

# **Making Social Change: Questioning the Study of Social Movements, and Investigating Organizational Dynamics and Network Strategies in a Social Movement Case**

A Dissertation Proposal Presented to the Faculty of the Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA

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The United States was built on deep, structural, social and political inequality that disadvantages vulnerable populations such as low-income and racial and ethnic minorities while accruing benefits to privileged populations such as upper-income whites. Policy and legislation have been used to challenge such inequity, but these types of mechanisms tend to be in the hands of those who are more powerful in society who may benefit from inequalities. As a result, the voices, interests and needs of vulnerable populations are often minimized or omitted in the political agenda setting and policymaking process.

In contrast, social movements are social change mechanisms that have the potential to empower and prioritize vulnerable populations who are otherwise excluded from or marginalized within formal power structures that influence policy priorities and agenda setting. Despite the importance of social movements for advancing social justice, few researchers focus on social movements as social policy mechanisms and academic studies often neglect the voices and interests of movement practitioners. Movements are highly networked and social entities; participants are integral to how the movement functions.

Without an understanding of the people involved in a movement and their social location; it is challenging to have an appropriate interpretation of how the movement operates. Furthermore, learning more about the strategies, practices, and implications of social movements, can lead to more effective social movements, which may result in policy that supports the needs of vulnerable populations.

Through qualitative mixed-methods, this three-paper dissertation: 1) uses critical race theory and intersectionality to critique the sociological study of social movements with respect to vulnerable populations and develops a framework for future study that prioritizes such populations; 2) studies a particular social movement case utilizing the newly developed framework to develop a conceptual organizational model relevant to social movements and 3); uses network analysis to examine the impacts of social capital with respect to the social location of participants and strategies used for the particular movement case. Social policy outcomes will be examined with respect to both formal and informal outcomes such as concrete policy changes, or the establishment of new norms.

This dissertation will contribute to the study of social movements, develop innovative organizational frameworks, and make methodological contributions to network analysis. It will strengthen current social movement literature by integrating organizational theory,

social policy literature and network analysis, each of which brings a unique strength to the study and understanding of social movements. This work will result in methodological and practical implications for scholars and practitioners.

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