

Social Movements Of Subcultures

Neil Stammers has recently argued that social movements are not only central to the process of social change, but are key to understanding the origin and development of human rights; that social movements, in challenging extant power, generate human rights demands. Thus theorists such as Cohen viewed subcultures and social movements as points along a continuum, not as totally separate concepts; individuals with 'similar problems of adjustment' interact, creating new cultural forms by developing new group standards or shared frame of reference. If subcultures and social movements were originally conceived as being different extremes of the same phenomena, why are they currently thought of as being analytically distinct? There have been two main approaches to the study of social movements; the 'psychological' and the 'sociological', or the how and why of social movement participation. Placing social movements as a reflection of social relations - and making no distinction between 'old' and 'new', 'industrial' or 'post-industrial', action theorists ask what barriers restrict individual involvement.

The sociological, or structural, approach casts social movements as a reaction against the structure of society, and may be further divided into two camps; first, 'orthodox marxist', where social movements are seen as ultimately class based. Next, 'new social movement theory' (NSM), associated with the work of Alberto Melucci; here 'new' forms of political protest are explained by reference to the process of identity construction. The NSM critique of class-based explanations extended the realm of the political, focusing attention on the cultural or expressive dimensions of political participation. This widening and deepening of the concept of 'politics' focussed on the micro-physics of power.

Social movements are the point at which politics and culture collide and researchers associated with the approaches outlined above bring with them not only differing assumptions and questions, but are likely to conclude varied explanations, based on their tendency to prioritise either the agency of the actor, or the limitations imposed by structural constraints.