

Music and Social Movements

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Abstract

Music is a key component of social movements. This article addresses the relationship between music and social movements through four foci: collective identity, free space, emotions, and social movement culture. Collective identity is developed and nurtured within free spaces through the use of music. These spaces are often rife with emotions that are instrumental in development of collective identity. A social movement culture may develop as these processes unfold. Music is part of this culture and serves as an important mechanism for solidarity when participants move beyond free spaces to more contested ones. Examples of song lyrics demonstrate these processes. Research on music and social movements, it is argued here, can be enhanced by addressing technology and popular culture.

Introduction

A student once told me music seemed less important for today's social movements than those of 1960s. I replied that music is just as important but it and the times have changed. The 1960s are now seen by many as a highpoint in the use of music in social movements. Folk, rock, pop, and spirituals provided the glue for social movements concerning race, gender, and peace. These movements achieved many of their goals. They changed the way society feels about race and gender and acted as catalysts for institutional change (Hobson 2008). For instance, social movements provided access to previously denied positions for women and people of color. We can see the long-term results today. In the 2008 election, an African-American man ran for president on the Democratic ticket and won, while a woman was the vice presidential candidate for the Republican side.

As society changes, those desiring transformation must contend with those who do not. Today, punk, rap, and other forms of popular music reflect the disenchantment of a new generation (see Trapp 2005). Contemporary social movements still find free spaces where music inspires emotions; people express themselves, and collective identity among potential adherents forms new social movement cultures. For instance, the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning) movement and the environmental movement challenge the status quo by meeting in protected spaces as well as through public protest. Just as in past social movements, these use music to attract and retain participants. Collective identity still arises when people act to take advantage of opportunity structures in society or react to societal constrictions. As these processes move forward, music provides a means for solidarity around shared causes and resistance from those who prefer the status quo. In what follows, I outline the process by which collective identity is formed and the role of emotions, free space, and political opportunity in this process. Following this, I note how social movement culture has formed across time. I provide excerpts from songs to demonstrate these ideas. In my conclusion, I suggest how researchers might extend their analyses of music and social movements.

Social movements and music as vehicles for social change

In this section, I will concentrate on four key concepts related to social movements and music: collective identity, emotion, free space, and social movement culture. I choose these ideas because they dominate the literature concerning music and social movements. I also see them as areas ripe for further study. In the following sections, I will discuss these concepts and how they have been used in social movement research.

Collective identity

Research focusing on music and social movements is most often concerned with collective identity formation among participants (Taylor and Whittier 1992). Durkheim (1965) sees ritual as a way to bolster social solidarity by creating and maintaining group boundaries. Social movements can thrive when a collective identity surfaces among movement participants through ritual. A collective identity is formed when groups seeking social change share common ideological, normative, and cultural goals (See Bernstein 2005; Polletta and Jasper 2001). Music is often part of a ritual interaction or an interaction with specific behaviors leading toward some prescribed goal. It can offer an alternative framing of an issue and suggest a course of action (Gamson 1995a). Collective identity often arises from ritual events where music can create new meanings or maintain old ones (Taylor and Whittier 1995). Music in the form of song is important in developing a shared identity because singing can bring people together. The song, 'Solidarity Forever,' brought union workers together (Denisoff 1972).

Solidarity forever
Solidarity forever
Solidarity forever
For the union makes us strong
(from Greenway 1953)

By repeating the lyrics 'solidarity forever,' the message may be internalized, allows participation by all, and contributes to collective identity. 'Solidarity Forever' specifically calls for integration around unionization. Music can act to transcend differences and bridge the gap between disparate groups and generations around a common cause (Eyerman 2002).

Collective identity can be formed via interactions but is not necessarily tied to material rewards (Melucci 1985). Through interaction, groups can forge new relationships around a common cause by attracting members and sympathetic allies (Rosenthal 2003). Music is a central part of the cultural 'toolkit' used in social movements (Swidler 1986). Song lyrics tied to movement goals are important in this regard. When the Clinton presidential campaign in 2000 selected a theme song, it chose Fleetwood Mac's 'Don't Stop Thinking about Tomorrow,' because it fit the goals of the campaign and was an important recruitment tool. In an example from the Civil Rights movement, songs were important for achieving the goals of the movement. The song 'We Shall Overcome' is a case in point.

We Shall Overcome
We Shall Overcome
We Shall Overcome, Someday
Deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome someday
(from Denisoff 1972)

'We Shall Overcome' supported the goals of the movement. It proposed overcoming racism and segregation, instilled hope and maintained solidarity during active and collective protest (Denisoff 1972; Flacks 1999; McLaurin and Peterson 1992).

In an example from the labor movement, Ella Mae Wiggins' 'Mill Mother's Lament,' written for the 1929 Gastonia textile mill worker's strike (Roscigno and Danaher 2004), begins by highlighting discontent but ends with a call for solidarity, as we see in the first and last verses of the song:

We leave our home in the morning,
We kiss our children good-bye,
While we slave for the bosses,
Our children scream and cry.

But understand, all workers,
Our union they do fear.
Let's stand together, workers,
And have a union here
(from Green 1963).

'Mill Mother's Lament' provides an excellent example of how a song shapes collective identity. It appeals to the basic problems people face and offers a solution. By forming a collective identity, social movements are able to sustain themselves across time (Eyerman and Jamison 1998).

In sum, social movement research has focused in part on music as a vehicle for developing and maintaining collective identity. Ritual interactions allow people to share grievances and express emotions through song. Lyrics describe these grievances and provide solutions and tie people together. Singing together can bolster collective identity.

Emotion

Emotions are important in establishing a collective identity. Early research on collective behavior found emotions to have an effect on crowd psychology (see Le Bon 1968). Because emotions may be defined as both irrational and difficult to measure, emotions as aspects of social movements have often been elided (Jasper 1998). However, studying emotions has gained attention (see for instance, Goodwin et al. 2008). In fact, Collins (1990) argues that emotions are a resource to be mobilized because they hold social movements together. Jasper (1998) finds that emotions are present in all social protests, have rational and goal oriented components, and are formed or reformed through the participation in collective action via shared emotions. Emotions can bring people together or establish in- and out-group boundaries. Goodwin and Pfaff (2008) argue that emotions are key causal factors leading to social movements.

Music can bring about 'vitalizing emotions' to social movement participants Taylor (2000). The participation in musical performance and rhythm of the music can result in emotional reactions among participants and lead to group identity (Flacks 1999; Kendon 1990; Lipsitz 1994). Participants engaged in intense interactions employ body movements, gaze direction, and speech as part of the rituals associated with protest (Kendon 1990). Speed and repetition of the rhythm may also contribute to more intense interactions and increased bonding among participants (Gramsci 2000; Lipsitz 1994). McNeil (1995) notes that music and rhythm have been central to human

history, in part, by motivating humans to act for the benefit of the group over and above themselves.

Futrell et al. (2006) find that music scenes provide a place for formation of emotional attachments and collective meanings. Roscigno et al. (2002) look at the role of emotions among depression-era southern textile workers. Musicians gathered in mill villages where hillbilly music was blossoming. 'Let Them Wear Their Watches Fine' is a song from this scene designed to elicit an emotional response from listeners.

Those fancy folks that dress so fine
And spend their money free
They don't have time for a factory hand
That dresses like you and me.

As we go walking down the street
All dressed in lint and strings,
They call us fools and factory trash,
And other low down things.
(From Green 1963)

Musicians living in closely knit mill villages were important for union organization and actively crafted songs arousing emotions workers needed to brave the inevitable reaction, or countermobilization, of the powerful. In contrast to the textile workers, textile owners and other middle-class citizens preferred classical music, furthering dividing these groups by cultural preferences (Grundy 1995).

Emotion does not always lead to gains for a movement. In a study of contemporary leadership in feminist social movements, Reger (2007) finds that although popular musicians, such as Ani DiFranco and Kathleen Hanna, are identified by participants as leaders in the current feminist movement, these musicians take a non-traditional, antileadership stance. This results in emotional mobilization but does not translate into political power and recognizable leaders. While music provides the glue that holds the movement together, a large and effective political mobilization has not been realized. Emotions are important for leading to a strong sense of group identity but organization and leadership are also central for a social movement to make changes.

Free space

Social movements often take advantage of political opportunities or how the political context changes across place and time (McAdam 1983). This allows for free spaces within society where groups can vie for recognition and work for social change (Pratt 1990). A free space is an opening within the framework of society where people are allowed to criticize the dominant culture within acceptable limits. Free space can be both physical and symbolic in nature (Eyerman and Jamison 1998; Pratt 1990). Free space can be symbolic when, for instance, a politician recognizes legitimacy of a group when he supports their aims in a speech, as Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) and his fire-side chats on the radio did for the textile workers in the 1930s (Roscigno and Danaher 2001, 2004). It can also be physical, as when activists meet in a place known only to them (Pattillo-McCoy 1998). Free space can vary depending on the severity of the transgression of activists.

Political opportunity theory and the importance of free space to social movements are not without critics however. Meyer (2004) argues that political opportunity or political process theory, while a fruitful area of study, has been plagued by somewhat narrow

conceptualizations of political opportunity. Goodwin et al. (1999) critique political process research as biased toward structural explanations. Polletta and Amenta (2008) also note that simple frustration or empathy can lead to a push for social change in face of constrained opportunities.

Some research focuses specifically on free space, music, and social movements. For instance, Taylor and Whittier (1992) find the use of performance within a defined space can maintain boundaries between dominant and subordinate groups and act as a staging area where subordinate groups can present themselves to sympathetic members of the dominant group. Within these free spaces, an alternative frame presented through music may help the subordinate group define their identity (Gamson 1998; Snow and Benford 1992). For instance, Kaminski and Taylor (2008) argue that drag shows create a space where the LGBTQ movement reaches a more mainstream audience while challenging gender and sexual boundaries (see also Rupp and Taylor 2003). In another example, Staggenborg and Lang (2007) investigate the Montreal Women's Movement. They find that organizational context, connections, and goals are important in outcomes of ritual events. Creating a safe space for these ritual events is important because the relaxed atmosphere created through music can attract participants who might otherwise demure.

Eyerman (2002) notes the importance of new technologies such as the Internet in spreading social movements. Roscigno and Danaher (2004) demonstrate how the new technology of the radio created a physical free space whereby depression-era southern textile workers were able to air their grievances to sympathetic audiences. During the 1929–1934 'frontier' period of radio, local airways were free to play music that reflected shared problems. The Dixon Brothers' 'Weave Room Blues' uses both physical and symbolic free space by presenting the plight of families to largely mill worker radio audiences.

Working in a weave room, fighting for my life
Trying to make a living for my kiddies and my wife
Some are needing clothing, some are needing shoes
But I've got nothing but the weave room blues
(Dixon 1998)

In 1934, the song was popular on the 50,000 watt radio station, WBT, broadcasting from Charlotte, NC when nearly half a million mill workers went on strike, mostly in the south.

When literal free space is not available, groups often find a means to create this space metaphorically (Eyerman and Jamison 1998). African-Americans in the pre-civil rights US south were a subordinated group tied together in part by the messages in blues songs (Baraka 1963; Davis 1998; King 1996; Kloosterman and Quispel 1990). Code words in blues music brought a shared identity to African-Americans (Danaher and Blackwelder 1993; Hamilton 2008). While blues songs may have formed a pre-movement solidarity (Pomerance 1988), and rhythm and blues songs were a help and a hindrance to the movement (Ward 1999), spiritual songs would play a decidedly positive role in the civil rights movements (Morris 1984; Reed 2005). This was partly a result of southern churches being one of the only areas of physical free space in the African-American community during the civil rights movement (Morris 1984; Pattillo-McCoy 1998). In contrast, Lipsitz (1994) argues that after the African-American Diaspora to the North, African-Americans could openly criticize society through rap music from the unintended free space afforded by living in violent, segregated neighborhoods of large US cities (see also Clay 2006; George 2001).

Bennett and Peterson (2004) note the importance of the Internet as a 'scene.' Scenes tied to technology provide a space for people to perform and for audiences to relate to artists and other audience members. Physical and metaphorical free space can contribute to social movement formation and success by supporting views in opposition to the status quo as part of an 'oppositional culture' (see Adams and Roscigno 2005; Mansbridge 2001). Reactive movements are also an instance of oppositional culture. They develop in reaction to a movement by the less powerful. For instance, Steinberg (2004) uses ideas of space and place to embed the Serbian student movement within the context of political attempts by the government to use neo-folk music to bolster its position. In another example, the white power movement as a reactive movement has made extensive use of the Internet to recruit new participants (Eyerman 2002; Futrell et al. 2006). The song, 'White Power,' provides an example.

I stand and watch my country, going down the drain
 We are all at fault now, we are all to blame
 We're letting them takeover, we just let 'em come
 Once we had an Empire, and now we've got a slum

(chorus)
 White Power! For England!
 White Power! Today
 White Power! For Britain
 Before it gets too late
 (Screwdriver 1995)

The Internet can support a scene that enables current and potential adherents to share their grievances and become familiar with subcultural and counter cultural messages.

Free space has been important for movements to express their beliefs, recruit participants, and react to the status quo. One space that is of practical importance to social movements on a macro level is the media. Gamson (2002) sees media standing, one's power in the media, as contested terrain. Media standing can be biased because of a number of factors, such as interviewer preference, network bias, or spectacle and drama. Given this, one might see more opportunities for social movement participants to use popular music, such as rap (Clay 2006) to get the media's attention, thus opening a space for the movement through use of popular or novel musical forms. Corporate control of the media must also be taken into account as a barrier to media access (Garofalo 2008). Still, if a popular song highlights a social problem, this might bring attention to the issue. For instance, the song 'My Name is Luka?' brought attention to child abuse at a time when the social problem was becoming recognized more widely. Weinstein (2006) has argued that rock music has often been seen as protest music but across time its association with social movements has been tenuous at best because of factors such as obliqueness of lyrics and, more recently, corporate control over the airways (see also Garofalo 2008). These are obviously problems but might be addressed through innovative methodologies bridging the macro and micro realms, meld or revise current theories, or test more anecdotal assertions.

Social movement culture

Social movement culture refers to norms and values specific to a particular social movement. This is in contrast to culture as anthropologists see it as characteristic of a whole society and its material and non-material artifacts (Spillman 2002). Sociologists have often

separated culture and social structure, seeing the former as perhaps more subjective and prone to interpretation than social structure. Critiques of this idea note that what sociologists have thought of as structural aspects of culture are so fused with the more affective aspects, such as ritual and belief, that they form a coherent whole (Jasper 1997). Spillman (2002) proposes seeing culture as a process of meaning-making activities rather than structures that act on individuals. Social movement culture can therefore be seen from this point of view as actors in social movements pushing for social change according to certain rules, which for them is a meaning-making activity.

Cultural resources, such as music, are important components of social movements (Williams 1999). Social movement culture as a component of social movements is characterized by a sense of group identity, an alternative interpretational frame of cause and effect, and a sense of political efficacy (Gamson 1995b; Snow 2001; Taylor and Whittier 1995). Alternative interpretational frames look for a new way to interpret societal conditions (Mansbridge 2001). Group identity and alternative interpretational frames contribute to a sense of political efficacy by tying people together and giving activists goals for change (see Reger et al. 2008). Social movement culture can also develop within a social movement by bringing in preexisting culture (Melucci 1985; Taylor and Whittier 1995), arise from within the movement itself (Fantasia 1988), have a strategic goal of political change (Calhoun 1998), or act as a forum where identities can be openly presented and reinterpreted (Lichterman 1999).

Music acts as a catalyst to create and enhance the three elements of social movement culture. Lyrics often reflect the feelings underlying a particular social movement culture beyond an individual level by framing key issues, making them politically important and leading to a collective consciousness (Flacks 1999; W. Gamson 1992b; Goffman 1981; Lichterman 1999; Street 2003; Mills 1939, 1940). The importance of music as a component of that culture can be seen in scholarship focusing on social movements, such as antiwar, civil rights, and labor (see also Greenway 1953; Lieberman 1989; Lomax et al. 1967). For instance, Denisoff (1971) investigates the antiwar movement of the 1960s and its connection to the folk movement of the 1950s and 1960s by showing how the counter culture uses folk and folk-rock music to further the antiwar effort through a folk consciousness. This refers to folk music being the outward manifestation of the downtrodden. The song 'If I had a Hammer' is a case in point.

If I had a hammer
 I'd hammer in the morning
 I'd hammer in the evening
 All over this land
 I'd hammer out danger
 I'd hammer out a warning
 I'd hammer out love between my brothers and my sisters
 All over this land
 (Hays and Seeger 1986)

A version of folk consciousness can also be seen in country music with appeals to a working class consciousness (Peterson 1992) and the individualism inherent in 'being southern' (Denisoff 1972; McLaurin and Peterson 1992).

Roscigno and Danaher (2004) find that the political opportunity structure plays a role in how new subcultures become part of social movements. Specifically, the policy changes of the FDR administration during the 1930s gave southern mill workers a sense of political opportunity. FDR was adept at using the new technology of radio to connect

with his constituency through his 'fireside chats.' Social movement culture overlapped with the political change and new technology to create new resources for social movement participants (see also Eyerman and Jamison 1998). In a related example, the civil rights movement made extensive use of music from pre-existing African-American culture. For instance in the Charleston, SC hospital worker's strike of 1969, workers sang the spiritual 'We Shall Not be Moved' in the face of police attempts to break up the picket lines (Dent 1998). The role of spirituals in the Civil Rights movement is clear in a description of a voting rights rally where '...the moral came through the music and the people gave themselves the message of the meaning. Words could never rival its [music's] effectiveness but there had to be words (Belfrage quoted in McAdam 1988: 91).' Social movement culture may develop whenever groups attempt to change inequalities. Development of social movement culture is varied across cases but once it arises there is a greater chance that a movement will have the desired effect.

Conclusion and discussion

Music is an important component of social movements. It helps establish and maintain collective identity, leads to vitalizing emotions, takes advantage of free space afforded by political opportunities, and helps establish and maintain social movement culture. Social movement research has primarily studied the use of music to establish collective identity among group members through the development of a social movement culture which is able to develop and thrive within free spaces and aid groups seeking social change. In the feminist movement, festivals open up space for musical performance to help participants become part of the group and aid long-standing members in socializing new ones. During the depression-era labor movement, radio was a space for southern textile workers to air grievances. Today, youth turn to rap, other popular music, and the Internet to further their goals. As these last two example show, social movement researchers have become increasingly aware of the effects of technology in their studies. How movements use pre-existing culture, establish allegiances, and make use of popular music are also fruitful areas for future study.

Music is most useful as a tool for establishing collective identity when people can relate to it. Social movements that marshal preexisting culture via its music to elicit emotion and form and maintain collective identity have often been successful in achieving their goals. Labor movements in the Northeastern United States for instance had their songs to bolster their workers. When these same organizers came south during the Great Depression to organize textile workers, they found their songs were appreciated but that workers wanted to use their own songs (Dent 1998; Roscigno and Danaher 2004). In the civil rights movement, spirituals were employed outright or familiar melodies were used with new lyrics that made clear the grievances of African-Americans (Garofalo 2008). Youth movements of the 1960s depended on music such as folk and folk-rock to sustain them (Roy 2002, 2010). Popular culture's current role in social movements is similar to that of folk culture in the 1960's (Garofalo 1992). Today's youth rely on their own favorite musical styles to tie them together.

Music is important for establishing allegiances among disparate groups. Social movement research has often studied how music is used to recruit members but would benefit from more research on how alliances are formed with other groups. For instance, Kaminiski and Taylor (2008) note the importance of popular music in maintaining allies between the LGBTQ movement and heterosexuals (see also Bernstein 1997). The current feminist movement is closely allied with women artists (see Love 2002). As women musicians

become associated with more traditionally male occupational roles (see Clawson 1999), the ability of women musicians to affect change via social movement participation may increase. Subculture as a concept, and thus social movement culture, has been critiqued for ignoring changes in structure resulting from processes of interaction and identity formation (see Fine and Kleinman 1979). In reaction, research has focused on micro processes by which social movements form and are perpetuated (see Gamson 1992a; Williams 1995). In this manner, how allegiances are formed by face-to-face encounters may be better understood. The study of global social movements demonstrates how music helps diffuse culture across societies and acts as a platform to establish social movement allies (Lipsitz 1994).

Social movement scholars should heed Adams (1998) call to study popular culture and its increasing effects in society. The peace movement provides examples of popular musicians such as Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young in the 1960s to the band Green Day, more recently, giving their time to help the cause (Garofalo 2008). The women's movement has historically relied on popular music to bring attention to its cause (Arrow 2007; Mohammed 1991). Heavy metal music has been a mainstay of white power movements (Corte and Edwards 2008; Futrell et al. 2006), while rock music has been important for new religious movements and mega-churches (see Wilcox et al. 2000). Governments and the public have vied for public space and the hearts of the population through the use of popular music (Eyerman and Jamison 1998; Steinberg 2004). Rock musicians, especially ones with working class roots, have been instrumental in recent social movements to help the world's poor and subordinated populations. Bob Geldof organized Band Aid and Live Aid, the latter reaching over one and a half billion people in over 160 countries (Garofalo 2008). Watkins (2005) argues that today's younger generation is often neglected, ignored, and lost which has led them to form an embryonic cultural movement. Clay (2006) finds hip-hop music to be important in establishing and maintaining a collective identity in post-civil rights social movements of youth. Punk music was important in youth movement collective identity in Bandung, Indonesia (Pickles 2007). These examples point out how sociologists have analyzed popular music's effects on social movements and provide a template for further work.

Eyerman and Jamison (1998) say music creates a shared history, while DeNora (2000) finds that music is an important facet of everyday life. One means to further the success of contemporary social movements is to tap into participants' sense of shared history. Music is a part of everyday life; people listen to music of their choosing as well as 'muzak' in stores to malls to doctors' offices. Traditional social movements were able to tap into the 'music of the folk' to their advantage. Current social movements need to do the same, using popular music, today's music of the folk, as a way to create, or tap into, a shared history. Social movement culture is part of the larger culture and, while boundaries between 'us' and 'them' have always been crucial to maintaining solidarity, social movements need to reach out to allies to achieve their goals, especially in light of increasing corporate power over the media. Social movement culture that makes good use of popular culture, uses or creates free spaces for activists to come together, kindles emotions, and cultivates social movement culture will come closer to achieving wide-spread change in society.

Short Biography

William F. Danaher is a Professor of Sociology at the College of Charleston. His article coauthored with Vincent J. Roscigno, 'Radio and mobilization of textile workers in the

US south, 1929–1934,’ won the best article award from the American Sociological Association’s Sociology of Culture Section in 2002. Their coauthored book, *The Voice of Southern Labor: Radio, Music, and Textile Strikes, 1929–1934*, was published in 2004. Danaher has also published articles in the *American Sociological Review*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, *Poetics*, *Sociological Spectrum*, *Sociological Focus*, and the *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*. His work has been funded by the National Science Foundation and numerous grants from the College of Charleston. His current research investigates occupational subcultures, work and musicians, and the historical changes in allies between social movements (with Marc Dixon). His other work concerns the role of media in constructing social problems. He holds a BA, MS, and PhD in Sociology from North Carolina State University.

Note

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