



Louise Gubb/The Image Works © **Cultural diffusion inevitably results when people from one group or society come into contact with another.**

moral order of the Yir Yoront was undermined because their myths explained the origins of all important things in the world, but did not account for the arrival of steel axes. This, as Sharp observed, caused conditions fertile for the introduction of a new religion, a happy circumstance for the missionaries.

Diffusion occurs wherever and whenever different cultures come into contact with one another, though contact is not essential for traits to diffuse from one culture to another. For example, Native American groups below the Arctic smoked tobacco long before the arrival of the Europeans. However, in Alaska the Inuit (Eskimos) knew nothing of its pleasures. European settlers brought tobacco back to Europe, where it immediately became popular and diffused eastward across Central Europe and Eurasia, up into Siberia, and eventually across the Bering Strait to the Inuit.

Today, of course, when so many of the world's peoples increasingly are in contact with one another through all forms of mass communication, cultural traits spread easily from one society to another. The direction of diffusion, however, rarely is random or balanced among societies. In general, traits diffuse from more powerful to weaker peoples, from the more technologically advanced to the less so. A social change that is imposed by might or conquest on weaker people

is called **forced acculturation**.

Crowd Behavior and Social Change

Some social change involves crowds. A **crowd** is a temporary concentration of people who focus on some thing or event, but who also are attuned to one another's behavior. There is a magnetic quality to a crowd: It attracts passersby, who often interrupt whatever they are doing to join. Think, for example, of the crowds that gather "out of nowhere" at fires or accidents. Crowds also fascinate social scientists, because crowds always have within them the potential for unpredictable behavior and group action that erupts quickly and often seems to lack structure or direction—either from leaders or from institutionalized norms of behavior.

Attributes of Crowds

In his study *Crowds and Power* (1978), Elias Canetti attributed to crowds the following traits:

1. *Crowds are self-generating.* Crowds have no natural boundaries. When boundaries are imposed artificially—for example, by police barricades intended to isolate a street demonstration—there is an ever-present

danger that the crowd

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will erupt and spill over the boundaries, thereby creating chaos. So, in effect, crowds always contain threats of chaos, serious disorder, and uncontrollable force.

2. *Crowds are characterized by equality.* Social distinctions lose their importance within crowds. Indeed, Canetti believes that people join crowds specifically to achieve the condition of equality with one another, a condition that carries with it a charged and exciting atmosphere.
3. *Crowds love density.* The circles of private space that usually surround each person in the normal course of events shrink to nothing in crowds. People pack together shoulder to shoulder, front to back, touching one another in ways normally reserved for intimates. Everyone included within the crowd must relinquish a bit of his or her personal identity to experience the crowd's fervor. With a "we're all in this together" attitude, the crowd discourages isolated factions and detached onlookers.
4. *Crowds need direction.* Many crowds are in motion. They may move physically as they do in a marching demonstration or emotionally as at a rock concert. The direction of movement is set by the crowd's goals, which become so important to crowd members that individual and social differences lessen or disappear. This constant need for direction contains the seeds of danger. Having achieved or abandoned one goal, the crowd may easily seize on another, perhaps destructive, one. The direction that a crowd will take depends on the type of crowd involved.

Types of Crowds

In his essay on collective behavior, Herbert Blumer (1946) classified crowds into four types: acting, expressive, conventional, and casual.

Acting Crowd An **acting crowd** is a group of people whose passions and tempers have been aroused by some focal event, who come to share a purpose, and who feed off one another's arousal, often erupting into spontaneous acts of violence.

In 2000, Fat Tuesday celebrations in Seattle illustrate typical acting crowd behavior:

Hundreds of Fat Tuesday revelers taunted and threw beer bottles at police in riot gear early Wednesday as Mardi Gras festivities in Pioneer Square turned ugly. . . . Under the glare of a helicopter spotlight, police gradually

pushed crowds away from the epicenter of the disorder where as many as 500 had gathered to celebrate

the final day of Mardi Gras. . . . The disturbance began around midnight when about 300 to 500 people gathered at First Avenue and Yesler Street. During this scene, a woman standing on a newspaper vending box fell and hit her head. Officers who tried to come to her aid were pelted with rocks and bottles. (Associated Press, 2000)

Acting crowds can become violent and destructive, as 400 million worldwide television viewers discovered in the summer of 1985. Sixty thousand soccer fans had assembled in Brussels to watch the European Cup Finals between Italy and Great Britain. Verbal taunts quickly turned into rocks and bottles being thrown. Suddenly, British fans stormed the fence and surged toward the Italian fans, trampling hundreds of helpless spectators. Before the horror could be stopped, 38 people were dead and another 400 injured (Lacayo, 1985).

A **threatened crowd** is an *acting crowd that is in a state of alarm, believing that some kind of danger is present*. Such a crowd is in a state of panic, as when a crowded nightclub catches fire and every body tries to get out, jamming exits and trampling one another in their rush to escape. A threatened crowd created havoc when a busboy accidentally ignited an artificial palm at the Coconut Grove Night Club in Boston on November 28, 1942, spreading fire instantaneously throughout the club. The fire lasted only 20 minutes, but 488 people died. Most died needlessly when panic gripped the crowd. Fire investigators found that the club's main entrance—a revolving door—was jammed by hundreds of terrified patrons. With their escape route blocked, those people died of burns and smoke inhalation only feet away from possible safety (Veltfort & Lee, 1943).

In February of 2003 a nightspot known as the Station was consumed by fire minutes after the band Great White lit off an unlicensed pyrotechnic display at the beginning of its show. The pyrotechnics ignited highly flammable polyurethane packing foam that had been placed around the stage walls and ceiling as sound insulation. The fire engulfed the building within minutes and produced thick, toxic smoke that quickly overcame patrons trying to flee. Of the 350 people in the building at the time, 99 were killed and 184 were injured (Rowland, 2003). In this as well as other threatened crowds, there is a lack of communication regarding escape routes.

Expressive Crowd An **expressive crowd** is drawn together by the promise of personal gratification through active participation in

show. In a very real sense, they want to be part of the show. Many dress in clothing calculated to draw attention to themselves, take drugs during the performance, body surf or slam dance in packed masses up against the stage, and delight in giving problems to security personnel.

Conventional Crowd A **conventional crowd** is a gathering in which people's behavior conforms to some well-established set of cultural norms, and gratification results from a passive appreciation of an event. Such crowds include the audiences attending lectures, the theater, and classical music concerts, where everybody is expected to follow traditional norms of etiquette.

Casual Crowd A casual crowd is the inevitable outgrowth of modern society, in which large numbers of people live, work, and travel closely together. A **casual crowd** is any collection of people who happen, in the course of their private activities, to be in one place at the same time and focus attention on a common object or event. On Fifth Avenue in New York City at noon, many casual crowds gather to watch an accident, a purse snatcher, the construction of a new building, or a theatrical performer. A casual crowd has the potential of becoming an acting crowd or an expressive crowd; the nature of a crowd can change if events change.

The Changeable Nature of Crowds

Although the typology presented is useful for distinguishing kinds of crowds, it is important to recognize that any crowd can shift from one type to another. For example, if a sidewalk musician starts playing a violin on Fifth Avenue, part of the aggregate walking by will quickly consolidate into a casual crowd of onlookers. Or an expressive crowd at a rock concert will become a threatened crowd if a fire breaks out.

Changing times may also affect the nature of crowds. For example, until the 1970s, British soccer matches generally attracted conventional crowds who occasionally turned into expressive crowds chanting team songs. Since the late 1970s, however, British soccer fans have become active crowds: Fighting in the stands is epidemic, charging onto the field to assault players and officials has become common, and rioting has taken place. In 2000, Danish police and British soccer fans clashed in Copenhagen prior to a match between the Turkish and British soccer teams. Police used tear gas, dogs, and batons on

activities and events. For example, many rock concert audiences are not content simply to listen to the music and watch the

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about 100 British soccer fans.

Minutes before that clash, British fans fought with Turkish fans near Copenhagen's town square. As a precaution against further rioting, authorities erected iron fencing outside the 39,000-seat stadium

to separate British and Turkish fans. Another fence was put up inside around the playing field (CNN News, 2000).

Because they are relatively concentrated in place and time, crowds present rich materials for sociological study (even if much of the data must be tracked down after the dust has settled). However, when collective behavior is widely dispersed among large numbers of people whose connection with one another is minimal or even elusive, the sociologist must then deal with phenomena that are extremely difficult to study, including fads and fashions, rumors, public opinion, panics, and mass hysteria.

Dispersed Collective Behavior

In this age of mass media, with television, the Internet, and other systems of communication spreading information instantaneously throughout the entire population, collective behavior shared by large numbers of people who have no direct knowledge of one another has become commonplace. Sociologists use the term **mass** to describe a collection of people who, although physically dispersed, participate in some event either physically or with a common concern or interest.

A nationwide television audience watching a presidential address or a Super Bowl game is a mass. So are those individuals who rush out to buy the latest best-selling CD and the fashion-conscious whose hemlines, lapel widths, and clothes always reflect the "in" look. In other words, dispersed forms of collective behavior seem to be universal. (See "Technology and Society: Dispersed Collective Behavior on the Internet.")

Fads and Fashions

Fads and fashion are transitory social changes (Vago, 1980), patterns of behavior that are widely dispersed among a mass but that do not last long enough to become fixed or institutionalized. Yet it would be foolish to dismiss fads and fashions as unimportant just because they fade relatively

quickly. In modern society, fortunes are won and lost trying to predict fashions and fads—in clothing, in entertainment preferences, in eating habits, or choices of investments.

Probably the easiest way to distinguish between fads and fashions is to look at their typical patterns of diffusion through society. Fads

are social changes with a very short life span marked by a rapid spread and an abrupt drop in popularity. This was the fate of the Hula Hoop in the 1950s and the dance known as the "twist" in the 1960s. The roller-skating fad that emerged in 1979 rolled off into the pages of history.



More than half of all Americans use the Internet to send e-mail or to gather information. With the growth of the Internet, collective behavior shared by large numbers of people who have no direct knowledge of one another has become commonplace. Sociologists call this dispersed collective behavior. The early users of the Internet were often well-educated white males. Today this stereotype no longer holds and women now make up half of all Internet users. Hispanic and African Americans are now using the Internet at accelerating rates also. All this has produced a revolutionary change in the way people interact with each other and learn about the world (Horrigan, 2002). (See Table 18-1.)

Source: John B. Horrigan, "New Internet Users: What They Do Online, What They Don't, and Implications for the 'Net's Future," Pew Internet and American Life Project.

recent fads include the introduction of Furby, Teletubbies, Pokemon, and Dragonball Z.

Some fads may seem particularly absurd. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, when many Americans were having trouble putting food on the table, college students started engaging in the practice of swallowing goldfish. The fad was started by a Harvard freshman who swallowed a single, live fish as fellow students looked on in disgust. Three weeks later a student at Franklin and Marshall College swallowed three fish. The practice quickly escalated and new records were set daily, with 89 being swallowed in one sitting at Clark University. Eventually a pathologist at the U.S. Public Health Service cautioned that goldfish may contain tapeworms that

Table 18-1

Internet Activities

| Activity | Percent |
|-----------------------------|---------|
| Use an online search engine | 93% |
| Information | 75 |
| Buy a product or service | 75 |
| Fun | 65 |
| Reservation for travel | 61 |
| Message | 50 |
| Sports scores | 46 |
| Download music files | 44 |
| Chat room | 37 |
| Visit website | 22 |
| Take a class online | 13 |
| Credit | 7 |
| Gamble | 5 |

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking Surveys (March 2000—present).

sometime in the 1980s, as did the Rubik's cube, and Coleco, the company that made Cabbage Patch dolls, which went bankrupt in 1988. The Tickle Me Elmo stuffed toys were quickly forgotten after the 1996 Christmas season. Whereas you or your parents may remember such past fads as yo-yos and Mr. Potato Head,

could cause intestinal problems and anemia. The fad disappeared shortly thereafter (Levin, 1993). A *fad* that is especially short-lived may be called a **craze**. The Mohawk hairstyle among both young males and females was a relatively short-lived craze, as was streaking, or running naked down a street or through a public gathering, in 1974. One streaker even ran on stage during the Academy Awards presentation.

At the peak of their popularity, fads and crazes

may become competitive activities. For example, when streaking was a craze, individual streaking was followed by group streaking, streaking on horse back, and parachuting naked from a plane.

On other occasions, what appears to be a fad actually signals a trend and a change in social values. In 1922, newspapers reported the shocking news that smoking was common among female college students. The University of Wisconsin's dean of women said the smoking fad, most popular among women of the "idle, blasé, disappointed class," was

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Fashions relate to standards of dress and manners during a particular time. Here we see how the dress of royalty has changed over time. At the left is a court dress worn between 1765 and 1775. At the right is a dinner dress worn by Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1991.

already passing. She pointed out that an intelligent woman "cannot see herself rocking a baby or making a pie with a cigarette in her mouth, flicking ashes in the baby's face or dropping them in the pie crust" (Schwarz, 1997).

Fashions relate to *the standards of dress or manners in a given society at a certain time*. They spread more slowly and last longer than fads. In his study of fashions in European clothing from the eighteenth to the present century, Alfred A. Kroeber (1963) showed that though minor decorative features come and go rapidly (that is, are faddish), basic silhouettes move through surprisingly predictable cycles that he correlates with degrees of social and political stability. In times of great stress, fashions change erratically; but in peaceful times, they seem to oscillate in cycles lasting about 100 years.

Georg Simmel (1957) believed that changes in fashion (such as dress or manners) are introduced or adopted by the upper classes, who seek in this way to keep themselves visibly distinct from the lower classes. Of course, those immediately below them observe these fashions and also adopt them in an attempt to identify themselves as upper class. This process repeats itself again and again, with the fashion slowly moving down the class ladder, rung by rung. When the upper classes see that their fashions

have become commonplace, they take up new ones, and the process starts all over again.

Blue jeans have shown that this pattern is no longer true today. Jeans started out as sturdy work pants worn by those engaged in physical labor. Young people then started to wear them for play and everyday activities. College students wore them to class. Eventually, fashion designers started to make fancier, higher-priced versions, known as designer jeans, worn by the middle and upper classes. In this way the introduction of blue jeans into the fashion scene represents movement in the opposite direction from what Simmel noted.

Of course, the power of the fashion business to shape consumer taste cannot be ignored. Fashion designers, manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers earn money only when people tire of their old clothes and purchase new ones. Thus, they promote certain colors and widen and narrow lapels to create new looks, which consumers purchase.

Indeed, the study of fads and fashions provides sociologists with recurrent social events through which to study the processes of change. Because they so often involve concrete and quantifiable objects, such as consumer goods, fads and fashions are much easier to study and count than are rumors, another common form of dispersed collective behavior.

IssuesRumors

A **rumor** is *information that is shared informally and spreads quickly through a mass or a crowd.* It arises in situations that, for whatever reasons, create ambiguity with regard to their truth or their meaning. Rumors may be true, false, or partially true, but characteristically they are difficult or impossible to verify.

Rumors are generally passed from one person to another through face-to-face contact, but they can be started through television, radio, and the Internet as well. However, when the rumor source is the mass media, the rumor still needs people-to-people contact to enable it to escalate to the point of causing wide spread concern (or even panic). Sociologists see rumors as one means through which collectivities try to bring definition and order to situations of uncertainty and confusion. In other words, rumors are "improvised news" (Shibutani, 1966).

Hard-to-believe rumors usually disappear first, but this is not always the case. For 103 years, Procter & Gamble, the maker of familiar household products such as Mr. Clean and Tide laundry detergent, used the symbol of the moon and 13 stars as a company logo on its products. Around 1979, a rumor began circulating that this symbol indicated a connection between the giant corporation and satanic religion. There was no evidence to substantiate this rumor, but unable to dispel it, the company finally decided to remove the logo from its products in 1985 (Koenig, 1985). In 1997 Procter & Gamble was still plagued by the rumor and filed the latest in a series of lawsuits, this time against Amway Corporation and some of its distributors for allegedly spreading rumors that Procter & Gamble is affiliated with the Church of Satan. Since the early 1980s, the company said it has filed 15 lawsuits to fight the rumors.

Public Opinion

The term *public* refers to a dispersed collectivity of individuals concerned with or engaged in a common problem, interest, focus, or activity. An opinion is a strongly held belief. Thus, **public opinion** refers to *the beliefs held by a dispersed collectivity of individuals about a common problem, interest, focus, or activity.* It is important to recognize that a public that forms around a common concern is not necessarily united in its opinions regarding this concern. For example, Americans concerned about abortion are sharply divided into pro and con camps.

Whenever a public forms, it is a potential source for, or opposition to, whatever its focus is. Hence, it is extremely important for politicians,

market analysts, public relations experts, and others who depend on public support to know the range of public opinion

on many different topics. Those individuals often are not willing to leave opinions to chance, however. They seek to mold or influence public opinion, usually through the mass media. Advertisements are attempts to mold public opinion, primarily in the area of consumption. They may create a need where there was none, as they did with fabric softeners, or they may try to convince consumers that one product is better than another when there is actually no difference. *Advertisements of a political nature, seeking to mobilize public support behind one specific party, candidate, or point of view* technically are called **propaganda** (but usually by only those people in disagreement). For example, radio broadcasts from the former Soviet Union were habitually called "propaganda blasts" by the American press, but similar Voice of America programs were called "news" or "informational broadcasts" by the same American press.

Opinion leaders are *socially acknowledged experts whom the public turns to for advice.* The more conflicting sources of information there are on an issue of public concern, the more powerful the position of opinion leaders becomes. The leaders weigh various news sources and then provide an interpretation in what has been called the two-step flow of communication. Those opinion leaders can have a great influence on collective behavior, including voting (Lazarsfeld et al., 1968), patterns of consumption, and the acceptance of new ideas and inventions. Typically, each social stratum has its own opinion leaders (Katz, 1957). Jesse Jackson, for example, is an opinion leader in the African American community. The mass media have turned news anchors into accepted opinion leaders for a broad portion of the American public. Rush Limbaugh has emerged as one of the more influential opinion leaders, as the fortunes of political candidates are determined by his loyal listeners.

When rumor and public opinion grip the public imagination so strongly that facts no longer seem to matter, terrifying forces may be unleashed. Mass hysteria may reign, and panic may set in.

Mass Hysteria and Panic

At a summer program in Florida, 150 children would gather every day in a dining hall where they were served prepackaged lunches. One girl said the sandwich tasted funny and that she felt sick. Other children soon said they felt sick also. The

lunch room aid told the rest of the children to stop eating because the food might be poisoned. Within the hour over 60 more children said they were sick. Ambulances rushed the children to three different hospitals. All tests revealed there was nothing wrong with the food and the children quickly recovered (Feldman

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Chung Sung-Jun/Getty Images

According to Herbert Blumer, a crowd is a collectivity of people more or less waiting for something to happen. Eventually something stirs them, and people react without the kind of caution and critical judgments they would normally use.

& Feldman, 1998). It appears the children were all victims of a case of mass hysteria (Feldman & Feldman, 1998).

Mass hysteria occurs when large numbers of people are overwhelmed with emotion and frenzied activity or become convinced that they have experienced something for which investigators can find no discernible evidence. A **panic** is an uncoordinated group flight from a perceived danger, as in the public reaction to Orson Welles's 1938 radio broadcast of H. G. Wells's *War of the Worlds*.

According to Irving Janis and his colleagues (1964), people generally do not panic unless four conditions are met. First, people must feel that they are trapped in a life-threatening situation. Second, they must perceive that the threat to their safety is so large that they can do little else but try to escape. Third, they must realize that their escape routes are limited or inaccessible. Fourth, there must be a break down in communication

between the front and rear of the crowd. Driven into a frenzy by fear, people at the rear of the crowd make desperate attempts to reach the exit doors, and their actions often completely close off the possibility of escape.

The perception of danger that causes a panic may come from rational as well as irrational sources. A

fire in a crowded theater, for example, can cause people to lose control and trample one another in their attempt to escape. This happened when fire broke out at the Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate, Kentucky, on May 28, 1977. When employees discovered an out-of-control fire, they warned the 2,500 patrons and tried to usher them out of the building. A panic resulted as people attempted to escape the overcrowded, smoke-filled building. People trampled each other trying to reach the exits, and 165 people died in the process.

Such extreme events are not very common, but they do occur often enough to present a challenge to social scientists, some of whom

believe there is a rational core behind what at first glance appears to be wholly irrational behavior (Rosen, 1968). For example, sociologist Kai T. Erikson (1966) looked for the rational core behind the wave of witchcraft trials and hangings that raged through the Massachusetts Bay Colony beginning in 1692. Erikson joins most other

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scholars in viewing this troublesome episode in American history as an instance of mass hysteria (Brown, 1954). He accounts for it as one of a series of symptoms, suggesting that the colony was in the grip of a serious identity crisis and needed to create real and present evil figures who stood for what the colony was

Leadership is an important ingredient in the emergence of a social movement.

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not—thus enabling the colony to define its identity in contrast and build a viable self-image.

Mass hysterias account for some of the more unpleasant episodes in history. Of all social phenomena, they are among the least understood—a serious gap in our knowledge of human behavior.



feel. Two major theories, relative deprivation theory and resource mobilization theory, attempt to explain how social movements emerge.

Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative deprivation is a term that was first used by Samuel A. Stouffer (1950). It refers to the situation in which deprivation or disadvantage is measured not by objective standards, but by comparison with the condition of others with whom one identifies or thinks of as a reference group.

Thus, **relative deprivation theory** assumes *social movements are the outgrowth of the feeling of relative deprivation among the large numbers of people who believe they lack certain things they are entitled to*—such as better living conditions, working conditions, political rights, or social dignity.

From the standpoint of relative deprivation theory, the actual degree of deprivation people suffer is not automatically related to whether people feel deprived and therefore join a social movement to correct the situation. Rather, deprivation is considered unjust when others with whom the people identify do not suffer the deprivation (Gurr, 1970).

Social Movements

A **social movement** is a form of collective behavior in which large numbers of people are organized or alerted to support and bring about, or to resist, social change. By their very nature, social movements are an expression of dissatisfaction with the way things are or with changes that are about to take place.

Participation in a social movement is, for most people, only informal and indirect. Usually, large numbers of sympathizers identify with and support the movement and its program without joining any formal organizations associated with the movement. For people to join a social movement, they must think that their own values, needs, goals, or beliefs are being stifled or challenged by the social structure or specific individuals. The people feel that this situation is undesirable and that something must be done to set things right. Some catalyst, however, is needed to mobilize the discontent that people

Karl Marx expressed this view when he noted,

A house may be large or small; as long as the surrounding houses are equally small it satisfies all social demands for a dwelling. But let a palace arise beside the little house, and it shrinks from a little house to a hut. . . .Our desires and pleasures spring from society; we measure them therefore, by society and not by the objects which serve for their satisfaction. Because they are of a social nature, they are of a relative na ture. (Marx, 1968)