

Take Home Exam #1

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Throughout history, homosexuals have been stigmatized, chastised, discriminated against, killed and labeled sick, deviant and evil. Although some societies accept or tolerate homosexuality, American society in general, has been and still is guilty of all the above. On July 28, 1969, however, homosexuals in America began to fight back against these injustices. What occurred on that night in 1969 in New York City was the now famous Stonewall Riot. As an instance of collective behavior, the Stonewall riot helped trigger off the gay liberation movement in America.

In this paper, I shall first define collective behavior, describe the riot, and then apply these definitions to the riot. Then I shall cover the gay liberation movement and describe it according to the definitions and typologies of social movements covered in class and in the readings.

What constitutes collective behavior differs according to which theoretical perspective one looks at. Generally, collective behavior has been defined within the context of three general theoretical perspectives. The first is called contagion theory. In this theory, the crowd takes on some kind of group mind, or mental unity, and a process of contagion occurs in which individuality and social norms are lost or forgotten. The second theoretical perspective of collective behavior is called convergence theory. This theory assumes that people with particular predispositions somehow all get together and converge to create a crowd. The third perspective is called emergent norm theory. In this theory, crowd behavior emerges into some orderly action in which patterns of behavior recur over and over.

Turning to more concrete aspects of collective behavior which incorporate parts of the three theories, I shall cite Berk and Smelser and apply their criteria for collective behavior to the Stonewall incident. Berk defines collective behavior as a) face to face interaction of large numbers of people, b) in which the action is spontaneous, c) transitory, and d) in which there are a variety of motives for participation. Smelser cites five determinants which must be present for collective behavior to occur. First, there must be structural conduciveness. This refers to the limits to situations generated by the social structure that provides a range of possibilities within which a hostile outburst can occur. Secondly, there must be some structural strain, which describes conditions of strain particularly in the norms and values in the pre-crowd situation. The third determinant of collective behavior is what Smelser calls a "generalized hostile belief". This belief progresses through a series of stages. These are a) ambiguity, b) anxiety, c) the assignment of responsibility, d) punishment by participants to the agents in the situation, and e) a feeling of power. The fourth determinant is mobilization, or how the participants take power. Finally, according to Smelser, there has to be an element of social control, which can be either negative or positive, depending on the situation.

Turning to the Stonewall riot, it is only fitting to describe what occurred and all the other important factors related to the incident. The Stonewall Bar, in the late sixties, was a popular homosexual hang-out. Located in the heart of New York City's predominantly gay area called Greenwich Village, it was a private club where drag queens and under age homosexuals

sexuals danced and partied. It had no liquor license, but liquor was often available on the premises. Because of this, the New York police often raided the place. (Some people contended that the operation at the Stonewall had been known all along, but that the police were in a deal with the mob to keep the place going. However, whenever the police saw fit to raise the cost of the bribe, they would raid the place). During a routine raid on Friday, July 27, 1969, as arrests were being made, a crowd gathered outside the bar. As the paddywagon drove up, the crowd began to get feisty, booing and catcalling the cops. After the paddywagon drove away, the crowd exploded. Suddenly, pennies, nickels, dimes, beer cans, beer bottles, rocks and garbage cans were being hurled at the cops. The cops quickly retreated into the bar, but the crowd began to break windows and tear down the only door to the place. Several policemen were hit with bottles. Somehow a man was captured and beat up inside the bar by the cops. This further angered the crowd, which in turn became more violent. After forty minutes of violence, the police pulled out their guns, but as soon as they did, the building was set on fire. Everyone then fled, and thus ended the riot.

In review of Berk's and Smelser's criteria, the riot at the Stonewall seems to fit the definitions of collective behavior. Here I shall match Berk's criteria and then Smelser's criteria with what occurred at the riot.

Berk's criteria

A) face to face interaction of large numbers of people- In the Stonewall incident, the people in the street, including gays, transients, and others were pitted against the cops.

B) Spontaneous action- The riot was not planned. It was a spontaneous reaction to the police taking away several drag queens and the employees of the bar.

C) Transitory- The riot lasted only less than an hour.

D) A variety of motives- The participants included gays, street people and others. Therefore, it seems only logical that their motives weren't all the same.

Smelser's criteria

A) Structural conducivess- First of all, it was Friday night. It would seem that people were out for some action and partying. The mood was loose. Also the streets were crowded and there weren't many police on hand after the paddywagon had driven off. Finally, by retreating into the bar, the police had set up a battle zone, ^{those on} the inside versus ^{those on} the outside.

B) Structural strain- First of all, the gays resented that the police were invading their turf. Clearly, there existed a hostile attitude by the gays toward the cops and vice versa. Gay bars were recently being raided more and more because of a change in the local precinct personnel. The new personnel had vowed to get rid of the homosexuals in the area, and also to crack down on liquor law violations.

C) Generalized hostile belief

1) Ambiguity- Some people in the street at first wanted to overturn the paddywagon, but it left too fast. Clearly the atmosphere was tense. When a lesbian who had been arrested, put up a fight against the cops, the people in the street became more anxious.

2) Anxiety- As the woman was taken away, people started throw-

ing objects at the cops, and the cops retreated in order to retaliate and to wait for more police to arrive.

3) The assignment of responsibility- The crowd became even angrier as a man was taken inside the bar and beaten because he was accused of hitting a cop with a bottle. Clearly, the crowd felt that the cops were to blame for the trouble because they were raiding and invading the "gay ghetto".

4) Punishment by participants to the agents in the situation.- Clearly, the crowd wanted to get back at the cops. Because the cops were inside the bar, the crowd wanted to get in, in order to fight back.

5) A feeling of power- The crowd had the police trapped, because there was only one exit to the bar. Also, reinforcements had not yet arrived. Therefore, they began to tear down the door and break the windows in order to get inside.

D) Mobilization- In a sense, the police set themselves up by retreating inside. More than likely, few of them knew that there was only one way to get in or out of the bar. (The building, according to one source, should have been condemned long before the riot occurred). However many people in the crowd knew they had the cops trapped. Thus, they all began to attempt to get in.

E) Social control- As the building was set on fire, the reinforcements began to arrive. By then, however, the crowd had dispersed because the place caught on fire, and also because more police came on the scene.

It is evident then, that the Stonewall riot fits both Berk's and Smelser's criteria. Although I have given a very sketchy account of the riot, it has been studied and classified as an example of collective behavior.

Many people contend that the riot at the Stonewall triggered off the gay liberation movement. This can be easily disputed. However, for the sake of not having to delve into the history of homosexuality in America, I shall take 1969 as a starting point for the contemporary movement. First, however, I shall go over the concept "social movement", and apply the definitions and criteria to gay liberation.

As with collective behavior, there are several definitions of social movements. For the sake of saving space, I shall cite only three. First, according to Aberle, a social movement is an organized effort by a group of human beings to effect change in the face of resistance by other human beings. Second, according to Ash, a social movement is a set of attitudes and self conscious actions on the part of a group of people directed toward change in society, and carried on outside legitimated channels, or which uses these channels in innovative ways. Finally, according to Wilson, a social movement is a conscious collective organizational attempt to bring about or resist large scale change in the social order by non-institutional means.

The gay liberation movement fits into all three definitions quite easily. Although it is a large scale social movement, it is not one organized effort, but many efforts by many organizations and many people. In citing the different aspects of gay liberation, I shall define what it is and also fit these aspects into the common elements of the three definitions given by the theorists mentioned.

First of all, gay liberation has several goals, most of which constitute some kind of demand for change.

These are:

- 1) an end to all laws that discriminate against gays because of their sexuality. (sodomy laws)
- 2) an end to police harrasment
- 3) an end to disrimination in housing and employment.
- 4) an end to the psychological ideologies that view homosexuals as sick or maladjusted. (Although the American Psychiatric Association has taken homosexuality off its list of mental disorders, many psychiatrists and psychologists contend that homosexuality is a curable disease.)
- 5) an end to the stereotypes that view gay men as feminine and lesbian women as butch dykes. The media, in particular is guilty of these negative portrayals of gay people.

This list could go on and on because homosexuality is so rampantly misunderstood and gays so rampantly discriminated against in today's America. On a broader level, gay liberation calls for personal liberation, in the sense that gays should come out of their closets and live their lives as they see fit. Homosexuality needs to be accepted as a valid alternative lifestyle to the stereotypic heterosexual way of life in America. As one author put it, "the essential quality of gay liberation lies in its assertion of gayness, its refusal to feel shame or guilt at being homosexual.

In terms of organizational efforts, there are many within the gay community in America. On a national level, there are the Gay Activist Alliance, Radicalesbians, the Mattachine Society, and the National Gay Task Force, to name but a few. As one gets into the state and local levels the number of organizations increas-

es greatly. Most of these organizations call for political and legislative change. Some organizations send lobbyists to Washington, and some operate on the state legislative level. Leaders emerge within the movement, but they are not really that effective or powerful because they represent only certain blocs within the movement. In terms of tactics of mobilization, gays use a variety of methods. These include marches, boycotts, pickets, and sometimes riots. (Those in New York and more recently those in San Francisco come to mind.) Opposition to gay liberation has always existed in America, but with the advent of the Reagan administration, it has increased dramatically. Currently, there is a bill in Congress, called the Family Protection Act, which if passed, would virtually strip gays of all the hard fought rights achieved so far by them.

The gay liberation movement in America today is as strong as ever, yet it cannot be pinpointed, because it exists on many levels. Turning to the different typologies covered in class and in the assigned readings, I shall demonstrate the complexity of the gay liberation movement.

Turner and Killian, in their text, Collective Behavior, describe a typology which classifies social movements into three different categories. The first category is what they call value oriented movements- those in which the principal support for the movement is derived from a conviction of the worth of the program for change. The program represents and legitimates some desired future state of affairs, and it is the prospect of the achievement of this state that provides the main impetus for commitment. The movement, then is one of principle. The se-

cond category constitutes what are termed power oriented movements- those which have as their primary orientation the acquisition of power, status, or recognition for their members. Turner and Killian's last category comprises what are called participation oriented movements. These are centered around the provision of membership gratification, mainly through self expression. They further dividethis category into three sub-categories:1) passive reform reform movements, 2) personal status movements, and3) limited personal movements.

Attempting to fit gay liberation into only one of the three of Turner and Killian's categories would be unfair and misleading. In the context of the first category, gay liberation fits in terms of its focus on stressing the value and legitimacy of hmomsexuality as a valid, viable, alternative lifestyle. One of the aims of the gay liberation movement is to re-educate people about sexuality, to destroy the myths about homosexuality, and to stress that "gay is good", not something that is evil, deplorable, or unnatural. In this sense, gay liberation focuses on values. In terms of power orientation, the movement sees a need for a place in the American power structure in order to change existing discriminatory laws against gays. Gay people don't want the power just to have it; they want it to balance the inequities and the injustices currently aimed at them by changing the law. In terms of Turner and Killian's last category, participation oriented movements, gay liberation also fits. The movement attempts to get gay people to come out to their friends, families, neighbors, and employers, in order that they all see that gay people are everywhere and that gay people are oth-

erwise normal people leading normal lives. Gay people are urged to participate, to stand up and be counted, and to be proud of what they are. Without a focus on gratification for the participants, gay liberation would not exist.

Turning to Smelser's typology, he distinguishes value oriented movements from norm oriented movements. Norm oriented movements seek to change only the norms of a society, while value oriented movements seek to change the value structure itself. On the surface, it would seem that gay liberation is a norm oriented movement in that it seeks to change the laws that discriminate against gays. However, some activists argue that the American value structure regarding sex and sexual mores needs to be totally changed. Americans seem to have really wierd, screwed up ideas as to what is natural, what is right, what is dirty, and what is lawful regarding sexual behavior. What is needed, say many activists, is re-education regarding sex, which would in turn lead to a change in values about sex and sexuality. This view is not held only by gays. Many feminists argue for the same value reconstruction regarding female sexuality and sex roles in general.

Aberle's typology distinguishes between different types of change and different amounts of change. His first category describes what are called transformational movements. These types aim at a total change in the total social structure. (in other words, on a supra-individual level). The anticipated change is cataclysmic, imminent, violent, and all embracing. The second category encompasses reformative movements, which aim at a partial change in supra-individual systems. In seeking to reform that which is seen as basically good, they stop short of a to-

tal rejection of the present social order. Aberle's third category, redemptive movements, aims at total change in individuals. This type of movement interprets social problems and their causes in purely individual kinds of terms. Aberle's last type of movements are known as alterative movements, those which aim at partial change in individuals. The belief is that particular characterological defects, or socially induced practices are responsible for degradation and impoverishment, and must be rectified by reform in part by the individual.

Again, it is difficult to categorize the gay liberation movement into any one type. Clearly, it is a reform movement in that it seeks a partial change in the law. However, it also seeks change in the individual, by which I mean it seeks to change the individuals conception of homosexuality. This change in conception could very well be redemptive. For example, if a suicidal homosexual were taught to see that homosexuality is not bad or evil, it may totally redeem him/her. On a less drastic level, teaching people to accept that part of themselves that is homosexual could very well be alterative. In the transformative sense, only certain factions of the gay liberation movement would call for total change in the total social structure. I don't think that radical Marxist gays constitute a majority in the movement, but they are there.

In conclusion, the gay liberation movement in America today is a multi-goal, multi-dimensionally oriented movement. In my opinion, the gay liberation movement is so hard to pin down because there are so many different changes needed. Because of this, different groups within the movement focus on certain is-

sues only. Also, it is quite evident that America is "backward" in terms of its acceptance of homosexuality, but what is more important to consider is that gays themselves are so diverse. They are in a sense invisible, in that they are not easily picked out in a crowd, and they come from all walks of life. Gays hold in common with other gays their sexual preferences, and really not much more. For that reason, the gay liberation movement is so big, so diverse, and so all-encompassing in terms of categorization.

Your analysis is coherent -
you do a good job of putting
some diverse material together.

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