
POLITICAL GENERATIONS, MICRO-COHORTS, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS*

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In this paper I propose a generational model of continuity and change in social movements. Building on political generation and cohort replacement theories, I offer three propositions about generational processes in social movements: (1) The collective identity of an activist cohort remains consistent over time, contributing to movement continuity; (2) cohorts construct different collective identities based on the external contexts and internal conditions of the movement at the time they enter; (3) cohort replacement contributes to change in social movements. These three generational processes interact with organizational factors and political opportunity structures to shape movement continuity and change. I illustrate these propositions by drawing on an in-depth case study of the women's movement from 1969 to 1992 in Columbus, Ohio, and I suggest key questions about generational processes in other cases.

Social movements can endure over decades and even centuries, cycling through higher and lower levels of mobilization, yet simultaneously they change character over time (Isserman 1987; McAdam 1988; Meyer 1993; Morris 1984; Rupp and Taylor 1987; Tarrow 1989, 1994; Tilly 1995; Whittier 1995). A Zen koan reminds us that we never step in the same river twice.¹ The task of scholars of social movements is to explain how long-lived challenges, like the river, both persist and are continually made anew.

Explanations of change and continuity in social movements fall into two general categories. First, *political process approaches* seek to explain both broad cycles of movement emergence, growth, and decline, and

the tactical shifts that exploit political openings. They do so by emphasizing external forces such as state structure, vulnerability of political alliances to manipulation by challengers, support by elites, availability of both indigenous and external resources, and the tactical repertoires of movement actors (Gamson and Meyer 1996; McAdam 1982; Meyer 1993; Tarrow 1989, 1994; Tilly 1978, 1995). Second, *organizational approaches* focus on explaining continuity of social movements. Building on resource mobilization theory and population ecology, they emphasize the characteristics of organizational structure, ideology, and culture that enable movements to mobilize resources (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Morris 1984), preserve legitimacy in hostile or changing environments (Edwards and Marullo 1995; Minkoff 1993), and sustain members' commitment through abeyance periods (Isserman 1987; Taylor 1989; Weigand 1994).

In this paper I analyze change and continuity in a social movement, and propose a third approach—a *generational approach* that draws on theory about political generations and cohort replacement. This approach adds the consideration of movements' internal dynamics of recruitment and collective identity to the factors emphasized by political process and organizational theories. I ar-

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¹ Thanks to David S. Meyer for suggesting the koan.

gue that social movements change in part through the entry of recruits. Shifts in political opportunity provide an impetus for change; generational processes of recruitment and cohort turnover are one micro-level mechanism by which such change occurs.

Social movements are composed of multiple cohorts of personnel at any given time, including both long-time participants and new recruits. Core participants remain committed and mobilized over long periods (Braungart and Braungart 1984; Fendrich and Lovoy 1988; Fendrich and Turner 1989; Jennings 1987; McAdam 1989; Whalen and Flacks 1989; Whittier 1995). The enduring commitment of long-time activists is an important internal process promoting movement *continuity*. In addition, recruits enter movements at varying rates. Although new entrants share basic assumptions and goals with their predecessors, often they also differ in important ways. Consequently recruitment and personnel turnover help produce *change* in social movements. These two personnel processes—the persistence of committed long-time participants and the entry of recruits—bridge a theoretical concern with the political processes that shape recruitment and cycles of protest with an analysis of interaction in micro-mobilization contexts and the construction of collective identity.

Case studies of various movements indicate intercohort differences and suggest that the entry of new cohorts contributes to movement transformation. For example, several analysts of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) argue that the large cohort that joined in the late 1960s differed ideologically and strategically from the organization's founders, shifting SDS's direction and paving the way for the takeover by the Progressive Labor Party (Gitlin 1987; Miller 1987; Ross 1983). Similarly, Ginsburg (1989) notes generational roots of women's participation in protests for or against abortion rights. Despite such compelling examples, however, little theoretical work has examined how political generations and cohort replacement affect social movements.

My analysis is based on data tracing organizations and participants in the radical wing of the American women's movement from 1969 to 1992 in Columbus, Ohio. During this period the women's movement in Columbus

(and nationally) emerged, grew to mass mobilization, declined, and finally began to resurge slightly. It contained multiple overlapping activist cohorts, each with a distinct collective identity. As incoming cohorts gained influence, they helped alter the movement's direction. Because the women's movement is one of the major enduring challenges over the past century in the United States, it provides a useful case study of social movement continuity and transformation.

I define social movements by building on the concepts of social movement community (Buechler 1990), collective identity (Melucci 1989; Taylor and Whittier 1992), and multi-organizational fields (Klandermans 1992). Social movements are clusters of organizations, overlapping networks, and individuals that share goals and are bound together by a collective identity and cultural events. This definition is particularly useful for understanding change in a decentralized, informally structured movement (Staggenborg 1989) such as radical feminism, in which the establishment of new groups is a relatively low-cost way to introduce new tactics, expand goals, or revise ideology. I will describe changes in both the definition of collective identity and the community and multiorganizational field of the women's movement in Columbus, Ohio.

DEFINING POLITICAL GENERATIONS

Mannheim's ([1928] 1952) essay on political generations informs most contemporary work on the subject. Mannheim contended that when an age group enters social life, its formative experiences produce a distinct and lasting perspective (Braungart and Braungart 1984; Mannheim [1928] 1952). In his view, each age group is divided into "generation units"; each unit encounters the same events and interprets them in the same way, thus forming an ideological unit or cultural movement. Mannheim asserted that generational perspectives and the units dividing a given generation endure over time, and that members of different political generations possess different perspectives (DeMartini 1992).

Mannheim's approach provides a starting point that I specify in three ways to analyze social movements. First, following Schneider (1988), I define *political generations* as be-

ing comprised of individuals (of varying ages) who join a social movement during a given wave of protest. This definition moves away from a developmental emphasis on adolescence as the sole formative period in individuals' lives; instead I regard immersion in protest as transformative at any age.

Second, cohort differences are not confined to the striking dissimilarities between activists who enter during separate cycles of protest. Differences also emerge among more finely graduated groups within political generations, which I call *micro-cohorts*. Micro-cohorts are clusters of participants who enter a social movement within a year or two of each other and are shaped by distinct transformative experiences that differ because of subtle shifts in the political context. I use the term micro-cohort to emphasize both the brevity of the period that defines the cohort and the interaction in micro-mobilization contexts (Gamson 1992; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988) that crystallizes members' shared perspective.² A *political generation* includes all micro-cohorts that participate in a given wave of protest. Although the micro-cohorts that make up a single political generation differ from each other, their perspectives overlap as a result of basic commonalities in their movement experiences.

Third, I conceptualize cohorts' shared perspective in terms of *collective identity*. When individuals are immersed in a social movement, they internalize a new self-definition as part of a collectivity that interprets the world politically (Cohen 1985; Melucci 1989; Pizzorno 1978). Collective identity consists of three related processes: delineation of group boundaries, construction of an oppositional consciousness or interpretative frameworks for understanding the world in a

political light, and politicization of everyday life (Taylor and Whittier 1992). Because collective identity is an attempt to make sense of external events, experiences, and the movement context, cohorts construct different identities as the external environment and the movement context change. Each activist cohort in the women's movement constructed distinct definitions of "feminist" (group boundaries), held common beliefs about gender politics (consciousness), and viewed certain actions as central to or inconsistent with being a feminist (politicization of everyday life). Differences in collective identity are observable in practices such as norms of self-presentation, interactional styles, and internal discourse in the movement (Lichterman 1995; Whittier 1995).

PROPOSITIONS

Generational Persistence

Fundamental to Mannheim's ([1928] 1952) argument was the contention that a generation unit's initial perspective endures throughout members' lives. Recent theorists believe that an activist cohort forms political commitments and networks that endure even as members age, social movement mobilization declines, and external conditions change (Braungart and Braungart 1984; Schneider 1988). Social movement continuity is affected by how strongly a cohort's collective identity persists throughout later life.

There are two main schools of thought about the degree to which commitment persists over the life cycle. According to both Mannheim and the cohort replacement approach, each generation unit or cohort possesses distinctive characteristics that are shaped by historically specific formative experiences and that endure throughout members' life cycle (Mannheim [1928] 1952; Ryder 1965). In contrast, life cycle, psychoanalytic, and period perspectives argue that all generations change over time. Supporters of the life cycle perspective suggest that these changes result from predictable experiences of moving through different life stages (e.g., education, career and family, retirement) (Braungart 1974; Erikson 1969; Kiecolt 1987); psychoanalysts hold that intergenerational struggles are rooted in the

² The Mannheimian view sees political generations as constructed socially rather than temporally. A new political generation forms, not after an arbitrary number of years, but in response to significant changes in the environment and corresponding changes in individuals' transformative experiences (Schuman and Scott 1988). Although date of entry into the movement is a continuous variable, cohort differentiation is more usefully conceptualized as categorical; the distinctions between cohorts emerge when the movement changes.

Oedipal dilemma (Feuer 1969); a period perspective suggests that all generations change simultaneously in response to historical and political shifts.

These theories have been tested extensively, most commonly as they apply to the social movements of the 1960s. To demonstrate a cohort effect, a generation unit must be shown to retain its perspective over time despite life cycle and period changes. Previous studies consistently demonstrated that veterans of the 1960s protests retain their political beliefs and participation decades later, although they have changed somewhat over time; some have moderated their political ideology or pursue social reform by different means. Follow-up studies show that New Left veterans (one generation unit) remain differentiated from their nonactivist age-mates (another generation unit) by more radical ideology, greater participation in both protest and conventional politics, lower income, lower marriage rates, and higher divorce rates (Braungart and Braungart 1984; Fendrich and Lovoy 1988; Fendrich and Turner 1989; Jennings 1987; McAdam 1988, 1989; Whalen and Flacks 1987; Whittier 1995). This work refutes a key contention of life cycle, psychoanalytic, and period approaches by showing that a generation unit's political commitments endure over the years.

Activist cohorts, then, are characterized by a lasting collective identity that is constructed through their initial interaction in social movements. Members remain politically committed and active over the years because they internalize a collective identity that links their sense of self to membership in a politically defined and active group. Years later, a cohort's collective identity remains marked by the conditions that prevailed both inside and outside the social movement when they were initially politicized.

Proposition 1: The collective identity of a given cohort of social movement participants remains consistent over time.

Cohort Differences

Theories of political generations posit differences between cohorts as well as the persistence of each cohort's own collective identity (DeMartini 1985, 1992). As participants

come of political age, the interpretive frameworks they develop for understanding the world and their place in it are shaped by the external environment and by interaction in micro-mobilization contexts (Gamson 1992; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988; Whittier 1995). When changes occur in the contexts that shape cohorts' collective identities, recruits who enter movements at different times have different politicizing experiences and hence construct different collective identities.

Empirical work on differences between cohorts is considerably scantier than that on enduring characteristics of one cohort. Schuman and Scott (1989) find that cohorts generally recall world events from their own youth as significant, and interpret the importance of events in terms of their cohort-specific experiences. Ginsburg's (1989) case study of abortion protest suggests that because women in their forties had witnessed the feminist movement, they were more likely than younger women to participate in pro-choice activism. Schneider (1988) also finds generational differences in activists' definitions of feminism. In the absence of longitudinal research, however, it is difficult to prove that differences between age groups observed at a single point in time result from cohort differences rather than life cycle effects (Glenn 1976; Rodgers et al. 1982). These cross-sectional analyses rely on corroborating evidence and theory to suggest that the differences they find are due to cohort effects rather than to the changes over the life cycle common to all cohorts.

Case studies that rely on contemporaneous documentary evidence approximate longitudinal analysis more closely by examining cohort differences as they emerged historically instead of depending solely on individuals' retrospective accounts. Ross (1983) and Gitlin (1987) use this approach to show how SDS changed as a new "Prairie Power" micro-cohort redirected the organization over long-time members' objections. Gusfield (1957) documents how an "Old Guard" held the Women's Christian Temperance Union of the 1930s and 1940s to the convictions and strategies of the Prohibition era, while a new cohort—which came of political age after Prohibition—advocated a different approach. Studies of long-lived movements also show

differences between the political generations that mobilized the first and the second waves of feminism (Rupp and Taylor 1987) and the Old and New Left (Isserman 1989; Weigand 1994).

Proposition 2: Cohorts construct different collective identities based on the changing external context and internal conditions of the movement at their time of entry. Differences in collective identity exist between the political generations that mobilize each wave of protest and among micro-cohorts within each political generation.

Cohort Replacement

If the characteristics of each cohort are enduring, and if different cohorts possess different collective identities, it follows that personnel turnover, or recruitment, leads to change in social movements (Ryder 1965). To conceptualize the impact of cohort differences on mobilization, I draw on organizational demographers who analyze the ongoing process of cohort replacement, in which initial cohorts depart or lose power in organizations and are replaced by incoming members. These scholars argue that institutions and organizations change as new cohorts gain influence (Alwin 1990; Firebaugh 1992; McNeil and Thompson 1971; Reed 1978; Ryder 1965).

The rate of personnel turnover is not constant across organizations. In the formal organizations most often studied, such as corporations or government bureaucracies, seniority and fixed promotion systems slow newcomers' entry into positions of authority (Gusfield 1957; Reed 1978). Slower turnover permits greater socialization of new members by experienced personnel, which leads to greater organizational continuity but also limits organizational change (McNeil and Thompson 1971; Reed 1978). Formally structured social movement organizations often have similar mechanisms that slow turnover. For example, Women's Christian Temperance Union officers had long tenure, and chapter presidents were drawn from the ranks of former vice presidents; these conditions ensured that newcomers could not acquire power quickly. Consequently the organization found it difficult to adapt to the

post-Prohibition era and attract new members (Gusfield 1957).

In contrast, decentralized and antihierarchical movements cannot effectively control the influence of rapid recruitment (Staggenborg 1989). Without formal organizational hierarchies, long-time members can lose power and new members can gain influence in established organizations, or can form new groups. Other variables producing more rapid turnover also encourage more rapid movement change; these include external factors promoting movement growth in general, and internal characteristics such as reliance on transitory participants, norms such as the "trashing" of leaders, which is common in radical feminism, and high demands on participants leading to burnout and exits from the movement.

Although cohort replacement is a potential source of organizational transformation, a social movement's structure influences the rate of cohort replacement and thus contributes to either change or continuity. Granted, cohort turnover is only one contributor to change in social movements. Other observers have documented the effects of changes in external environments (Kriesi et al. 1995; Tarrow 1994; Tilly 1995), and activists may change strategies even when cohorts do not turn over. The impact of cohort replacement on social movement transformation, however, has been largely overlooked.

Proposition 3: Cohort replacement contributes to change in social movements. During periods of high recruitment or personnel turnover, high levels of change are expected in the ongoing organizations, the multiorganizational field, and the collective identity of the movement.

METHODS

In this paper I draw on a case study of a cluster of radical feminist³ organizations and in-

³ The definition of radical feminism is widely disputed (Whittier 1995). For this study I defined organizations and individuals as "radical feminist" if they either used that identity label themselves, were direct predecessors or successors of organizations that termed themselves radical feminist (e.g., the "women's liberationist" groups

dividuals in Columbus, Ohio between 1969 and 1992. A medium-sized midwestern city, Columbus is the state capital and home to the Ohio State University (OSU). A nationally influential radical feminist movement emerged in Columbus around 1969 and grew steadily throughout the 1970s. As in other locations, the number of radical feminist organizations decreased in the 1980s, but the movement was kept alive by an informally organized feminist community, a handful of surviving organizations, and some new organizations.

Data consist of documents from major radical feminist organizations in Columbus,⁴ in-depth, semistructured interviews with a snowball sample of 34 women who entered the Columbus movement before 1979 and were identified in organizational documents as core activists, and interviews with a purposive sample of key recent informants, who provided information about 10 Columbus women's movement organizations of the 1990s, including all the organizations that had survived since the 1970s or had grown out of 1970s feminist groups.⁵ Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the long-time feminists and the recent informants.

The Columbus women's movement is not typical of all social movements. Throughout the 1970s the movement was at its peak, resources and external support were relatively plentiful, and overall recruitment and growth were high (Whittier 1995). During this time, internal movement characteristics promoted

of 1969 and 1970), or, in the 1990s, when such distinctions were less salient (Taylor and Whittier 1993; Reger 1996), worked in regular coalition with radical feminist groups. This task was simplified by the fact that Columbus, Ohio had no active socialist feminist movement; hence there was no need to draw that distinction. The distinction drawn by participants between "radical" and "liberal" feminism paralleled Freeman's (1975) distinction between "younger" and "older" branches of the women's movement.

⁴ Organizations included the Women's Action Collective and its member groups (e.g., Women Against Rape, Lesbian Peer Support, Single Mothers' Support Group, Committee Against Sexist Advertising, and others), the Fan the Flames Feminist Bookstore, the OSU Association of Women Students, and other university-affiliated groups.

⁵ Three recent informants were among the 34 long-time feminist respondents, and 7 additional

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents: Members of Radical Feminist Organizations in Columbus, Ohio

Characteristic	Long-Time Radical Feminists	Recent Informants
Mean age in 1991	45 ^a	—
<i>Race</i>		
White	33	7
Latina	1	0
African American	0	3
<i>Education</i>		
High school graduate	1	0
College graduate	13	2
Graduate degree	19	4
Currently in school	1	4
Number of cases	34	10

^a Ages ranged from 33 to 84.

rapid personnel turnover, creating new micro-cohorts every two to three years and permitting newcomers to rise quickly to influence. Radical feminist organizations valued antihierarchical structures; to prevent the formation of an elite, they specified that key leadership positions could not be held by one individual for more than one or two years. Even without formal rotation of positions, leaders regularly "burned out" because of high demands. Also, because of a norm of "trashing," or intense criticism of leaders, influential members commonly were attacked and forced from their positions, increasing turnover even further (Freeman 1975). In addition, a university-centered movement (Columbus is home to the Ohio State University) has inherent turnover because participants graduate or move on. Consequently, the experienced members did not retain sole con-

recent informants were interviewed (one interview was conducted by Kim Dill [1991]), for a total N of 41. Recent informants covered all organizations that had been founded in the 1970s or grew out of 1970s groups, as well as the major newer lesbian feminist organizations and the National Organization for Women, because Columbus NOW had developed considerable overlap with the radical feminist community by the 1990s (Reger 1996). Interviews lasted one to five hours, averaged 90 minutes, and were tape-recorded and transcribed in full.

trol of organizations, new perspectives held by recruits could gain influence quickly, and organizational change was relatively rapid. These characteristics, though atypical, make the Columbus women's movement an excellent case for my purposes because the processes and consequences of personnel turnover are readily visible. Although a study based on one case has limited generalizability, it does offer the empirical richness necessary for examining interactional and micro-level factors.

GENERATIONAL PERSISTENCE

The first proposition suggests that people who share transformative experiences construct a collective identity that persists throughout their lives. Participants in the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s had such an experience. The long-time feminist respondents, who joined the movement in the 1960s or 1970s, had been core activists immersed in protest, organizational maintenance, and a feminist community. This intense involvement made the collective identity "feminist" highly salient to participants' self-definitions. Participants in the women's movement during its peak years defined themselves as part of a group of like-minded women, constructed feminist interpretive frameworks that guided understandings of self and society, and opposed male dominance in everyday life, both symbolically and directly. The specific forms of feminist collective identity differed by micro-cohort (described below), but the transformative effects held for all micro-cohorts.

These transformations have endured along several dimensions. One central indicator of collective identity boundaries is the adoption of a self-label signaling affiliation with the group (Friedman and McAdam 1992). In the early 1990s, all respondents continued to identify with the term *feminist*, and two-thirds with *radical feminist*. This identification remained highly salient. As one respondent stated:

If someone asks me "Who are you?" I'm a radical feminist. I see radical feminism as my life's work. . . .

A second important dimension of collective identity is the existence of interpretive

frameworks that diagnose social and political problems, explain participants' experiences with regard to those problems, and suggest necessary social changes (Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994; Snow and Benford 1992; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Touraine 1985). The women's movement developed an elaborate analysis of women's oppression and male dominance, and politicized everyday life with the notion of the personal as political (Cassell 1977; Freeman 1975; Ryan 1992; Whittier 1995). Core participants retained their oppositional consciousness years later. Most respondents were emphatic that their feminist beliefs had endured:

It's still the core of everything for me. . . . Everything that happens in the world, I have a framework for understanding it, and that framework comes from the consciousness-raising. . . . If I didn't have a feminist framework to look at the world, I'd be, like most people, kind of adrift.

Such a transforming experience had lasting effects on respondents' understandings of politics and of their social position as women:

It's like once you realize that the world is round, you can never again believe that it's flat.

Respondents initially constructed their collective identity through interaction, and they did not maintain that identity in isolation. A network of feminist veterans helped maintain commitment (McAdam 1989; Sherkat and Blocker 1994) and is another indicator of generational persistence. Shared political commitments inclined movement veterans to continue to organize together. For example, a respondent who ran for political office in 1991 noted that another feminist veteran "was the first person to send a contribution to my campaign." In another example, a woman who founded a national feminist organization in the 1980s drew her board of directors from feminists who were active with her in the 1970s.

The network remained important because of the emotional and intellectual closeness that grows from sharing a common transformative experience (McAdam 1989). Many respondents reported that friendships they had formed in the women's movement of the 1970s remained central in the 1980s and 1990s. Such relationships sustained commit-

ment to feminist politics. One woman, who was in a committed relationship with a woman she had met in the 1970s Columbus movement, explained

Without each other I don't know how we'd be surviving the doldrums. One of the things we are for each other more than anything else is a reality check. In the 1980s, I certainly could have fallen off the edge if [she] hadn't been here.

The four respondents who were least integrated into this activist network also expressed the most conflict and the greatest difficulty in maintaining their feminism.

The endurance of a cohort's collective identity promotes social movement continuity because it leads to ongoing mobilization by long-time participants. Not surprisingly, the contours of former core feminists' employment and personal lives distinguish them from the comparable population of White women their age. Table 2 shows these contrasts: Compared to their age-mates, a higher percentage of respondents were employed, unmarried, or childless. In addition, respondents were disproportionately employed in managerial or professional occupations: 94 percent compared with 70 percent of employed White female college graduates (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993:409). Veterans of other 1960s movements also have lower rates of marriage and childbearing (Fendrich and Turner 1989; McAdam 1989; Sherkat and Blocker 1994). For feminist movement veterans, these life choices, along with their professional employment, were explicitly political attempts to avoid conventional women's roles. In addition, their everyday actions contested dominant views of women, both symbolically and directly (Taylor and Whittier 1992). In the words of a typical respondent,

I think [radical feminism] has permeated who and what I am. . . . [T]here is rarely anything that I would do, either personally or politically, that wouldn't somehow bear the trappings of what I learned at that time.

For example, norms of feminine appearance and demeanor were strongly criticized by feminists in the 1960s and 1970s, and respondents' presentation of self continued to reflect their collective identity. In interviews, few respondents displayed conventional

Table 2. Employment, Marital Status, and Childbearing Status of Long-Time Radical Feminists Compared with White Women in the Same Age Cohort

Characteristic	Respondents		Percent of White Women in Same Age Cohort
	N	Percent	
In the labor force	34	100.0	74.6 ^a
<i>Married</i>			
All respondents	7	20.6	93.4 ^b
Heterosexual/ bisexual respondents	7	53.8	—
<i>Mothers</i>			
All respondents	8	23.5	83.4 ^c
Heterosexual/ bisexual respondents	4	30.8	—

^a Age cohort of comparison group was born in 1936–1965 (Taeuber 1996:80).

^b Age cohort of comparison group was born in 1946–1950: 91.4 percent of those born in 1951–1955 and 95.1 percent of those born in 1941–1945 had ever been married (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993:102).

^c Age cohort of comparison group was born in 1946–1950 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992:71).

markers of femininity such as makeup, skirts, high-heeled shoes, or styled hair. One woman explained the lasting difference in her demeanor made by the women's movement:

It's really been an inherent part of the way I present myself on the job and to other people in general, and it gives me an edge that some people don't want to deal with. . . . I don't tolerate people behaving or speaking in a sexist or racist way around me.

Respondents also continued to effect change through their paid employment. Table 3 shows the occupations in which respondents worked toward feminist goals and outlines how they incorporated their work for social change into their work for pay. All of the respondents not in explicitly feminist occupations reported that they incorporated their feminism indirectly through conversations with coworkers and in attempts to influence company policies toward women.

Table 3. Occupations of Long-Time Radical Feminists: Members of Radical Feminist Organizations in Columbus, Ohio

Variable	N	Percent	Feminist Tasks within Job
<i>In Explicitly Feminist Job</i>			
No	11	32.3	
Yes	23	67.6	
Total	34	100.0	
<i>Occupation of Respondents in Explicitly Feminist Jobs</i>			
Academic	6	26.5	Hold joint appointments in Women's Studies; feminist research and teaching focus.
Lawyer	4	17.4	Handle cases dealing with feminist issues including civil rights, employment discrimination, pornography, violence against women, lesbian and gay rights, and abortion rights.
Therapist	4	17.4	Work with woman clients; use explicitly feminist approach.
State government administrator	3	13.0	Head programs serving women.
Administrator in social movement organization	3	13.0	Includes women's movement organizations and related movements.
Other	3	13.0	
Total	23	100.0	

Feminists' moves into mainstream occupations exemplifies the interaction of their enduring collective identity with external forces. Many participants were able to eke out a living in women's movement organizations during the 1970s, but as social service funding dried up, they had to find other sources of income. Movement veterans turned to their jobs for political involvement because few other options remained.

Respondents also continued to engage in collective action on behalf of women. Table 4 shows that these women retained high levels of participation in women's movement organizations, although lower than during the 1970s. Nearly two-thirds of respondents participated in demonstrations, women's studies conferences, and women's caucuses in their professional associations, and donated money, attended meetings, or served on boards of directors of feminist organizations, such as Planned Parenthood, the National Organization for Women (NOW), the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL), battered women's shelters, and other local women's movement groups. More than one-third of the respondents were no longer involved in women's movement orga-

nizations, but even they still considered themselves feminists, retained a feminist consciousness, participated in feminist networks, and pursued feminist social change in their daily lives and employment.

Although movement veterans remained feminists over the years, what it meant to them to be feminist changed somewhat. Respondents reported three general shifts. First, they became less devoted to the collectivist structure, including the nonhierarchical division of labor and consensus decision-making that characterized feminist organizations of the 1970s. Second, they became more aware of racial and class differences among women, and reflected critically on the racial and class homogeneity of the women's movement (Whittier 1995). Third, they broadened feminist goals to encompass other movements, including peace, environmentalism, lesbian and gay freedom, socialism, and human rights (Meyer and Whittier 1994). These were not drastic or discontinuous shifts in the collective identity: Almost every respondent, when asked whether her world view had changed over the past 20 years, first answered "No," and then mentioned these changes.

Table 4. Long-Time Radical Feminists' Participation in Women's Movement Organizations: Members of Radical Feminist Organizations in Columbus, Ohio, 1991

Variable	N	Percent
<i>Involved in Women's Movement Organizations</i>		
No	13	38.2
Yes	21	61.8
Total	34	100.0
<i>Type of Participation^a</i>		
Paid employee	6	28.6
Leader or core member (unpaid)	4	19.0
Participant, non-leader (unpaid)	11	52.4
Total	21	100.0

^a Types of participation are mutually exclusive; respondents are categorized as "paid employees" if that is their only significant form of participation.

Other follow-ups of movement veterans find similar shifts as activism moves into local communities and participants work in broader coalitions (McAdam 1988; Whalen and Flacks 1988). Such changes suggest that models of political generations that posit the persistence of a fixed perspective are too simplistic. Instead the Columbus cohort underwent changes that were consistent with members' initial transformative experiences and collective identity. Even as the cohort's collective identity endured, members operated in an altered context. In keeping with Proposition 1 above, movement veterans did *not* abandon their feminist commitments because of increasing opposition, declining feminist mobilization, and their own aging. Their collective identity continued to motivate ongoing participation in women's movement organizations and feminist practices in daily life. Yet their collective identity and types of movement participation did shift somewhat over time; these changes suggest that period and life cycle effects exist alongside a cohort effect.⁶

⁶ A considerable amount of quantitative work has sought (largely unsuccessfully) to disaggregate cohort, life-cycle, and period effects. Most authors suggest that researchers must rely on empirical or theoretical corroboration in the absence of effective statistical techniques for separating these effects (Glenn 1976; Rodgers et al. 1982). Although my findings agree with other qualita-

COHORT DIFFERENCES

Differences in collective identity are evident among cohorts that entered the Columbus women's movement at different times. Participants' transformative feminist experiences, and hence their collective identities, varied both subtly (by micro-cohort) and more sharply (by political generation). As the context of the women's movement changed rapidly throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, participants differed according to whether they entered during the movement's emergence, growth, peak, or decline. All micro-cohorts shared fundamental ideological and strategic commitments, but they constructed varying collective identities and distinguished themselves from those who joined at other times. Micro-cohort differences were an important internal dynamic during the movement's heyday in the 1970s.

Between 1969 and 1984, participants in the Columbus women's movement can be divided into four micro-cohorts: each encountered a different movement environment and constructed a distinct collective identity in response. Their distinguishing characteristics are outlined in Table 5. (For further details see Whittier 1995.) The delineation of micro-cohorts is specific to Columbus as different characteristics and time spans would mark micro-cohorts elsewhere.

Micro-cohort differences gave rise to conflict and change within the movement. For example, a respondent from Micro-Cohort 3 tried to become involved in the Women's Action Collective (WAC), but felt that new members had little influence in preexisting movement organizations:

Some of the older and established groups had very much their [own] idea of how they wanted to run things. . . . There was this vague invitation to provide input, but you never really got the impression that that input was going to be taken seriously or acted upon in any way.

In part this conflict resulted from long-time members' seniority rather than from cohort

follow-ups on activists that suggest a combination of cohort, aging, and period effects (McAdam 1988; Whalen and Flacks 1988), disentangling these effects is not possible in my data.

Table 5. Micro-Cohort Differences: Members of Radical Feminist Organizations in Columbus, Ohio

Variable	Micro-Cohort			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Entry	1969-1970	Late 1970-1972	1973-1977	1978-1979
Movement phase	Emergence	Growth	Heyday	Decline
Influence	Through 1971	Through 1978	Through 1978	Through 1984
Previous movement experience	Civil rights, New Left; often leaders.	Participants in New Left, but not leaders.	First politicized in women's movement.	First politicized in women's movement.
Self-label	Women's liberationist	Radical feminist	Radical feminist	Radical feminist
Distinguishing characteristics	Raised issues, established first independent feminist organizations. Remained linked to New Left.	Founded formally structured, lasting organizations. More separate from mixed-sex movement organizations. "Founding mothers" of movement organizations.	Optimism about "radical feminist revolution." Lesbianism central to collective identity. Immersed in thriving movement community.	Less engaged with external authorities; more focus on feminist community. Internal cleavages, loss of resources, opposition, and demise of organizations.
Key issues	Welfare rights, daycare, contraception, abortion, consciousness-raising.	Rape prevention, consciousness-raising, establishment of Women's Studies.	Rape prevention, lesbian issues, sexism in media, "women's community."	Lesbian issues, racism in women's movement, spirituality, conservative backlash.
Key organizations founded	Columbus-OSU Women's Liberation, Women's Yellowpages.	Women's Action Collective (WAC), Women's Community Development Fund, Women Against Rape, feminist bookstore, Lesbian Peer Support, Women's Co-op Garage.	<i>Womansong</i> newspaper, Single Mothers' Support Group, Central Ohio Lesbians, Women's Music Union.	Short-lived study groups within WAC.

differences. The new initiatives favored by this respondent, however, were specific to her cohort. After abandoning WAC, she went on to form a lesbian organization (rather than a group open to all women, like WAC) and to build coalitions with gay men's organizations, which were anathema to earlier activists.

Because of changing conceptions of feminism, micro-cohorts often took different points of view in internal disputes. In 1981, for example, members of the Women's Action Collective debated whether feminist spirituality was political. Many long-time ac-

tivists argued that it was not; newcomers accused them of failing to keep up with trends in feminism and of being old-fashioned by spelling the group's name with *women* instead of using one of the newer alternate spellings adopted to omit *men*:

Womyn's spirituality is a "hot" topic in the many, many womyn's journals nationwide and in many womyn's lives. The Women's (sic) [*sic* in original] Action Collective . . . seems, by our lack of forward progress, to be isolating ourself. . . . Unfortunately, WAC is becoming very mainstream feminist. (*Women's Action Collective Newsletter*, September/October 1982)

Participants' point of entry into the cycle of protest shaped their definition of feminism and the place of spirituality in that definition.

Despite micro-cohort differences, all participants in the 1960s–1970s wave of the women's movement shared certain attributes because they overlapped and thus influenced each other. As the movement declined in the early 1980s, a larger gap emerged between that political generation and a new political generation of incoming feminists in the late 1980s and early 1990s. McNeil and Thompson (1971) suggest that "generation gaps" emerge when there is a period during which a new cohort does not enter, which leaves a wider space between cohorts. In social movements, such "lulls" occur often during abeyance periods (Taylor 1989) and result in sharper collective identity differences between one cluster of micro-cohorts that makes up one political generation and a second cluster of micro-cohorts that constitutes a new political generation.

For the Columbus women's movement, the early to mid-1980s formed such a dividing line. Informants from all the surviving organizations reported that this was a difficult period, with shortages of members and resources. Many organizations folded, including the Women's Action Collective (1984), the umbrella organization that had been the heart of Columbus's radical feminist movement. Only small numbers of recruits entered women's movement organizations (interview with recent informant #5; *Women's Action Collective Newsletter*, November 1979). Consequently, a feminist "generation gap" emerged as the micro-cohorts active before the early 1980s coalesced into a political generation distinct from the micro-cohorts that entered after the lull. Earlier activists either left movement organizations or, if they remained, retained their earlier collective identities. Incoming recruits constructed a new collective identity, staffed emerging social movement organizations, and worked in new directions. To understand the effects of these differences on the women's movement, I turn to the subject of cohort replacement.

COHORT REPLACEMENT

Cohort replacement affected the composition of the multiorganizational field, the internal

dynamics of ongoing organizations and the women's movement community, and the collective identity of the Columbus women's movement. Organizational births and deaths in social movements can be viewed from several different perspectives. A period approach would predict high numbers of either organizational births or deaths in a given year. Population ecology analyses then focus on the features of organizational structure that lead to legitimacy, resource acquisition, and hence survival during movement decline (Edwards and Marullo 1995; Minkoff 1993). A cohort replacement analysis, in contrast, suggests that personnel turnover contributes to overall change in a movement's multi-organizational field. Hence high numbers of organizational births and deaths would occur simultaneously during periods of high recruitment, and both births and deaths would decline as recruitment dropped.

Figure 1 shows the number of women's movement organizations founded and disbanded and the total number of organizations operating in Columbus by year from 1969 to 1992.⁷ Throughout the late 1960s and the 1970s, the numbers of both organizational births and deaths were consistently high. As shown by the total number of organizations, the Columbus women's movement was also largest and most active in these years. Contrary to what one might assume about a movement's peak, this period was marked by change in the women's movement's organizational composition as organizations formed and disbanded. In other words, healthy recruitment did not guarantee that all women's movement organizations survived, because recruits often formed new organizations instead of helping to sustain existing ones. After 1981, organizational births declined to fewer than two per year; in many

⁷ Figures 1 and 2 show the full population of Columbus women's movement organizations, including "radical feminist" and "liberal feminist" groups. They exclude official university committees and government organizations, although these groups were sometimes important players in the movement. I identified as complete a population of organizations as possible by using both documentary evidence (which often mentioned groups that had not themselves left documentation) and respondents' reports. Nevertheless, the population is probably incomplete.

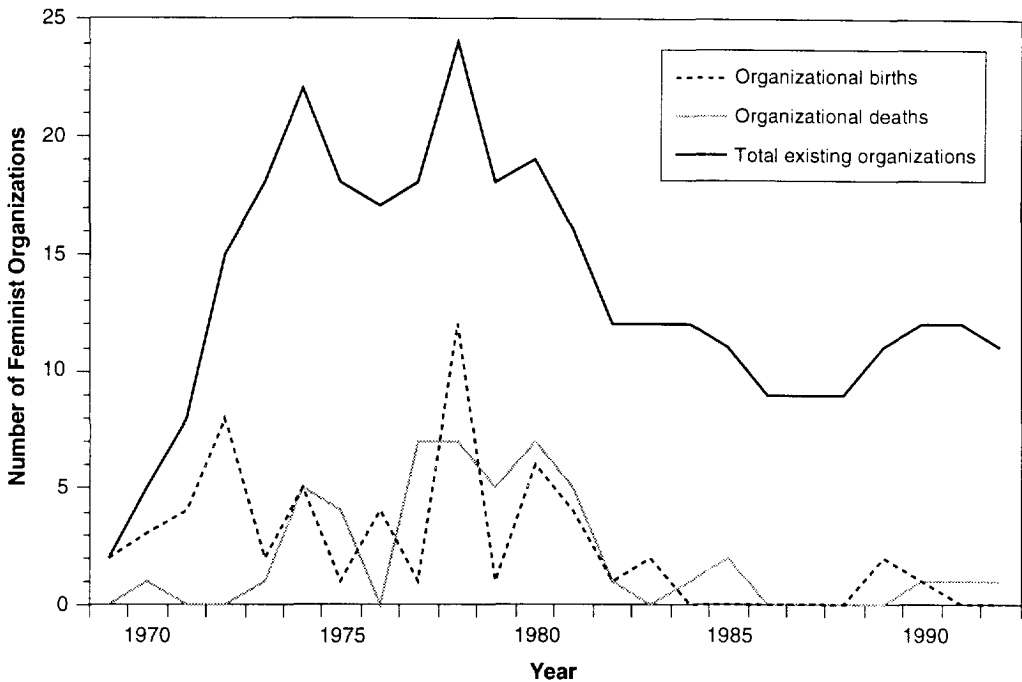


Figure 1. Organizational Growth and Decline: Women's Movement, Columbus Ohio, 1969 to 1992

Note: Includes both "radical" and "liberal" feminist organizations (see footnote 7).

years no new organizations were established. Simultaneously, organizational deaths dropped to similarly low levels. The decrease in deaths during this period did not occur because all women's movement organizations were already defunct; the total number of organizations, although lower than before, remained at between 9 and 11. Rather, organizational change in general, including births and deaths, diminished because few new recruits entered the women's movement during these years.

Figure 2 shows the rate of change in organizational composition by year. Throughout the early 1970s, the rate of organizational change was high and positive, as organizational births outpaced frequent organizational deaths. In 1975 and 1976, rates of change became negative as several organizations died because they had attained movement goals: The Coalition to Ratify the ERA disbanded after state ratification was achieved; other groups disbanded after Ohio State University established a women's studies program. In 1979, in contrast, the negative rate of change foreshadowed the movement's decline: The long-time group

Lesbian Peer Support and the feminist newspaper *Womansong* disbanded for lack of support. In 1980, short-lived study groups still coalesced periodically, but no lasting organizations were established. The remainder of the 1980s saw little organizational change, consistent with the lack of personnel turnover.

Organizational births and deaths were often linked to the entry of recruits or the departure of long-time activists. The organizations established in 1970 were founded by Micro-Cohort 1 and included Columbus-OSU Women's Liberation and a Women's Yellowpages project. As the second micro-cohort entered, members founded numerous new organizations in 1971 and 1972, including the umbrella Women's Action Collective and several affiliated groups, a caucus that pressed for a women's studies program at the university, and the first visible lesbian group, Lesbian Peer Support. Few members of Micro-Cohort 1 were involved in these new groups. The new organizations founded in the mid-1970s were established primarily by members of Micro-Cohort 3, although many were affiliated with the Women's Ac-

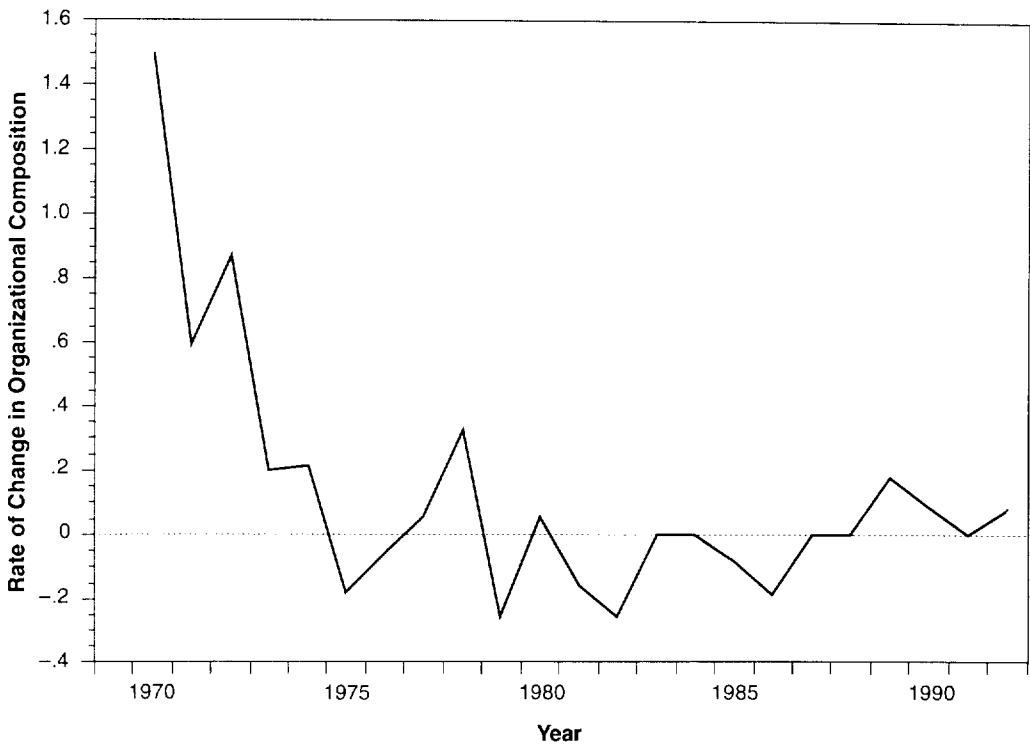


Figure 2. Rate of Change in Organizational Composition, by Year: Woman's Movement, Columbus, Ohio, 1969 to 1992

Note: Rate of change equals $(T_2 - T_1)/T_1$ where T_2 equals the number of organizations in the present year, and T_1 equals the number of organizations in the preceding year. Includes both "radical" and "liberal" feminist organizations (see footnote 7).

tion Collective: a support group for single mothers, a feminist newspaper, a concert production company, and another lesbian group. In the late 1970s, most new organizations were discussion groups on topics such as alcoholism, eating issues, spirituality, and Third World women's issues. Some members of earlier micro-cohorts participated in these groups, but most organizers listed in movement documents belonged to Micro-Cohort 4.

As each micro-cohort lost influence, the organizations it had founded often declined. By 1974, for example, most members of Micro-Cohort 1 had left the Columbus movement; Columbus Women's Liberation died as recruits entered other groups instead. Organizational deaths after the late 1970s were affected by the increasingly hostile political context and the overall decline in level of mobilization, but also were shaped by cohort turnover. For example, the Single Mothers'

Support Group (1977), Central Ohio Lesbians (1977), the Women's Cooperative Garage (1977), and Lesbian Peer Support (1979) disbanded even as Micro-Cohort 4 continued to establish numerous new groups addressing different issues. These organizations died in part because Micro-Cohort 4 saw different issues and tactics as more central to feminism. Finally, WAC disbanded in 1984 when few members of the first political generation remained active in Columbus.

The gradually increasing positive rate of change beginning in 1989 signified both a change in the movement's organizational composition and qualitative changes in the contours of feminism: A new political generation entered the movement, founded new organizations, and reconstructed feminist collective identity. New organizations—Take Back the Night, Women in Comfortable Shoes (a lesbian group), and Queer Nation (a mixed-sex group that, in Columbus, was

overwhelmingly lesbian)—were staffed largely by recent entrants.

Informants reported increases in membership in ongoing organizations and corresponding shifts in direction (interviews with recent informants #5, #6, and #7). Organizations in Columbus changed during this period as the first political generation left ongoing organizations. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, for example, Women Against Rape (WAR) was staffed by recent entrants to the women's movement who had no contact with the founders, and hence little organizational memory (Walsh and Ungson 1991) (interviews with long-time feminists #4 and #29 and with recent informant #2). The group had professionalized; it focused primarily on sustaining a rape crisis hotline and building coalitions with other movements. Former members perceived the group as more mainstream and less explicitly feminist than it had been 15 years before. As one former member explained,

WAR has become much more of a service organization than a radical feminist theory group. I suppose they still mouth a lot of the principles, like a feminist perspective on rape. But that's not really what they are about. . . . I think it's a very different group now than it was. I think there are probably a lot of young people.

In another example, a feminist bookstore founded in 1974 experienced near-total cohort replacement in its managing collective in the early 1990s. The store always had been staffed only by women, but in 1994 the collective members considered permitting male volunteers to staff the store. Although the collective decided against this change after heated debate, the question never would have come up among earlier activists for whom commitment to "women-only space" was central to collective identity.

A feminist movement community also expanded and became further institutionalized throughout the 1980s. This community grew from the feminist collectives, consciousness-raising groups, artists, and bookstores of the 1970s. Yet long-time feminist respondents were no longer central to it:

I'll go places and I'll think I should know people, and I don't know anybody. . . . It seems like there's a whole new crowd that I don't know. I'm starting to feel like an old lady.

The movement's collective identity changed when a new political generation entered in the late 1980s. As new recruits redefined feminist collective identity, for example, they challenged the notion of women as inherently gentle and nurturing or as inevitably oppressed, which had been a pervasive view in earlier years. Collective identity changes were visible as dress at feminist events changed dramatically from the jeans and work shirts of the 1970s to the gendered styles of the late 1980s, such as stretch pants and silk shirts or black T-shirts and leather (interview with long-time feminist #11).

Aspects of the women's movement culture that all four earlier micro-cohorts had taken for granted were altered. In 1991, for example, a dance following a "Women Take Back the Night" march featured recorded music by male artists, including songs with lyrics such as "I can't help myself." The earlier political generation would have viewed such lyrics as violating the ideal of "women-only space" and promoting rape. At another 1991 fundraiser for the same organization, a women's chorus sang a song by feminist songwriter Holly Near about fighting back against violence, which had been popular in the late 1970s. The song was prefaced with the following announcement:

This song was written during a period when the women's movement was filled with anger—at patriarchy and at women's treatment by patriarchy. Although we have moved through that stage of anger now, this song is an important reminder of the spirit of those times. (Field notes, January 24, 1991 and May 18, 1991)

These events illustrate the depth of the difference in collective identity between earlier and later entrants to the movement.

In sum, the women's movement changed direction as new cohorts rose to influence, modified feminist collective identity, and consequently altered strategies, tactics, political culture, and organizational structures. The changes in the Columbus movement also reflect the tightening of local and national political opportunities and the loss of resources, particularly foundation grants and state funding (Whittier 1995), but the resulting changes were implemented primarily by incoming cohorts. Each cohort interpreted

external conditions through interaction, and constructed its own responses and its own version of feminism. For long-time feminists, the loss of resources interacted with their enduring collective identity to produce a sense of marginality and isolation and to cause a turn toward incorporating politics into work and daily life. For later recruits, the more hostile climate shaped a collective identity and approach to organizing that emphasized professionalized organizations that could work within social institutions, alliances with other social movements, and a self-sustaining movement community (Whittier 1995). The changes in the women's movement thus reflect both the impact of hostile external conditions and the effects of an intergenerational redefinition of the collective identity "feminist."

CONCLUSION

The propositions I have outlined provide a starting point for studying the contribution of political generations and cohort replacement to change in social movements. The endurance of each political generation's collective identity is a thread that connects a movement from one wave to the next. Yet because collective identity is shaped by the changing contexts that prevail when activists first commit to the cause, long-lived social movements contain cohorts with potentially disparate definitions of the movement. As recruits enter, their redefinitions of themselves and the cause can reshape the movement.

Yet it is not inevitable that this will happen. The degree of movement transformation depends on the speed of cohort replacement, which varies not only with the number of recruits but also with organizational structures and cultures and with the power struggles and debates between long-time activists and recruits. Long-time activists may hold enough organizational power to maintain their influence despite challenge; or new entrants may be so few in number as to have little effect.

The extent to which cohort turnover produces change within social movement organizations also depends on organizational memory, or the effectiveness of information storage and retrieval that allows later activists to learn from their predecessors' experi-

ences. For example, we would expect greater continuity, despite cohort turnover, in organizations with elaborate training for new members, effective archiving of group history, and ready access to "old hands" for advice (Walsh and Ungson 1991:67). An earlier wave of a movement may establish institutionalized means for passing on its collective identity to a new generation, thus producing greater continuity; women's studies programs accomplish this in the women's movement (Dill 1991). Conversely, long-time activists may depart from social movement organizations, leaving openings for new participants.

We would expect to find that generational processes are important in different ways at various levels of mobilization. During times of low mobilization, the persistence of commitment among long-time activists, combined with a low rate of recruitment, may produce the enduring but relatively static organizations characteristic of abeyance structures (Taylor 1989). During periods of peak mobilization, successful recruitment creates a high rate of cohort replacement, which contributes to rapid change in the movement; differences then may emerge between micro-cohorts every few years. As movements make the transition from abeyance to renewed mobilization and as long-time activists pass the torch to new recruits, the differences, connections, and conflicts between political generations become important. More research on various social movements at different levels of mobilization is needed to flesh out these scenarios, show the circumstances in which they occur, and examine their effects on change in social movements.

A generational approach helps us conceptualize the contribution of internal personnel processes to the transformation of social movements. Others have emphasized that movements change in response to shifts in local or national political opportunities, available resources, the actions of counter-movements, and public opinion (Kriesi et al. 1995; McAdam 1982; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly 1995). I do not dispute such findings, but we cannot assume that change at the movement level means that individual participants have changed their minds about the best direction

for their movement. In the Columbus women's movement, participants largely held to their beliefs about what feminism entailed and what movement organizations should be doing. Cohort turnover, however, promoted innovation in feminist strategy, tactics, organizational structure and composition, and collective identity.

More research is needed to determine whether cohort turnover is a mechanism for producing change in a broad array of movements. In some movements, cohorts may have little effect on movement change because external conditions compel a particular strategy, because collective identity is relatively unimportant in dictating movement actions, because cohorts' collective identities are relatively weak, because few differences exist among cohorts, or because cohort replacement is minimal. In any case, the generational dynamics (or lack thereof) are important to consider.

These propositions and the generational analysis of the Columbus women's movement suggest several questions about the key variables that shape the role of cohorts in changing a particular social movement. First, to what extent have long-time activists retained their collective identity and remained active in the movement? Second, what are the major differences between activist cohorts in their collective identities? Do micro-cohorts vary in the endurance and strength of collective identity? Third, how often do distinct new cohorts form? Every two years? Every ten years? Finally, how quickly and to what extent are cohorts replaced? How has cohort replacement affected the movement? How has it intersected with external political, cultural, and organizational changes? As scholars of social movements analyze how political process and organizational factors shape cycles of protest, we must also examine the effects of collective identity differences among activist cohorts and of cohort replacement.

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