Part V

What Do Movement Participants Think and Feel?

Introduction

To most readers, the point of view of movement participants would seem to be the most important issue in understanding social movements. What do they want to accomplish? What do they demand? What kinds of emotions propel or draw them into the street? What goes through their minds? Are these people like the rest of us, or somehow different? In this part we try to get inside the heads—but also the hearts—of protestors, to see the world from their point of view. In the end, we all care about something deeply enough that, under the right circumstances, we could be drawn into a movement that addresses it.

One hundred years of scholarship thought this was an important goal, but unfortunately the same scholars assumed they knew what was inside protestors' heads without doing much empirical research to see if they were right. To them protest was such an unusual activity that protestors had to be either immature, mistaken, or irrational. For some of these early theorists, people could be driven mad by crowds, swept up into the motion of the crowd and led to do things they otherwise would not (LeBon 1895). Others assumed that people must be alienated from their societies in order to engage in such deviant behavior. Still others thought there must be some kind of strange psychological dynamics at work: people joined because they felt personally inadequate and wished to become part of something larger than themselves (Hoffer 1951); or young people used protest as a way to rebel against their fathers in an Oedipal dynamic (Smelser 1968). These theories were so dismissive of social movements that a new generation of scholars in the 1960s, who were sympathetic to many of the movements they saw around them, and sometimes participated in, virtually abandoned the effort to look inside the heads of protestors.

The mobilization and then process theorists simply assumed that protestors had rational goals, primarily the pursuit of their own economic, political, and legal interests. By assuming this, they did not have to investigate protestors' points of view any more than their predecessors had. To them, the idea that protestors had strong emotions seemed to admit that protestors were not rational; the idea that protestors needed to do some cultural work to "construct" their grievances and goals seemed to make these less important, more arbitrary. Besides, if a group's interests were structurally determined—by their economic class position, say, or by racism in the laws—it was easy to concentrate on the mobilization of resources and other opportunities for action that most interested these theorists. They assumed the willingness to protest was already there, and only needed an opportunity for expression.

But even at the height of these structural approaches, not all social scientists were willing to give up on the minds of protestors. Kristin Luker was one of these. We have excerpted a chapter of her book, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, which masterfully lays out the crux of the abortion debate: those on each side see the world

in very different ways. They make conflicting assumptions about what motherhood means, about what a woman's life should be like, about what can be left to chance and what is a valid area for human planning and control. They live in different worlds, and are shocked and outraged when they find out about the other side's world. Luker describes the worldviews of the two sides in largely cognitive terms, but she is also trying to explain the emotional reactions—surprise, outrage, vindictiveness—that result. She does not explicitly theorize about emotions, perhaps afraid that this might make the protestors seem less rational. Her main contribution is to show that both sides are acting reasonably given their visions of the world. (Because of space limitations, we have only reproduced her analysis of the anti-abortion activists.)

In many debates, people on the two sides simply live in different social and cultural worlds, with contrasting experiences, moral values, and beliefs. Neither side is altogether irrational, although each may make claims or hold beliefs that can be tested—and potentially disproved—through scientific evidence. In the years since Luker wrote her book, there has been an explosion of research on the mental worlds of protestors. Frame alignment deals with different ways of viewing the world, different ways of cutting it up in order to put some aspects in the frame and leave others out of it. Collective identity is another tool for dividing up the world in a way that may spur action.

This cultural "constructionist" approach does not suggest that protestors are irrational. But protestors sometimes make mistakes, such as constructing visions of the world that hurt their own cause. These are strategic errors, from which they usually try to learn, rather than a form of irrationality. Jane Mansbridge examines one such malfunction in her chapter on the women's movement. Efforts to pass the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment) depended on volunteers who were there because of their strong beliefs and feelings. As a result they tended to divide the world into "us" (inside the movement) and "them" (everyone else). This is a common temptation for social movements (it was even stronger, Mansbridge says, among the ERA's opponents), but it encourages extreme claims out of touch with the broader public and legislators. It is a common cause of radicalization in movements. This is a dilemma for most movements: whether to rely on exclusivity, purity, and homogeneity in order to reach in, or whether to "water down" the message in order to reach out. Both strategies have their advantages and disadvantages.

In the next chapter, Ryan and Gamson also show how cultural framings are intertwined with strategic activities. Good frames don't do anything by themselves, but must be combined with organizations and networks and other sorts of mobilizing activities. Frames are not especially useful for reaching anonymous audiences through the mass media; they are better as a means for carrying on conversations with allies and components of your own coalition. They allow different groups to talk to one another about how to proceed. Of course, the news media matter a lot, but they contain individuals and organizations with whom activists must carry on a dialogue.

Almost all scholars now admit that cultural meanings are an important dimension of social movements, that we need to look at how protestors view the world, and the kind of rhetoric they use to present this vision to others. There are still two large gaps in the literature, however. For all the process theorists' emphasis on the state and other players in a movement's environment, they have done little work to understand these other people's points of view. State bureaucrats, politicians, and police officers also have distinctive worldviews, and also try to persuade others that their arguments and perspectives are valid. Few scholars have approached these others from a cultural point of

view (for one exception, see Jasper 1990). This has been left to neighboring fields of research such as that on moral panics (e.g. Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994).

Another big gap has been the emotions of protestors. Almost all the cultural work on social movements has been about their cognitive beliefs and moral principles, but an equally important part of culture consists of their feelings about the world, themselves, and each other. A variety of emotions are apparent in Luker's and Mansbridge's selections, as thoughts and feelings are not easily separated.

James Jasper has tried to outline the importance of emotions, especially arguing that many standard explanatory concepts in social-movement research have emotions hidden inside them, unexamined and untheorized. It is often these emotions that are doing the causal work for the concepts, as when "opportunities" provide, most of all, emotional inspiration for protestors. Some emotions, he argues, have to do with people's long-term feelings toward each other, while others are more immediate reactions to events and information. Social movements work hard to shape both of these. Jasper argues that emotions are a part of culture, just like beliefs and moral values. (For more on emotions, see Jasper 1997; and Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001.)

Nothing expresses the ideas of a movement or arouses the emotions of participants better than music. Songs have been crucial to the U.S. civil rights and labor movements, for instance, as well as the causes of the 1960s. So we provide a list of important songs that represent several different movements of the twentieth century. The list comes from *Contexts* magazine.

As Mansbridge shows, the views and feelings that maintain the enthusiasm of members may not advance a movement's cause with the external world: these are two very different audiences for a social movement's words and actions. In part VII we will examine the strategic uses of words and images—in other words, how movements employ words and images to attain their goals. There may be tradeoffs between their external effectiveness and their internal solidarity, enthusiasm, and ability to recruit new members.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the core elements of the anti-abortion worldview?
2. What is the tradeoff between reaching in and reaching out, as Mansbridge describes it?
3. How are frames and other ideas put into action? How do organizers actually use them in pursuing their ends?
4. What are reactive and affective emotions? What is the relationship between them?
5. Can you think of other examples of the role of emotions in social movements?
6. What favorite songs of yours express protest against some condition?