2K” (year two thousand). Their concerns revolved around the massive number of society’s activities that are regulated by computers whose software programs were not written to recognize years beginning with the digit 2. The concern was valid, and governments and businesses spent millions reviewing their systems and rewriting computer programs. At the same time, a kind of hysteria arose as people anticipated what might happen. Some began to hoard cash, fearful they wouldn’t get access to their bank accounts. Others stored nonperishable food items against the potential failure of warehouses and delivery systems. Cat owners bought up bags of kitty litter. Some people prepared for the end of the world.

What makes people act this way? In this chapter, we’ll explore collective behavior, from the activities of “rubbernecks” who form a “gapers’ block” when accidents occur on the highway to the more organized group behavior known as social movements. From revolutions to sit-ins and letter-writing campaigns, social movements attempt to bring about change in society.

Collective Behavior

A **collectivity** is an unstructured collection of individuals, with no assigned roles or organized authority, who temporarily engage in an activity. They disperse once the issue that brought them together is over.

EXAMPLES: Onlookers at an accident scene—their interactions are temporary. They may merely gawk or may provide assistance to the victims and help with crowd control or in directing traffic.

Collective behavior consists of the actions, thoughts, and emotions that occur almost simultaneously within a collectivity.

EXAMPLES: Riots, fads, mass hysteria, panic.

Collective behavior is characterized by several factors. It tends to be:

- * Unstructured.
- * Unpredictable.
- * Spontaneous.
- * Emotional.

Such behavior differs from the behavior in organizations and institutions where norms and social controls are in place.

Understanding Collective Behavior

A number of approaches have been used to interpret collective behavior. There are **four** prominent theories.

1. Contagion Theory. In 1895, Gustave Le Bon proposed that powerful emotions are contagious, particularly in a crowd where people tend to lose their indi-

viduality and become anonymous. The “power of suggestion” causes people to behave unpredictably.

EXAMPLE: Lawyers have argued contagion theory in their defense of some people who acted violently during a riot. They may say that their clients were driven to violence by the powerful influence of other rioters.

Today, few sociologists believe that there is a common emotion in crowds. Some suggest that the more uncertain the situation, the more likely people are to follow the lead set by others.

2. Convergence Theory. This theory states that individuals who participate in mobs are brought together by similar interests and attitudes. These similarities predispose crowd members to collective behavior.

EXAMPLE: People who attend a rock concert or sporting event share common characteristics and interests.

Critics of convergence theory point out that it is unlikely that people with similar personalities would be present at fast-developing situations where collective behavior occurs.

3. Structural Stress Theory. In 1962, sociologist Neil Smelser argued that collective behavior depends not only on the dynamics of crowds but also on the social context in which the behavior takes place.

Smelser listed **six** conditions that must occur in sequence for collective behavior to happen:

- i. **Structural Conduciveness.** Preexisting social organization permits collective acts and sees them as legitimate.
- ii. **Social Strain.** There must be a preexisting strain due to previous failures of the government to meet citizens' needs or address social problems.
- iii. **Growth and Spread of a Generalized Belief.** Potential participants have

formed a belief about the situation that initiates their response.

- iv. **A Precipitating Event.** A particular situation or event brings the strain to the breaking point.
- v. **Mobilization of Participants for Action.** Leaders emerge, urging people to action.
- vi. **Inadequate Social Controls.** Smelser believed this is especially important because once collective behavior occurs, its length and severity are

Sociologist's Perspective



The Rodney King Riots

Riots occurred in Los Angeles in 1992 after a jury found four white policemen not guilty of beating black motorist Rodney King during his arrest. The beating had been videotaped, and TV news programs replayed the scene over and over during the weeks leading up to and through the trial. That event fit Smelser's theory:

Structural Conduciveness. The people who joined the riots lived within the same area of Los Angeles and readily communicated with one another.

Social Strain. There had been a history of police brutality against African Americans.

Growth and Spread of a Generalized

Belief. Rioters believed that local police were guilty of mistreating and brutalizing African Americans.

A Precipitating Event. The court found the police officers not guilty.

Mobilization of Participants for Action.

Leaders emerged shouting slogans such as "Let's burn!" and setting examples by looting, smashing storefronts, and overturning vehicles.

Inadequate Social Controls. The police were all but absent in the early hours of rioting. Perhaps they felt their presence would further enrage the rioters. Those whose property was destroyed saw their absence as further lack of regard for justice in a minority neighborhood.

determined by the response of “agencies of social control,” such as the police or National Guard. When there is no social control, people feel less constrained to behave in ways typically viewed as lawful or acceptable.

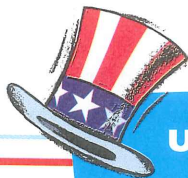
4. Emergent Norm Theory. This theory states that people in a crowd have the illusion that they share common values and norms, perhaps because they share the interest that brought them together. This illusion predisposes the crowd members to act as a unit and observe a new “norm” of the moment.

EXAMPLE: People who have waited in line for a “big sale” often begin pushing and shoving as soon as the store opens. Once this norm has emerged, they proceed to race from place to place, throwing merchandise around as they grab for bargains before someone else gets them.

Crowds

When people think about collective behavior, they often picture a crowd. Although crowds are not the only type of collectivity, they are an important one. Sociologist Herbert Blumer has described four types of crowds.

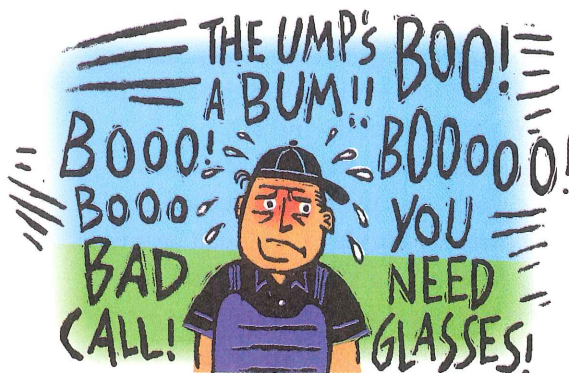
Blumer's Crowds	
Type of Crowd	What It Is
Casual	A collection of individuals that forms spontaneously because some common event captures their attention. Individuals in a casual crowd engage in little if any interaction with one another. EXAMPLE: People watching an accident or a street performer.
Conventional	People gathered for an event such as a performance or a lecture. There is little interaction. While they have a common goal, they pursue it as individuals. EXAMPLES: Concerts, lectures, movies.
Expressive	A group coming together for an emotionally charged event. People release emotions in what may not, in other circumstances, be acceptable behavior. EXAMPLES: Mardi Gras, New Year's Eve in Times Square, a religious revival meeting.
Active	An excited and emotional group of individuals express their emotions through violent or destructive behavior. EXAMPLES: Mobs, rioters, and “hooligans”—what some call rowdy and riotous fans at sporting events.



U.S. Culture Connection

Sports Fan Behavior

Why do sports fans act the way they do? The social identity theory suggests that sports fans enhance their self-esteem through association with the team. When the team wins, fans bask in the reflected glory of the team. When it loses, they defend the team as if they were defending themselves or family members.



Some sociologists have added a fifth type of crowd, protest crowd, to Blumer's four types. This type is a blend of the conventional and the active crowd, because it is somewhat organized and purposeful. Strikers and protestors are examples.

Emotions and Crowd Behavior

Emotions influence collective behavior.

- * **Panic** is a collective behavior that develops when people experience fear that they are in imminent danger. Fleeing from a threat is appropriate behavior, but collective panic leads to irrational and uncooperative behavior in which people can be trampled to death.
- * **Frustration and hostility** may lead to mob behavior. Mobs can form spontaneously or through planning. When mob behavior turns violent, it is called a riot.

- * **Joy or merriment** accompany celebrations, concerts, and parties. If the collective behavior gets out of hand at these events, it can evolve into mob behavior.

Deindividuation

Psychologists use the term **deindividuation** to describe what happens when a person loses a sense of individuality. **Three** attributes distinguish this state:

1. Loss of self-awareness.
2. Sense of reduced responsibility.
3. Decreased concern about how others view one's behavior.

In an emotional situation, there may be loss of self-awareness as attention is focused on what is happening. When

attention is not focused on self, people stop comparing their behavior against normal standards and instead tend to act like everyone else.

Research has shown that being in a crowd decreases an individual's sense of responsibility and accountability. In crowds, people wait for someone else to assume responsibility and act.

Once deindividuation has occurred, some event may push the social arousal level over the threshold. This can be anything from a "bad call" by a referee to the taunts of opposing fans. A few fans start throwing things or fighting. Because people have not only lost self-awareness but also feel anonymous in the crowd, they join in the action. In a mob, no one can be sure who did what, so no one can be blamed.

Mass Behavior

Some collective behavior involves individuals who are not in close proximity to one another. They may live in different parts of the country or the world, but something makes them behave in similar ways. In turn, their behavior influences others to behave in the same way. This is known as *mass behavior*. There are **six** common types of mass behavior:

- 1. Fads** are short-term, unexpected behaviors engaged in by one segment of the population, generally adolescents or young adults. Fads often give people the feeling of being part of a group.
EXAMPLE: Bungee jumping, body piercing, collecting Pokemon cards and slang expressions are fads.
- 2. Crazes** are a more serious form of fad that becomes the focus of a person's life or produces negative consequences.
EXAMPLES: Get-rich-quick schemes and the rapid rise and fall of emerging dot.com companies are crazes.
- 3. Fashions** are customs or styles that change periodically but less frequently than fads. More people follow fashions than follow fads.
EXAMPLES: Style of dress, length of one's hair, home furnishings, and car models are fashions.
- 4. Mass Hysteria** is a form of panic in which people reinforce each others' irrational fears about a threat from some powerful force.
EXAMPLES: In colonial New England, a form of mass hysteria persuaded villagers that their neighbors were witches, resulting in the execution of many innocent people. In 1938, a radio program, *The War of the Worlds*, presented a fictional news broadcast about Martians invading Earth. Although it was announced several times during the program that the show was a dramatization, people in New Jersey, where the Martian landing supposedly was taking place, fled their homes. Listeners with relatives in the area telephoned to warn them.
- 5. Rumors** are unverified information from anonymous sources that spreads quickly and informally. Rumors arise and flourish in situations where there is little available information and some anxiety.

Rumors are not necessarily false. However, people rarely take the time to verify their accuracy before passing them on. Later, even when a rumor proves to be false, people continue to believe that “where there’s smoke, there must be fire.” This is why innuendo (simply hinting things about people or events) is so powerful.

EXAMPLES: Large corporations hurt by false rumors include a fast-food franchise accused of adding earthworms to its burgers and a home-cleaning product line whose logo was said to be a satanic symbol.

6. **Urban Myths** are unsubstantiated stories that are widely circulated and believed. More complex than simple rumors, they often carry a warning about the hazards of modern life or hidden threats.

EXAMPLES: Alligators in the sewers, rats in soft drink bottles, and poison in the drinking water are all urban myths.

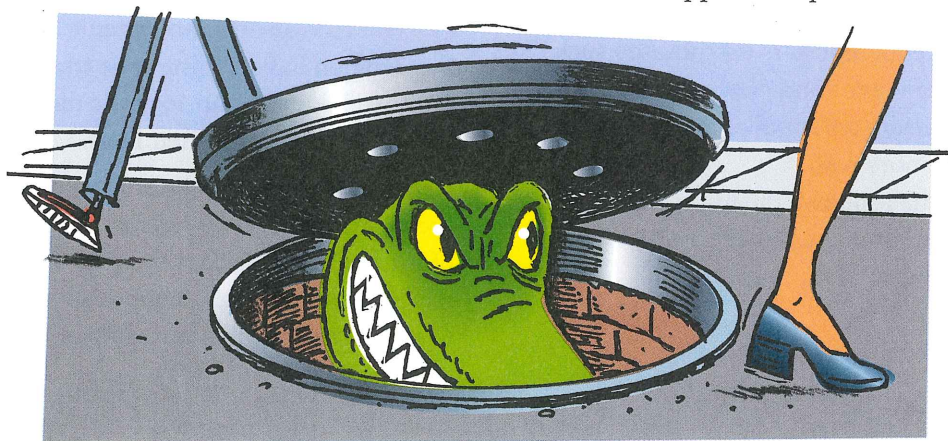
Popular Opinion

Groups in society often seek to influence public opinion, whether to gain sales of a product, persuade voters to elect a candidate, or garner support for a particular social issue, such as reproductive rights, drugs, taxes, or Social Security. Popular opinion, or “public opinion,” as expressed in polls and surveys, supposedly reflects the feelings and beliefs of the public. Public opinion can be influenced by propaganda and the mass media.

Propaganda

One tool used to sway popular opinion is **propaganda**—information designed to manipulate public opinion and to influence people to change their beliefs in a particular way. Some propaganda techniques include:

- * **Name calling**, associating an opposing idea or product with something undesirable by using such terms as “big spender” or “shoddy” or by juxtaposing images of a race riot or a nuclear bomb with an opponent’s picture.



- * **Glittering generalities**, associating an idea or product with a vague but highly popular concept, such as democracy or freedom.
- * **Transfer**, associating an idea or product with something else that is admired or desired, such as using pets or children in ads.
- * **Testimonial**, having a celebrity endorse a product or a national politician endorse a local candidate.
- * **Bandwagon**, creating the impression that “everyone else” supports an idea or product. Have you noticed how quickly positive poll results or endorsements by major unions or newspapers are announced by political candidates?

Mass Media

The mass media exert influence on public opinion. For example:

- * When the media report something, people are likely to believe it.
- * If a commentator says something that we already believe, our belief is validated.
- * When ideas that are out of the mainstream are reported, they seem legitimate.
- * When media reporters use phrases such as “crime wave” and “police brutality,” the vague anxieties people may have become more real.
- * The media establish the importance of an idea or issue by the degree to which they cover it.

Social Movements

Social movements are collective efforts to bring about social or political change. Compared to collective behaviors, social movements:

- * Are goal-oriented.
- * Are more structured.
- * Are longer-lasting.
- * Have more participants.
- * Have official leaders.

Social movements are temporary, making them different from institutions. A social movement can become an institution if and when it is accepted by society.

Characteristics of Social Movements

All social movements share **three** major characteristics.

1. **Ideology.** A set of beliefs unifies the members of a movement and determines the social process the movement wishes to influence. Though it is sometimes vague, the ideology provides a rallying cry for the movement.
EXAMPLE: Women’s movements believe that women have a right to be treated fairly and equally and to make their own decisions about their lives.
2. **Organization.** Social movements have social structure. They have a core group of leaders, a group of active participants, and others who support the cause of the organization in a variety of ways.

EXAMPLES: Large and successful social movements may become formal organizations, such as the NAACP or Greenpeace. These organizations have paid staff and, often, huge fund-raising capabilities. They exert political influence through lobbying or political action committees. Major causes such as protecting the environment or animal rights may have hundreds of separate organizations working on their behalf.

3. Goals and Tactics. A social movement has one or more goals or objectives that are clearly defined. These goals are reached through the use of tactics that vary depending on the cause and the goals. Tactics may include:

- * Community action, such as setting up recycling programs.
- * Voter registration programs.
- * Letter-writing drives.
- * Lobbying and political action groups.
- * Direct action, including protests and civil disobedience.

The working members of social movements are called activists. An **activist** is one who engages in assertive, sometimes militant, action as a means of supporting or opposing a controversial issue.

Frequently, activism takes the form of civil disobedience. **Civil disobedience** is a form of nonviolent protest in which individuals or groups deliberately and publicly disobey a law they believe is unjust.

Although they are breaking a law, their behavior is not lawless. They respect laws and expect to be punished for breaking them. They resign themselves to the consequences for the sake of the opportunity to call public attention to an injustice.

Most social movements do not condone violence. On occasion, they have proved unable to prevent their supporters from resorting to violent acts. Further, when activists begin a civil action, there is no guarantee that other people, untrained in nonviolence, won't join them and engage in violent or unlawful behavior. This was the case in 2000 when people seeking to protest a meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle, Washington, attracted a large number of others who were mainly interested in provoking mayhem.



▲ A cartoonist questioned the motives of "protestors" at the Seattle meeting of the World Trade Organization.

Types of Social Movements

Social movements can be characterized by the type of change they promote. The following chart describes six major types of social movements.

Social Movements	
Type	Characteristics
Expressive	Aims at individuals rather than society. Encourages individuals to replace their behaviors with behaviors deemed more desirable. EXAMPLES: Alcoholics Anonymous, religious movements.
Progressive	Attempts to improve society by making positive changes in institutions and organizations. Advocates that society try new ways of doing things. EXAMPLES: Labor Movement, Civil Rights Movement.
Regressive/ Resistant	Responds to efforts at social change by trying to prevent change or by advocating a return of society to a previous state. Triggered by strong disapproval of social trends. EXAMPLES: Efforts to oppose affirmative action, feminism, and homosexual rights.
Reform	Attempts to make a major change to some aspect of society or politics without completely transforming it. Often attempts to gain rights and protection for some segment of society without changing other aspects. EXAMPLES: Efforts to end the death penalty, efforts to increase gun control, the consumer rights movement.
Revolutionary	Advocates a radical shift in the fundamental structure or practice of a society. Often involves violence. Arises when a segment of the population is strongly dissatisfied with the existing society. EXAMPLES: American Revolution, Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, Castro-led revolution in Cuba.
Utopian	Seeks to create an ideal social environment from an image of a perfect society. Rejects violence as a method to gain its goal. EXAMPLES: Puritan society in colonial America, counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Did You Know?



Social Movements

Three great U.S. social movements have produced widespread social change: the Labor Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Women's Suffrage Movement. Smaller social movements have focused on:

- * Abortion.
- * Animal Rights.
- * Black Power.
- * Consumer Protection.
- * Death Penalty.
- * Drugs.
- * Environmental Protection.
- * Health Care.
- * Nuclear Weapons.
- * Peace.
- * Pornography.
- * School Busing.
- * Smoking.
- * Temperance.
- * Welfare Rights.
- * White Supremacy.
- * Women's Liberation.

Perspectives on Social Movements

Sociologists who study social movements have **two** major explanations for how and why they become organized.

1. Relative Deprivation Theory. Social movements arise when people feel deprived relative to other people or to their own expectations of what society should provide. You might think that social movements would arise in societies experiencing poverty. In reality, they occur more often in fairly wealthy societies. Often, they occur in societies in which improvements underway are not moving as quickly as people believe they should. Therefore, the explanation

is not that people are deprived, but that they are *relatively* deprived.

2. Resource Mobilization Theory. Social movements begin when deprived groups have found the resources to sustain organized action. Resources include money, facilities, leadership, influential contacts, and the people necessary to do the work.

There is some evidence that relative deprivation theory helps explain "crisis movements," such as those dealing with issues of race, poverty, or unemployment. Resource mobilization theory explains why the anti-slavery movement could not take place among the slaves themselves, but began when those with resources were moved to take action.



U.S. Culture Connection

The Ruckus Society's Boot Camp for Activists

The Ruckus Society takes its name from the expression "to raise a ruckus." (A *ruckus* is a "noisy disturbance.") The society seeks to help environmental and human rights organizations achieve their goals. Since its beginning in 1995, the Ruckus Society has trained activists in the "arts and crafts" of nonviolent civil disobedience. At Ruckus Society Action Camps, activists are trained in:

- * Nonviolent actions and protests.
- * Scouting and planning civil action.
- * Basic climbing skills for protest situations, such as tree sits, bridge blockades, and building climbs.
- * Communication technology.
- * How to set up blockades.
- * Media techniques, such as "spin control," sound bites, and media delivery.
- * How to create banners for specific site conditions.
- * Political theater—humor, drama, and pageantry to enhance campaigns.

People don't all agree that such training is a good thing for society. Trained protestors have generated a fair amount of criticism. Some activists "protest for hire." Their actions don't reflect their personal beliefs. Rather, they work for any activist group that will pay them and spend their time moving from protest to protest.



Criteria for Success

The success of a social movement depends on leadership, loyalty, and social conditions.

Leadership

A successful leader must have the ability to involve masses of people in support of an ideology and a particular goal. She or he must have the ability to reach compromises among members with different views and to maintain a sense of cohesion within the movement.

Movements need charismatic leaders, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., who lead through their personal enthusiasm and dedication to the ideology of the movement. Such leaders help members take the belief system of the movement to heart.

They also need administrative leaders to tend to the practical matters of organization, such as recruitment, fund-raising, and public relations.

Loyalty

The loyalty and dedication of members in a successful movement are constantly reinforced through propaganda, slogans, speeches, and such artifacts as buttons or bumper stickers. If member interest wanes, achieving the goal of the movement is less likely.

Social Conditions

Conditions that tend to improve a movement's chances of success include widespread discontent, frustration, social disorganization, and financial or social insecurity. When other issues become more

pressing than the one addressed by the movement, people may lose interest. When a major incident occurs, interest is revived.

Stages of a Social Movement

Although every social movement is different, sociologists have identified **four** stages common to their development:

- 1. Emergence.** A relatively small group of activists stirred by a problem begins to agitate for action or change.
- 2. Coalescence.** More individuals become interested and join together in an organized activity. In this stage:
 - * A small leadership group emerges.
 - * Goals and tactics are adopted.
 - * Plans are made and action begins.
 - * A rally or demonstration may be used to increase public awareness.
 - * Organizations with common interests may join together to strengthen the movement.
- 3. Bureaucratization.** A hierarchical structure emerges among the leaders and the active members. Now the organization takes on the characteristics of a bureaucracy:
 - * Participants take on specialized roles.
 - * Rules become more extensive.
 - * These changes add to the strength of the organization, but may also drain off some of the momentum.



Social Movements in China

Mao Zedong, leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), gained the support of 600 million Chinese by promising protection of human rights, equal distribution of land and profits, and a prosperous future. Mao understood the power of social movements. The CCP sponsored dozens of groups, including the All-China Federation of Democratic Youth and the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, to teach CCP ideology and keep the revolutionary movement alive.

Forty years later, a social movement emerged that did not have CCP support. While socialism had produced some improvement in economic conditions, the people were frustrated. Human rights violations were common.

In April 1989, Hu Yaobang, a former general secretary of the CCP, died. Hu had become a hero to Chinese students by refusing to stop demonstrations in 1987. To honor him, students began peaceful memorial demonstrations in several cities.

These demonstrations grew into a prodemocracy movement. Protesters demanded the removal of China's Communist leaders. The government ordered the demonstrations to stop, but they continued. On May 20, the government declared martial law. Troops marched to Tiananmen Square in Beijing, where protesters had erected a statue called the Goddess of Democracy. It resembled the Statue of Liberty. On June 3 and 4, the People's Liberation Army killed hundreds of demonstrators, injured another 10,000, and arrested hundreds of students and workers. The reform movement was squashed.

In 2000, when the CCP celebrated the Republic of China's 50th anniversary, there were no major incidents. While China has acknowledged to the international community that human rights are important and has taken steps to improve its record, "serious problems remain," says the U.S. State Department.

4. **Decline** The end of the social movement can take place in several ways:

- * The movement accomplishes its goals, and members see no point in continuing their efforts. This was the case with the Women's Suffrage Movement.
- * The movement fails, and members leave.
- * The leadership is "co-opted" by those in power. When this happens, the movement loses its ability to enact change and can no longer be effective.
- * Factions develop within the organization, dividing the attention of members and weakening the overall effort.
- * Members lose interest in the movement's goals.

- * The movement becomes so accepted by society that the group becomes a social institution. This happened to the NAACP with the success of the Civil Rights Movement.

Look to the Future

Some sociologists believe that issues in U.S. society will continue to be addressed through numerous single-issue social movements. But the technology of movements will certainly change. Recent years have seen the Internet being used to plan "spontaneous" demonstrations at events.

How effective are social movements in forcing social change? In the next chapter, we'll explore that topic.

Chapter 15 Wrap-up

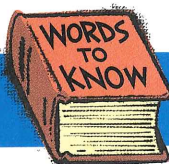
COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Collective behavior consists of the relatively short-lived actions, emotions, and thoughts that occur spontaneously in a group of people. This behavior may be restrained, such as the behavior of crowds at lectures or the theater, or it may be the unruly and sometimes illegal violence that erupts in a mob.

In mass behavior, people in various locations are moved by some stimulus to behave in the same way. Fads, fashions, rumors, and urban myths are examples of mass behavior.

Many groups try to influence popular (or public) opinion. Propaganda and the mass media are often used for this purpose.

Social movements are an organized form of collective behavior. Social movements are characterized by having an ideology, goals and tactics, and organizational leadership. Two theories have been proposed to explain social movements, the relative deprivation theory and the resource mobilization theory.



activist—person who engages in assertive, sometimes militant, action as a means of supporting or opposing an issue. *p. 291*

civil disobedience—form of protest in which laws are deliberately and publicly disobeyed out of a belief that they are unjust. *p. 291*

collective behavior—actions, thoughts, and emotions that occur almost simultaneously within a collectivity. *p. 284*

collectivity—unstructured collection of individuals with no assigned roles or organized authority who temporarily engage in activity together. *p. 284*

deindividuation—individual's loss of a sense of individuality. It is characterized by loss of self-awareness, sense of reduced responsibility, and decreased concern about how others view one's behavior. *p. 287*

propaganda—information designed to manipulate public opinion and to influence people to change their beliefs in a particular way. *p. 289*

social movement—collective effort to bring about social or political change. *p. 290*