**What Is Collective Behavior?**

Marx and McAdam are a good source on Collective Behavior (with lots of discussion, charts, etc., on what qualifies), but they don't provide a definition. The closest they come, after conceding that “[literally,] it includes any group behavior” (p.2), is to suggest that it “involves emergent group behavior in settings where cultural guidelines are nonspecific, inadequate, in dispute, or lacking altogether.” (p. 3). This could be taken as a definition of what Durkheim called “anomie” (normlessness).

Gamson (1975) is also helpful but not definitive. The best source for a definition is Smelser (1963), who is generally recognized as one if not the expert on collective behavior in the Sixties.

"[W]e define collective behavior as *mobilization on the basis of a belief which redefines social action* ... [it] involve[s] a belief in the existence of extraordinary forces [and] an assessment of extraordinary consequences which will follow if the collective attempt to reconstitute [social action](file:///W:\www\soc402\spring%202000\outlines\intro%20outline.doc) is successful ... (*generalized beliefs*). [Plus] collective behavior ... is not institutionalized. (Smelser 1963, p. 8).

Thus we might say that collective behavior is irrational (unrealistic, exaggerated, etc.) extra-institutional behavior.

We might also consider—for those of you who are more incline toward micro social constructionist approaches, Herbert Blumer, the man who coined the expression, “symbolic interactionism” and challenged the structural determinism of functional theory—especially Parsonian structural functional theory, which dominated sociology in the USA in the Fifties and Sixties. See syllabus for citation: Blumer and Shibutani (1970).

**What Is Collective Action?**

Tilly (1986) defines collective action as "people acting together on shared interests" (p. 381). Collective action is, at least, a claim made on behalf of an actor, in defense of a (purportedly) shared interest. Usually, this is political, in a broad or narrow sense of that term. Also, it is organized, at least in the limited sense that a category of persons (the constituency) have routine access to each other (and thus form a network).

**Where Do They Diverge?**

Rationality: collective behavior is irrational, expressive, unrealistic. Collective action is a rational effort to defend or promote a collective interest. Generally, collective behavior theories focus on disorganization and the breakdown of social control (from the perspective of authorities). Collective action theories focus on organization and opportunity/threat (from the perspective of challengers).

**Toward Convergence**

Marx and McAdam suggest that collective behavior and collective action may be elements in the emergent phenomena of panics, fads, disasters, and political protest. They suggest that social movement theory has moved too far in the direction of collective action theory and too far away from collective behavior theory.