

Social Movement, Spectacle, and Momentum

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Resistance is strategic. In this article I offer a social movement analysis of the 1991 public controversies and resolution of the jailing of the homeless by Fort Lauderdale Police. It demonstrates the role of the popular intellectual in generating the momentum that is essential for change. I argue that two important success elements are missing from the framing processes: the momentum of oppositional argument and goal attainment which should be a statement of repentance from establishment interlocutors who are being challenged to change the existing order. I argue that activists in social movements make mistakes by not building momentum toward a public outcry leading to an outcome which includes a statement of redemption from the antagonist.

Social movement activists can use interpretive frames that promote collective action and that define collective interests and identities, rights and claims. I refer to these specialists as "Popular Intellectuals". They should be viewed as individuals firmly embedded in social networks trying to influence the public during contentious episodes. My aim is to show that

resistance strategies can be taught through a model using a momentum archetype which is the best way to combine ideological work with political initiative.

Visualize Momentum as a Linear Strategy

The term momentum is often associated with the stock market or political campaigns. Revel's Bolero may come to mind when we hear the term because in this piece of music, we hear repetition build to crescendo. As a child, I was introduced to the concept of momentum through the children's book, *The Little Engine That Could*. In that tale, a long train must be pulled over a high mountain. Various larger engines are asked to pull the train but they refuse. The request is sent to a small engine, who agrees to try. The engine succeeds in pulling the train over the mountain while repeating its motto: "I-think-I-can". My mother read the story to me and like many other American children, I learned about optimism through my mom's repetition of the words: "I-think-I-can", "I-think-I-can", "I-think-I-can." As the little engine reached the top by drawing out bravery and then went on down the grade, congratulating itself by saying, "I thought I could, I thought I could," I learned momentum, how it feels and sounds in my mother's affirming voice.

In 1990, I became a member of the Young Democrats and learned how to build momentum in political campaigns. I learned from a successful campaign consultant named, Monte Belote. He explained the logic and phases of a campaign: Name Recognition, Persuasion, Attack, and the final "Get Out The Vote" or "GOTV" phase of a campaign. An obscure, little known, political candidate needs to follow these steps in sequential order to become prominent and get more votes than the opponent. I argue that social movement actors should visualize an ascending, linear path just like a political campaign.

In this article I am not comparing social movements to political campaigns although political organizing is an important part of social movements. In what follows, I offer analysis of the public controversy of the Fort Lauderdale Police jailing the homeless. This police resistance collective-action frame was produced in the process of contention and proved successful. This collective-action frame and the flow chart model promote understanding of the sequence of work steps that make up the process of the development of frames. It is a practical module available for activists across

the globe. Scholars will gain new disciplinary understandings of Popular Intellectuals and resistance studies using the momentum archetype to secure specifiable objectives conceptualized as movement outcomes.

Popular Intellectuals must select which frame is receptive to the public in order to create the ascendant momentum leading to a public outcry. After an outcry, the interlocutors must call for reparative treatment recommendations which include a statement of repentance. The charismatic Popular Intellectual ought to create a sense of crisis in the public and bring the movement to a watershed event that leads to the consequences of moral repair.

The Fort Lauderdale Case

In 1991, the Ft. Lauderdale Police arrested the homeless in high numbers under their “Zero Tolerance for Vagrancy Policy.” The Police Chief said that the media had a misconception about the police attitude about the homeless; the homeless are not a police problem because they are a societal problem. He said the police help the homeless, and the police never targeted the homeless for arrest. A social movement began to stop the jailing of the homeless. Before I discuss the case, it is important to discuss the theories behind the momentum model.

Current Theoretical Background

Social movement scholars, according to Robert Benford and David Snow look at “framing” as:

Meaning work--the struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings. [1] From this perspective, social movements are not viewed merely as carriers of extant ideas and meanings that grow automatically out of structural arrangements, unanticipated events, or existing ideologies. [2] Rather, movement actors are viewed as signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers.” (613)

In language, meaning depends on the context, so this principle can be seen as a tool for changing minds by controlling context.

In their article, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," they explain the verb "framing" as an evolving process:

which entails agency in the sense that what is evolving is the work of social movement organizations or movement activists. And it is contentious in the sense that it involves the generation of interpretive frames that not only differ from existing ones but that may also challenge them. The resultant products of this framing activity are referred to as 'collective action frames.' (614)

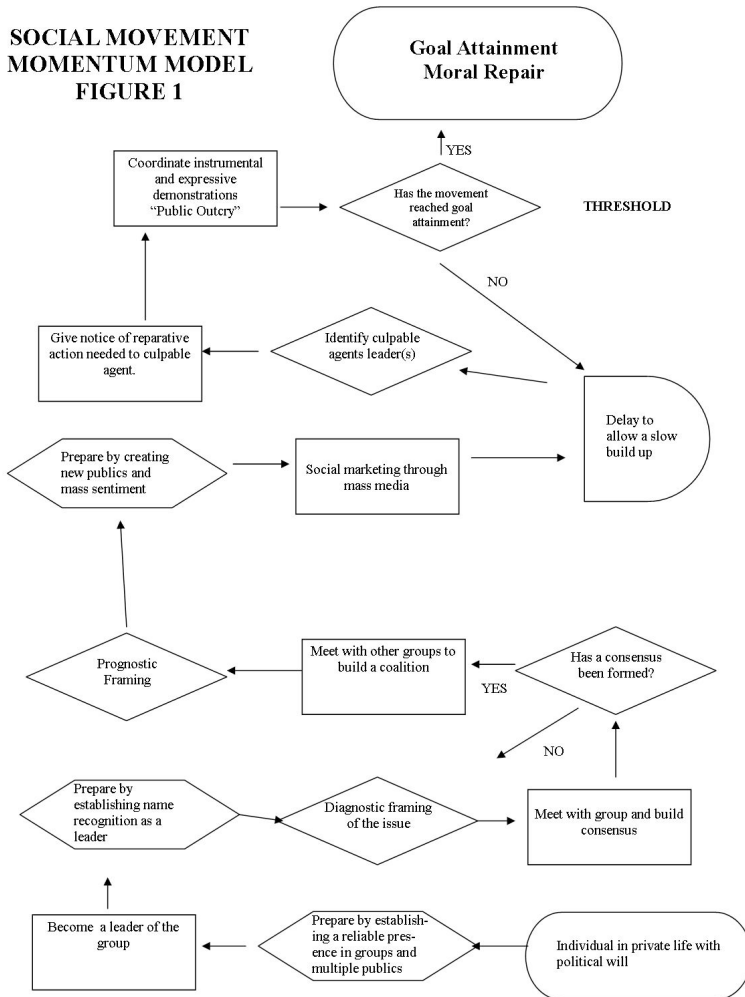
Using a Flowchart Strategy

One might object here and disagree with my choice of constructing a linear flowchart. "A flowchart is a diagram that uses graphic symbols to depict the nature and flow of the steps in a process" (Tribus 2). The purpose of developing a linear flowchart is to show that resistance strategies, which include core framing tasks, can be taught using a standardized process. Admittedly, there are a number of things that can go wrong when you try to standardize action steps and identify only the major action steps in a chronological order. From my research, I have not discovered anyone who has created a flow chart to show social movement steps as a process of core framing tasks leading to goal attainment. I have created this Social Movement Model (Figure 1) to show a symbolic representation of my concept.

Flow Chart Meanings

There is a systematic way to see how controversy moves through the public and between interlocutors. Implicit in our questioning of the intent of Popular Intellectuals should be the notion of how the Popular Intellectual must select which frame is receptive to the public in order to create the ascendant momentum leading to a public outcry. As a starting point for my analysis, I will provide an explanation of how I perceive the Popular Intellectual as a leader who can deploy sequential actions to create momentum. Referring to the flow chart in this article:

**SOCIAL MOVEMENT
MOMENTUM MODEL
FIGURE 1**



The oval shaped symbol with the words, “Individual in private life with political will,” is the starting point in the process. This depicts a trigger action in the process. This case study begins in 1991. I started counting the number of homeless people that were booked into the county jail for city municipal ordinance violations. This was easy for me to do since I was in

charge of the Public Defender Intake Division. At the same time, I joined the Broward County Young Democrats and began sharing my interest in helping the homeless with others in the group. I asked the President of the club if I could organize a "Homeless Project" within the organization. Several club members began meeting with me regularly and one member offered to create a documentary on our project.

Preparation Step The next step on the flow chart indicates a set up operation for the individual with political will. I had to prepare by establishing a reliable presence in groups and multiple publics.

Process Step This action step tells the individual to become a leader of the group. As Chairman of the Young Democrats' Homeless Project, I joined a loosely organized group of 70 Homeless advocates and providers who met monthly as the "Homeless Coalition." I shared my knowledge of a high number of homeless arrests with the Broward Young Democrats, the Homeless Coalition, and the Police Reform Coalition.

Preparation Step I had to prepare by establishing name recognition as a leader. The Broward Young Democrats Homeless Project continued and so did the making of a documentary called, "The Flame of Hope Auction," which featured members of the club and I organizing dissent on the Ft. Lauderdale jailing issue, hosting a sleep out to raise awareness about the homeless, and planning a charity auction to raise money for the Broward Homeless Coalition. The narrator and producer of the documentary filmed me going to club meetings discussing the project. My name recognition increased as my committee gained prominence through all of these activities. Since I was the leader, I was invited to numerous events. From this point on, I will refer to myself as the Popular Intellectual for this particular series of social movement events.

Decision Step This indicates a question or branch in the process. Please look at the flow chart to see where this step falls into the sequence. Diagnostic framing of the issue happens at this stage. It is important to emphasize the theoretical background of this activity. Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow describe "Core Framing Tasks." They refer to these core framing tasks as "diagnostic framing" (problem identification and attributions), "prognostic framing," and "motivational framing." I will only discuss diagnostic and prognostic framing. The first task for the Popular

Intellectual framing the argument is to identify the source(s) of causality, blame, and/or culpable agents. But as Benford and Snow point out, “consensus regarding the source of the problem does not follow automatically from agreement regarding the nature of the problem. Controversies regarding whom or what to blame frequently erupt between the various social movement organizations comprising a social movement as well as within movement organizations” (Benford 616). This was a significant obstacle for the movement organization because religious and charitable organizations are reluctant to challenge the police.

In May of 1991, I was able to convince an editor of the Miami Herald to write a story about the Ft. Lauderdale Police homeless arrests because I felt that the police’s wrongdoing has put the standards or their authority in question.

A front page story appeared in the paper, “Police Vagrancy tolerance is ‘zero,’” which investigated the Ft. Lauderdale Police policy for arresting municipal ordinance violators and tied the policy to the opening of a new downtown arts theater. The article said, “In a campaign police call “zero tolerance,” officers regularly arrest homeless people sitting on park benches, fishing scraps from trash cans and munching sandwiches outside convenience stores, records, show” (Miami Herald, 1991). The police arrests that the reporter referred to in the article were from my research that I had conducted on every “at large” address arrest for almost 5 months. There were more than 300 arrests of homeless in the City of Ft. Lauderdale in May 1991. I saw this article and the editorial page that chastised the police saying, “Zero Tolerance is Wrong,” as my first deployment of framing the homeless as victims being unfairly persecuted by the police.

Process and Decision Steps: I had to identify the culpable agent’s leader. I decided it was the Chief of Police. Now that I knew how the Police Chief was going to frame the issue, I was prepared to initiate core framing tasks and use diagnostic framing or problem identification and attributions to identify the source(s) of causality, blame, and/or culpable agents. But as Benford and Snow point out, “consensus regarding the source of the problem does not follow automatically from agreement regarding the nature of the problem. The Homeless Coalition was not very keen on attacking the Police Chief. Controversies regarding whom or what to blame erupt between the various Social Movement Organizations. So instead of trying to build consensus from each person on the Coalition, I went out and met with

homeless people and the documentary crew went with me. I brought one of them to a press conference I organized.

I met with a group at a press conference forum of invited guests from the Young Democrats, American Civil Liberties Union, the National Organization of Women, and Union Leaders. I invited the Chief of the Ft. Lauderdale Police to the press conference and meeting held at the United Way. I considered this a coordinated instrumental protest action that directly confronted the decision-making official.

The Police Chief said that the media has a misconception about the police attitude about the homeless. He said, "The homeless are not a police problem because they are a societal problem, and the police help the homeless and the police never targeted the homeless for arrest." The Chief of Police tried to deflect the problem from being a police problem to a societal problem. He also asked, "Is it the business owner's rights or the homeless individual's rights that are important?" He was contradicted when I was able to show the data of the number of homeless arrests.

One guest that I invited to "sandbag", which is a political term used to surprise a guest into contradicting themselves, was a homeless elderly woman who had been mistreated by the police. She chastised the Chief after he spoke. Since framing shifts context in order to change the moral valence (Fiore 4), I needed to reorient the audience by changing the frame that the Police Chief used as the "police helping the homeless" to the "Police persecuting the homeless." Framing is competitive between an antagonist and protagonist and I knew that I needed to influence how the problem was understood by presenting a person with first hand knowledge of the police abuse. I presumed that my audience that attended the meeting did not have personal experiences with homelessness and only conceptualized what living on the streets feels like when law enforcement officers encounters them. Through the elderly woman's testimony of being victimized by Ft. Lauderdale police officers, the press conference became more of a spectacle for the reporters that were present.

My identification of the Police Chief as the culpable agent's leader is important to establish. This can be seen on the flow chart as a decision. Notice was given to the Chief at the press conference. The second core framing task that Benford and Snow identify is known as "prognostic

framing.” Here is where the mistake is made by activists. Whenever the social movement leaders devise a proposed solution to the problem, a plan of attack, and the strategies for carrying out the plan; they often fail to include a call for reparative treatment recommendations which include a statement of repentance. Using Walker’s theory of moral repair, I argue that prognostic and diagnostic framing must include core framing responsibilities with goals that injustice to the victim does not go unaddressed.

The Popular Intellectual ought to identify the wrongdoer to the movement and urge this culpable agent to address the harm, offense, or anguish caused to those who suffer. If the culpable agent fails to make amends after being asked to by the Popular Intellectual, then the public outcry phase should begin.

At this point I developed the prognostic framing that we need to decriminalize the homeless using the slogan, “Homelessness is not a Crime” and proposed a solution to the problem, a plan of attack, and the strategies for carrying out the plan. I wanted the Chief to cease arresting homeless charged with minor life sustaining offenses. The Chief maintained his reality that his officers were not targeting the homeless. I wanted the Chief to be involved with the Homeless Coalition’s reparative treatment recommendations which consisted of housing and treatment and not jail.

Process (Refer to the top of the flow chart)

Since the Police Chief was claiming his Department policy was not targeting the homeless and no apology came from him, I had to coordinate an instrumental and expressive demonstration. I organized a spectacle to show a public outcry of 120 homeless people and their advocates in front of the Ft. Lauderdale Police Headquarters. I considered this an expressive demonstration or a protest that indirectly expresses dissatisfaction to decision-making officials. The protest was featured on the major network English and Spanish television news and in two of the largest daily newspapers in the Ft. Lauderdale metropolitan area. Protestors shouted, “Don’t make us do the time, Homelessness is not a crime.”

Terminator: Moral Repair as a Strategy

At the end of the flow chart, I have placed goal attainment as the end of the process. Movement outcomes should be evaluated in terms of goal

attainment for individuals and groups. Margaret Urban Walker in her book, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations After Wrongdoing* says it best, “Moral repair is the process of moving from the situation of loss and damage to a situation where some degree of stability in moral relations is regained” (6). She says moral repair is a communal responsibility which incorporates communities having three ongoing tasks to reassert norms:

First, communities are responsible for the reiteration of the standards that have been contravened and reassertion of their authority, at least if the wrongdoing has put the standards or their authority in question. Second, communities are responsible for the legitimization and enforcement of the individual wrongdoer’s proper acceptance of responsibility and consequent obligations to submit to or perform reparative action, at least if the wrongdoer is identified, available, and subject in some degree to the community’s control. Third, communities are responsible for seeing that injustice to the victim does not go unaddressed, or, more precisely, that the victim does not go unaddressed, but receives acknowledgement that the treatment by the wrongdoer was unacceptable to the community, and assurance that this is a matter of record and due importance to the community. (30, 31)

I articulate these elements of moral repair as a goal of social movements and Popular Intellectuals both theoretically and through reflection on my participation in the Ft. Lauderdale, Florida case.

Framing the Homeless Issue using the Momentum Model

The Ft. Lauderdale case was part of a larger social movement for homeless rights because of the group actions that focused on carrying out, resisting or undoing a social change. A key insight to my approach is the significance of the public outcry which relied on large-scale communications in order to *matter*. The theories behind this model are based on social theory as a technique of illumination. Sharing my experience and calling me a Popular Intellectual may be considered by some a dubious distinction. However, in

order to consider then satisfy the conditions and possible flaws of the model I propose, I had to share my lived experience as it applies to the model.

The momentum became what they call in the news business, “a story with legs” since I frequently appeared on talk radio, spoke to news reporters, held meetings with organizations, and convinced the homeless themselves to stand up for themselves. The publicity caught the attention of one of the largest law firms in the state and an attorney met with city leaders and me and threatened a class action suit. The social movement action came to a crescendo when the Miami Herald wrote a story a day or two after the demonstration, “Lauderdale Police Chief: We didn’t target homeless.” In the article, the Police Chief agreed to have a representative from the police join the Homeless Coalition to help solve the homeless’ problems.

In the end, the Fort Lauderdale Police, City Manager, and Mayor strengthened their moral relationship with the homeless and their advocates by agreeing publicly to join the Homeless Coalition. The Chief made an important reparative statement that the police never *meant* to target the homeless for arrest. An ordinance was created by the City of Ft. Lauderdale establishing a Civilian Review Board as a standing committee made up of civilians to review police actions. The city opened a tent in front of City Hall to house the homeless until a permanent shelter was opened. This tent remained open for almost a year. Today, there is a new Police Chief and City Manager and the City of Ft. Lauderdale has a special unit that is responsible for diverting the homeless who are committing life-sustaining minor crimes into a homeless shelter that was built when the tent was shut down. Unfortunately, the number of homeless arrests for violating municipal ordinances is climbing once again.

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