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Lifestyle Movements: Exploring the Intersection of Lifestyle and Social Movements

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ABSTRACT *While the contentious politics (CP) model has come to dominate the field of social movements, scholars note the paradigm's shortcomings, especially its narrow focus on movement organizations, public protest, and political action. The conceptual wall between lifestyles and social movements has created a theoretical blind spot at the intersection of private action and movement participation, personal and social change, and personal and collective identity. We suggest that lifestyle movements (LMs) consciously and actively promote a lifestyle, or way of life, as a primary means to foster social change. Drawing upon our observations of a variety of LMs, we discuss three defining aspects of LMs: lifestyle choices as tactics of social change, the central role of personal identity work, and the diffuse structure of LMs. We also explore the links between LMs and social movements, CP, and conventional politics. Finally, we demonstrate that LM, as a new conceptual category, is applicable across a range of movement activities.*

KEY WORDS: Lifestyle movements, lifestyles, social movements, new social movements, voluntary simplicity movement, social responsibility movement

Introduction

Scholars have commonly drawn sharp distinctions between social movements and lifestyles, conceptualizing movements as organized, change-oriented collective action aimed at the state or other authority structures, and lifestyles as more diffuse, internally focused, style-oriented groupings driven by consumption and popular culture. Movements feature collective (rather than individual) action, preferences for social change, a degree of organization, some temporal continuity and operate, at least in part, outside conventional political institutions (McAdam & Snow, 1997). Lifestyles encompass people's everyday practices, tastes, consumption habits, leisure activities, modes of speech and dress – one's 'individuality, self-expression, and stylistic self-consciousness' (Featherstone, 1987, p. 55). While all lifestyles serve as both ways to identify *with* and disidentify *from* others, alternative lifestyles, such as veganism, communal living and hardcore punk, fall outside the mainstream in some significant way, explicitly challenging predominant cultural norms. However, scholars tend to conceptualize movements as externally focused,

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collective ‘political’ action, while often viewing lifestyles as self-centered, largely individualistic projects of personal expression and affirmation, thus marking movements as serious contenders for social change and lifestyles as trivial in comparison. This divide has created a scholarly blind spot concealing the intersections of private action and movement participation, personal change and social change, and personal identity and collective identity.

In this paper, we respond to Snow’s (2004, p. 19) call to ‘broaden our conceptualization of social movements beyond contentious politics’ by exploring the space between lifestyle and social movement and thus bridging the gap in between them. The space includes the lifestyle ‘wings’ of established social movements, such as the green living segment of the environmental movement. It also includes the collective challenge occasionally emergent around lifestyle choices, such as the home-birth movement. And finally, this space is home to a diverse array of groups such as locavore and virginity pledge movements that lie more or less in between lifestyles and movements, engaged in ‘individualized collective action’ (Micheletti, 2003, p. 24) as *lifestyle movements* (LMs) that *consciously and actively promote a lifestyle, or way of life, as their primary means to foster social change* (see Miller, 2005). In this definition, we exclude collectivities that spread a lifestyle but do not have broader goals of social change such as religious movements to save individual souls and the ‘healthy living movement’ (Dworkin, 2000) to improve individual physical well-being.

While LMs are quite diverse, they differ, sometimes subtly, other times profoundly, in their tactics, structure, and deployment of identity from many traditionally studied movements and even ‘new’ social movements such as environmentalism, feminism, and gay rights. This paper explores the LM concept by outlining the key variables distinguishing such movements from both lifestyles and contentious politics (CP). We illuminate these differences using observations of a variety of movements, from green living and voluntary simplicity to virginity pledging and social responsibility. We draw upon our original research of voluntary simplicity, social responsibility, and virginity pledging, but in order to show the broad applicability of the LM concept, we also offer examples from others’ empirical studies of various movements, as well as data from movement documents such as mission statements, websites, and books. After reviewing the CP model and alternatives, we discuss in depth the three defining characteristics of LMs: (1) lifestyle choice as a tactic of social change, (2) the central role of personal identity work, and (3) the diffuse structure of lifestyle movements. We conclude by reviewing the central conceptual themes of LMs, considering their place in contemporary societies, and demonstrating that a variety of movement activities occurs in the space between lifestyles and movements.

Contentious Politics and Alternative Paradigms

While there are many theories explaining social movements, the CP paradigm – including both political process/opportunity and resource mobilization theories – predominates, defining movements as organized, episodic, manifestly political, public interactions between claims makers and their targets, typically the state or its representatives (McAdam *et al.*, 2001). While noting its strengths, many scholars have critiqued CP, particularly for being ‘too narrowly focused on political action and protest events’ (Staggenborg & Taylor, 2005, p. 38) and for neglecting ‘cultural and discursive tactics’

(Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004, pp. 267–268; see also Snow, 2004). The CP definition of social movements does not adequately explain lifestyle-centered or identity-based movements that combine personal and social transformation. How can we theorize groups like vegetarians, Promise Keepers, green lifestyle adopters, locavores, slow fooders, voluntary simplifiers, and virginity pledgers, groups that profess to change the world but focus more energy on cultivating a morally coherent, personally gratifying lifestyle and identity than issuing *direct* challenges to the state/social structure? Such phenomena are worthy of consideration as *movements* – they are explicitly social change-oriented, often extrainstitutional, and persist over time – but are more individualistic rather than collective, personal rather than social, and tend to emphasize cultural targets rather than the state.

Moving beyond critiquing the CP approach, several scholars have more recently offered alternative conceptualizations of movements (e.g., Staggenborg & Taylor, 2005). Snow (2004, p. 11) advocates conceptualizing social movements as ‘collective challenges to systems or structures of authority,’ including challenges that are not ‘manifestly political,’ efforts aimed at affecting ‘various levels of social life’ (including the individual), and that come in various forms other than conventional social movement organizations (SMOs). Likewise, Zald (2000) sees movements as ‘ideologically structured action,’ shifting focus from movement organizations and protest events to arenas that nurture movement identity, ideology, and activity, such as schools, families, and cultural groups.

Multi-Institutional Politics and the Politics of Lifestyle Concern

A promising alternative to the CP/political process model is Armstrong and Bernstein’s (2008) ‘multi-institutional politics’ theory, explaining that movements challenge multiple sources of power (rather than only the state), pursue both material and symbolic change, and involve challengers both within and outside of targeted institutions. The multi-institutional politics model encompasses collective challenges to all societal institutions (including medicine, sport, science, religion, media, and education) from a wide variety of ideologies and tactics. It illuminates ‘awkward movements’ – those that do not fit well into the political process/CP models because they are not instrumental, do not target the state, and/or are not comprised of an oppressed group.

In a similar vein, Page & Clelland (1978) and Lorentzen (1980) discuss the ‘politics of lifestyle concern,’ examining how and why groups engage in political struggle to preserve a way of life, such as traditional morality in public school textbooks. While acknowledging the importance of lifestyle and culture as elements of movement activity, these sorts of phenomena entail collective public political action (i.e., CP) undertaken to preserve or advance a way of life. In contrast, we examine *lifestyle action* undertaken by (primarily) *individuals* with the self-conscious agenda of change.

New Social Movement Tradition

Perhaps the most recognized attempt to connect culture and social movements comes from scholars working in the new social movement (NSM) tradition. They bring renewed attention to the role of culture and identity in movements, in particular, how movements construct grievances, create and maintain collective identities, and engage in symbolic action in the cultural sphere (Melucci, 1985, 1994; Touraine, 1985; Buechler, 1993,

1995). Such movements struggle over postmaterialist values, identities, and cultural practices rather than class-based economic concerns and material resources. People identify with ‘communities of meaning’ (Cohen, 1985) as they pursue ‘lifestyle politics’ (Giddens, 1991; Bennett, 1998), engaged in the ‘politicization of the self and daily life’ (Taylor & Whittier, 1992, p. 117). NSM theories have expanded the focus from movement organizations and conventional politics, pointing to broader definitions of movements based on loosely organized networks, collective identities, and cultural challenges.¹

Yet, even scholars employing NSM theories often study organizationally based, public collective action aimed at changing government policy (Kriesi *et al.*, 1995), to the detriment of understanding movements employing individualistic, lifestyle-centered action – creating a ‘myopia of the visible’ by equating movement activity with public protests (Melucci, 1989, p. 44). While NSM acknowledges that movement organizations tend to be segmented, diffuse, and decentralized, the focus still remains on *organizations*. Other criticisms of NSM theories abound; for example, they incorrectly tie a category of movements to a specific historical period (Calhoun, 1993) and neglect right-wing movements (Pichardo, 1997). Most significantly, rather than a coherent conceptual theory, NSMs are a catchall category including organized, hierarchical protest movements (e.g., peace, antinuke, disability rights, and gay rights) with relatively unorganized, diffuse ‘cultural’ movements (e.g., countercultures, cultural feminism, and squatter movements) (see Larana *et al.*, 1994). Including every postlabor, post-1960s, postmaterialist movement under one banner implies similarities between movements that differ extraordinarily in form, tactics, and targets.

Prefigurative Politics and Political Consumerism

Prefigurative politics, the concept most closely linked to lifestyle action in the social movements literature, describes activists’ attempts to create on a small scale the type of world they envision (Breines, 1989). Practices such as communal living, creating alternative economic institutions, and exercising participatory democracy serve to withdraw support from structures deemed unjust and/or provide the cultural foundations for broader social change (Cornell, 2009). Prefigurative politics paves the way for protest movements to engage with the state or other institutions. While LMs may ‘prefigure’ alternative realities supportive of protest, many have no intention of targeting the state because they have no broader political agenda (e.g., vegetarians and virginity pledgers). For some LMs, attempts at ‘winning cultural space’ (Clarke *et al.*, 1976) are ends in themselves.

The ‘political consumerism’ literature examines how social movements politicize and effectively mobilize consumption through campaigns such as consumer boycotts (Holzer, 2006; Wiedenhof, 2008). Consumer campaigns ‘collectivize individual choice’ and convert individual monetary resources into political power (Holzer, 2006, p. 406). However, these campaigns are often too short-lived and narrow in scope to be considered the mobilization of a ‘lifestyle.’ Micheletti (2003) notes, however, that *lifestyle political consumerism* – a variation of political consumerism – is growing in importance, directly emphasizing a deeper personal commitment to synthesizing public and private responsibility.

Lifestyle Movements

LMs occupy a space where NSMs, prefigurative politics, political consumerism, subcultures, religious movements, lifestyle trends, and even CP overlap. We describe the variables most relevant to LMs in an effort to make better sense of the diversity of movements that do not neatly fit the CP model. LMs differ from many traditionally studied social movements in several key ways:

- LMs promote individual (vs. collective) action; participation occurs primarily at the individual level with the subjective understanding that others are taking similar action, collectively adding up to social change.
- LMs engage in private (vs. public), ongoing (vs. episodic) action; adherents interweave action into daily life.
- LM adherents subjectively understand their individual, private actions as efforts toward *social change* (vs. exclusively self-help, religious exploration, or personal transformation).
- LM adherents engage in identity work, focusing particularly on cultivating a morally coherent, personally meaningful identity in the context of a collective identity. Personal identity is a site of social change.

In addition to these primary characteristics, LMs also have two tendencies:

- LMs *tend* to be structurally diffuse (vs. centrally organized), yet have a degree of coherence and continuity that contrasts them with fads or trends.
- LMs *tend* to target cultural practices and codes (vs. formal/political institutions).

The following list briefly introduces examples of LMs we use to illustrate the points above, chosen for their variety of structure, goals, tactics, and general political ideologies/orientations:

- *Voluntary simplicity*: reducing material possessions for psychological, social, and environmental reasons.
- *Social responsibility*: promoting environmental and social sustainability through ethical consumption (e.g., fair trade) and daily habits.
- *Virginity pledge*: sexual abstinence movement aimed at both personal spiritual fulfillment and challenging ‘hookup’ and ‘pornographic’ culture.
- *Quiverfull*: conservative Christian pronatalist movement that ‘trust the Lord’ to determine (typically large) family size.
- *Promise Keepers*: conservative Christian movement of men committed to ‘changing the world’ by being spiritual leaders of their families.
- *Locavore*: eating locally produced foods to support local economies and environmental sustainability.
- *Slow food*: links pleasurable eating and good food to building community and environmental sustainability.
- *Veganism/Vegetarianism*: eliminating animal products from one’s diet to minimize animal suffering and/or environmental destruction.
- *Green living*: living ‘lightly on the planet’ by recycling and conserving energy and water.

Lifestyle Movement Tactics – Participation – Targets

While social movement scholars working in the CP tradition typically conceptualize movement participation and tactics in terms of public protest directed toward the state or other power structures, more recently some have begun to focus on collective actions that are aimed more directly at values expression (Dalton, 1994), discursive politics (Katzenstein, 1995), and cultural-performative forms of resistance (Staggenborg & Taylor, 2005; Van Dyke *et al.*, 2004). Compared to overtly political movements, participation in LMs is (1) relatively individualized and private, (2) ongoing rather than episodic, and (3) aimed at changing cultural and economic practices rather than targeting the state.

Individual (vs. Collective) Private (vs. Public) Action

While LM adherents occasionally express themselves collectively and may affiliate with a social change organization, most movement ‘action’ occurs individually. As compared to collective public action, LMs involve integrating movement values into relatively private individual action, focusing on the mundane aspects of daily living: consumption habits, leisure activities, eating and cooking, modes of dress, money management, transportation/travel, and water and energy consumption. Locavores – people who intentionally seek out and buy locally produced food at farmers’ markets and food co-ops – do not shop for groceries together, en masse. They see their individual actions as having potential to bolster local economies and gradually shift food production practices on a larger scale (Hinrichs, 2003). As Ostrom (2009, p. 117) reports from her study of community-supported agriculture, proponents avoid ‘conventional protests or the political process’ in favor of ‘refashioning their daily eating, cooking, and shopping routines around the seasonal output of local agroecosystems.’ Further, ‘Many participants in the movement are convinced that by reorienting their everyday habits and lifestyles in accordance with their values they can effect change at a wider level’ (Ostrom, 2009, p. 117).

While many types of movements advocate lifestyle changes as part of a larger strategy (e.g., women’s, black power, environmental, and queer movements), participants in LMs seek social change *primarily* via individual lifestyle change. The voluntary simplicity movement advocates reducing overall material consumption by fixing broken items, reusing old items, and ‘doing without’ in order to reduce environmental burdens. These actions serve to defy a culture of materialism, and free up financial resources to work less, spend more time with family, and volunteer (Elgin, 1993 [1981]; Doherty & Etzioni, 2003). The social responsibility movement encourages participants to ‘vote’ with their dollars, buying from socially responsible companies (and boycotting others), supporting locally owned businesses, purchasing ‘fair trade’ products, and making socially responsible investments (Jones, 2002). One organization, Center for a New American Dream, offers a wallet card with socially responsible shopping tips and the mantra ‘Every dollar I spend is a statement about the kind of world I want and the quality of life I value.’ As they act individually, *participants subjectively understand their individual actions as having an impact beyond their personal lives*, believing in both the power of their individual action and the power of non-coordinated collective action.

Some LMs focus exclusively on social or external benefits – such as the social responsibility movement, asserting that global poverty can be reduced through buying ‘fairly traded’ products – while most highlight potential external *and personal* benefits of lifestyle action. For example, the Quiverfull movement – an evangelical Christian movement whose followers eschew birth control – advocates large families, not simply for parental fulfillment, but rather as a tactic of spreading Christian doctrine, as suggested in Scott’s (2004) book *Birthing God’s Mighty Warriors*. This focus on creating *social change* distinguishes LMs from more insular subcultures such as goth, polyamor-y/swingers, and nudists who focus on creating a cultural space where they can freely express themselves. While such groups certainly challenge cultural norms, their intention is less to change society than to be left alone to their leisure pursuits (Muggleton, 2000). Similarly, a religious sect or movement with an emphasis on proselytizing but little subjectively understood outward-focused goals of change differs from the lifestyle challenge offered by groups such as Quiverfull, Promise Keepers, and virginity pledgers.

Cultural (vs. Political) Targets

While participants in CP target the state or its representatives, LMs *tend* to target cultural codes and individual practices. Snow (2004) suggests that movements challenge ‘authority structures’ that include *cultural* authorities and norms. Virginity pledgers may focus on individual abstention, but they still understand their personal choices as part of a collective challenge against a perceived ‘hookup’ culture that encourages casual sex. Pledge organization Silver Ring Thing aims to ‘reverse the moral decay of [...] youth culture’ and to ‘create a culture shift in America where abstinence becomes the norm again rather than the exception’ (Haenfler, 2010, p. 12). Similarly, Williams (2001, p. 3) notes that movements such as Promise Keepers, rather than engaging in an explicit ‘political reform agenda,’ are instead ‘determined to change society by altering fundamentally the way in which lives are lived,’ with adherents believing that ‘change happens through the transformation of the hearts and minds of individuals, who in turn create different relationships, that in turn help change other persons.’ Likewise, in the vegetarian movement the dominant strategy for reducing animal suffering is not collective political action but ‘collective individual improvement’ (Maurer, 2002, p. 115); in contrast, the broader animal rights movement frequently issues specific policy demands via collective public action.

Ongoing (vs. Episodic) Participation

Social movements scholars have long identified ‘cycles of protest,’ demonstrating that protest activity fluctuates, with movement participation growing and declining based, in part, on the political opportunities present (Tarrow, 1998). While collective action in the public sphere is episodic for most social movement participants (e.g., election cycles), LMs encourage participants to integrate movement values into a holistic way of life, creating a more perpetual obligation toward movement action. Even though the Promise Keepers hold periodic collective rallies, the group’s primary mission encourages men to consistently be better fathers and husbands (Williams, 2001). Food-related LMs (e.g., slow food, locavore, and vegetarianism) address how one acquires, prepares, and eats food *for every meal* (Ostrom, 2009), and the ‘green living’ movement addresses almost all daily

behaviors (e.g., water and energy consumption, buying habits, transportation, and food). Such ongoing actions are sustainable because they are relatively low cost, exposing participants to minimal financial, legal, or physical risks. For participants wary of CP, they provide less confrontational and more accessible opportunities to pursue social change. While participation in LMs will ebb and flow, the opportunities for current adherents to act remain, regardless of political trends.

Identity Work in Lifestyle Movements

Under the CP and NSM paradigms, scholars typically consider *collective*, rather than *personal*, identity. Organizers use collective identity – ‘an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution’ (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p. 285) – to construct grievances, foster commitment, demarcate symbolic movement boundaries, and sustain commitment between protest cycles (Taylor, 1989; Gamson, 1997; Staggenborg & Taylor, 2005). However, personal identity is likewise significant as participants reconcile their own identity with that of the movement (Reger *et al.*, 2008). The relationship between collective and personal identity is particularly important to LMs. In LMs, rather than simply being linked to an organization’s collective identity for purposes of political mobilization, personal identity becomes a site of social change in and of itself as adherents engage in identity work directed at crafting personal integrity and authenticity (Grigsby, 2004).

As in CP, collective identity serves several functions in LMs, including creating a sense of meaning and ‘we-ness,’ and mobilizing participation. However, since lifestyle action is individualized and privatized instead of collective and public, building strong personal connections between participants is not nearly as likely (nor possibly important) for LMs. While some LMs may not exhibit a strong collective identity, movement adherents participate in an ‘imagined community’ consisted of those they see and hear about taking similar action. Vegetarians, for example, often understand that while they may only experience their own actions and commitment, many others like them are taking similar actions resulting in a significant collective result (Maurer, 2002). In this way, collective identity provides an additional layer of meaning to individual action by connecting individuals to something greater than themselves (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Granted, the collective identity may be relatively weak (i.e., individuals do not strongly identify with the identity or follow through with its proscribed duties); even the ‘name’ of the movement may be contested (as in voluntary simplicity) or virtually nonexistent (as in social responsibility).² Nevertheless, in the absence of direct connections to organizations or other adherents, collective identity, fostered by the various structures outlined below, plays an important role in giving LMs their ‘movementness.’

Identity as a Site of Social Change (vs. Resource to be Mobilized)

More importantly for LMs, collective identity is a resource and reference point for individuals as they craft morally coherent and meaningful *personal* identities. While teasing apart collective identity and personal identity is difficult in any social movement, the distinction between a participant’s identification with a group (i.e., collective identity) and one’s perceived character traits (i.e., personal identity) (Polletta & Jasper, 2001) becomes especially muddy as LMs encourage participants to continually integrate

movement goals into multiple aspects of daily life, the same daily activities that contribute to a morally coherent sense of self.

Participants in LMs see their involvement as a quest for personal ‘integrity’ and ‘authenticity,’ adhering to some version of the premise that a human being is a sum total of her/his daily choices. Authors of popular voluntary simplicity books assert that ‘the development of the authentic personality is vital to experiencing life fully’ (Andrews, 1997, p. 69) and that ‘act[ing] in your day-to-day life in a way consistent with your values and purpose’ leads to a sense of ‘wholeness and integrity’ (Dominguez & Robin, 1992, p. 155). Proponents of the animal rights movement, a movement that fuses lifestyle action and CP, ‘struggle to bring their lifestyles in line with their beliefs’ and see the movement as ‘not simply an isolated set of ideas or philosophical beliefs’ but entailing ‘a transformation of their daily lives’ (Herzog, 1993, p. 110).

As such, the more one engages in actions that reflect deeply held values, the more personal integrity one feels. When indicating their motivations for action from a list of 21 statements, members of social responsibility organization Green America indicated the strongest support for ‘I wanted my actions to support my values more closely’ (Jones, 2002, p. 141). This process of aligning values and daily action involves ‘discursive consciousness’ (Giddens, 1984) where actors increase the intentionality of their daily actions through introspection and/or research. As each of these cases demonstrates, goals of personal integrity, of crafting a ‘pure’ identity, may motivate action more than the resulting social change.

Identity Work

Identity work, especially the quest for personal integrity, propels participants in LMs to action in lieu of more traditional forms of collective organizing (meetings, protests). One of the conundrums of social movement participation is the free-rider problem (Olson, 1965). In the case of the social responsibility movement, why pay more for organic food, fair trade coffee, or a hybrid car if your action makes almost no difference in the large-scale outcome of the problem (whether that be the plight of world coffee farmers or global climate change) and any change that occurs will likely occur whether you participate or not? For LMs especially, *identities* motivate adherents to action (see Haenfler, 2004). Virginity pledgers see certain sexual expressions as contradictory to the pledge identity; Bearman and Brückner (2001, p. 859) suggest, ‘The pledge works because it is embedded in an identity movement.’ Anticipating others’ responses, real or imagined, and internalizing judgment from the LM’s ‘generalized other,’ adherents consider their options and adjust their actions accordingly (Mead, 1934).

Grigsby (2004, p. 20) describes participants in voluntary simplicity support groups as engaging in moral identity work, or efforts to define themselves as ‘worthwhile and good people’ – forming an oppositional identity to those who are overly materialistic and not concerned with the well-being of others or the planet. Thus, for LMs in particular, movement participation becomes an avenue for constructing a desirable self (Teske, 1997). Micromanaging daily choices based on values embedded in a collective identity is typical of LMs. Success means *personal*, moral integrity, *often regardless of collective impact*, i.e., collective success. As one vegan respondent said, ‘On a personal level, after two years of veganism, I can honestly say that I feel good knowing that I can go through my life, my

entire day, without imposing any cruelty on animals in any way' (Herzog, 1993, p. 111). Likewise, failure is a *personal*, moral failure to live up to individual and movement ideals.

Lifestyle Movement Structure

In the broadest sense, the structure of a social movement includes processes that provide ideological boundaries, disseminate movement ideology, strategically motivate and coordinate collective action, and foster some degree of continuity. The CP approach emphasizes the central role that SMOs play in 'structuring' a movement. This approach has serious limitations for studying LMs because most participants have limited contact with such organizations. Much of the structure of LMs, including movement ideology and authority, *tends* to emerge from a diffuse discursive field rather than in the course of a highly organized campaign (although there are exceptions such as Promise Keepers). However, while LMs have a lesser degree of organization than many commonly studied movements, they have a degree of long-term continuity and stability that differentiates them from the more spontaneous forms of collective behavior such as fads, crazes, and panics. Lifestyle movement structure emerges from (1) informal social networks, (2) cultural entrepreneurs, and (3) via connections to formal organizations, including lifestyle movement organizations (LMOs), nonprofits, and SMOs (see Cherry, 2006).

Informal Networks (vs. Bureaucratic Movement Organizations)

Similar to mainstream lifestyles, alternative lifestyles spread through informal social networks, rituals, and events that infuse meaning and significance upon consumption patterns and other daily habits. Participants in LMs often learn about the movement from friends or family and receive new ideas and continued support from loose social networks rather than via an SMO. For example, 'as each vegetarian becomes more grounded in the vegetarian ethic, he or she is expected to become an increasingly powerful resource for attracting and motivating others' (Maurer, 2002, p. 115).

More specifically, locavores meet and share ideas at food co-ops, community gardens, farmers markets, or in their religious communities. Just as friends 'show off' their stylish purchases, participants in the social responsibility movement 'model' their fair trade coffee, vegetarian cooking, and bicycles as socially responsible and environmentally friendly alternatives (Jones, 2002). For some voluntary simplifiers, informal groups called 'simplicity circles' act as a place to support each other in their lifestyle choices (Grigsby, 2004). For each of these movements, informal social networks contribute to an ongoing discourse that serves as the 'structure' in lieu of a formal SMO.

Alternative media outlets such as magazines, websites, blogs, Facebook pages, YouTube videos, and Twitter feeds play an important role in facilitating LMs' informal structure, providing a virtual space for adherents to interact. Virginity pledge networks, for example, post YouTube videos extolling the benefits of abstinence (and viewers comment, adding to the conversation), maintain and interact via Facebook pages, and print abstinence-focused magazines such as *Just for Girls* and *Just for Guys* (Haenfler, 2010). Such media also advertise products amenable to movement goals, providing further opportunities for action; the Green America website offers links to socially responsible products with a 'green gift' guide. Collectively, these media forums contribute to

movement structure by fostering virtual/print ‘meeting spaces’ in effect substituting for organizational meetings and mobilization and facilitating discussions around *action*.

Cultural Entrepreneurs (vs. Formal Leaders)

While LMs often do not have *formal* leaders, individual ‘cultural entrepreneurs’ emerge as movement ‘authorities’ by producing popular books, audio recordings, newsletters, magazines, or documentaries. Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin started one of the first US voluntary simplicity organizations, the New Road Map Foundation in 1984, based on sales of their audiotape series on gaining ‘financial independence’ by reducing consumption – followed in 1992 by the best-selling book, *Your Money or Your Life*. The Quiverfull movement owes its growth to Mary Pride’s book *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality* and the resulting discussions led by pastors and laypeople (Joyce, 2009). These leaders are cultural entrepreneurs in that they have gained a following based on their individual charismatic writings and lectures rather than through leadership in an SMO. Such authors’ writings and speaking engagements provide ideological structure and boundaries to diffuse lifestyle movements, becoming part of the movement’s cultural ‘toolkit.’

Lifestyle Movement Organizations

Finally, while most LM adherents may never belong to or participate in a movement organization, LMOs, nonprofits, and businesses nevertheless structure these LMs as they organize and groom leaders, build a collective identity, refine movement ideology, organize public events and social networks, and mobilize adherents to spread movement ideology. For example, virginity pledge organizations such as the Silver Ring Thing host Facebook pages on which young people who may have never been to a pledge event can still interact and find community, and Slow Food USA’s website connects viewers to local slow food chapters (Parkins & Craig, 2006). LMOs attempt to mobilize lifestyles toward social goals, seeking to convert nonadherents to adherents and adherents to participants.

One way LMOs structure an LM is by reaching out to the public with suggestions for lifestyle action. The UK-based Vegetarian Society offers fact sheets on the environmental costs and animal harm of meat production along with recipes to ease the transition to a meat-free diet. Within the voluntary simplicity movement, the Center for a New American Dream employs a paid professional staff, manages a membership list of between 5000 and 10,000 members, and creates and distributes strategically crafted ideological messages to its members and to the mainstream media. Campaigns such as ‘Simplify the Holidays’ ‘sell’ voluntary simplicity in a mainstream, socially palatable manner, and encourage those who already take private, lifestyle action to become what could be called *lifestyle activists* – spreading movement ideology through their informal social networks (e.g., emails, starting a study group) and through public advocacy (e.g., passing out brochures, letters to editor, and organizing a ‘Buy Nothing Day’ event).

LMOs can also structure movement discourse by deciding which leaders get to speak for the movement. In 2001, voluntary simplicity leaders created The Simplicity Forum as a ‘think tank’ for voluntary simplicity movement (VSM) cultural entrepreneurs. By excluding authors who do not assert the importance of social justice and environmental factors in their call to ‘live simply,’ VS leaders have more systematically set ideological boundaries, intentionally shaping the movement’s structure (Johnson, 2004). Similarly, in

the vegetarian movement, national organizations articulate movement ideology and provide structure for the emergence of a collective identity (Maurer, 2002).

In consumption-based lifestyle movements, businesses and independent certifiers often achieve positions of authority, shaping movement structure and ideology. In the social responsibility movement (and within the larger context of political consumerism), retailers (e.g., natural food stores, fair trade outlets), manufacturers, and service providers (e.g., carbon offset companies) play a central role in defining what is ‘desirable’ (in this case, ‘socially responsible’). Nonprofit organizations also act as official arbiters of movement values. These organizations can certify products as ‘fair trade,’ ‘sustainably harvested,’ or ‘organic,’ thereby distinguishing which products are ‘actually’ socially responsible. Ideological parameters and behavioral expectations for an LM are negotiated within a diffuse discursive field shaped by peers, cultural entrepreneurs, economic organizations, and formal LMOs – but this mix of actors differs from movement to movement.

The Relationship between Lifestyle Movements, Social Movements, and Politics

Thus far, we have sought to distinguish LMs from more centralized, manifestly political movements, indicating that LMs form around diffuse networks and an ongoing discourse rather than formal SMOs. We have demonstrated that LMs encourage individualized participation in the private sphere rather than collective action in the public sphere, seeking to create cultural alternatives. Yet, LMs and more manifestly political social movements overlap; indeed, they are often inextricably linked, as movement organizations regularly promote both lifestyle and collective action, and adherents of LMs occasionally engage in electoral and contentious politics. Thus, we explore the links between LMs and (1) broad social movements and specific SMOs, (2) CP, and (3) conventional politics.

Lifestyle Movements and Social Movements

LMs often have strong relationships with broader social movements and their respective movement organizations. For example, Quiverfull, Promise Keepers, and virginity pledgers could be considered lifestyle ‘wings’ of the broader conservative Christian movement. Green living, voluntary simplicity, slow food, and social responsibility emerged from and contribute to the environmental and social justice movements (among others). As LM identities tend to be customizable and fluid, they often overlap with other social change-oriented identities, potentially connecting adherents to a variety of other causes. Thus, a vegetarian may connect with an animal rights group; Herzog (1993, p. 111) found that in some cases, ‘vegetarianism led to an involvement in animal protection [movements].’ In addition to these broad relationships, SMOs specifically have several important effects on LMs. First, SMOs explicitly link lifestyle action to social change. LMs and more centralized, overtly political movements often arise from the same discursive field, a sort of hybrid movement such as the environmental movement, with significant focus on both CP and lifestyle action. Many environmental SMOs encourage reducing one’s carbon footprint by consciously making different lifestyle choices, illustrating the connections between the ‘green’ lifestyle and the movement’s more political, protest-oriented branches. For example, members of the Sierra Club can join email lists ranging from ‘The Green Life,’ offering ‘daily tips for living well and doing good’ to ‘RAW’ – ‘dispatches from the front lines of the environmental movement.’

Second, along with LMOs, SMOs promote and inspire *new* ideas for daily action that filter into the LM discourse. As part of their ‘Stand for Christmas’ campaign, Focus on the Family, a conservative Christian organization, encourages consumers to shop only at ‘Christmas friendly’ retailers that employ ‘Merry Christmas’ in their stores rather than the perceived secular ‘Happy holidays’ (Barna, 2008). The Audubon Society, which promotes conservation through education and advocacy, has a free, printable wallet card rating the environmental impact of varieties of seafood; the idea is a portable, easily understood guide for consumers to make effective lifestyle choices. While such campaigns target members of these organizations, the ideas transcend any one SMO.

Lifestyle Movements and Contentious Politics

Just as SMOs provide LMs with resources, ideas, and inspiration, participants in LMs also sometimes engage in CP. LMs such as voluntary simplicity and social responsibility likely serve as *collective action reservoirs*, pools of potential participants whose collective value identities make them an ideal ‘reserve guard’ ready to periodically support particular protest events and mobilizations. The women’s movement’s collective action reservoir includes ‘lifestyle feminists,’ those who neither claim membership in movement organizations nor actively participate in protest politics, yet support feminist principles, perhaps by boycotting sexist media, subverting dominant beauty norms, refusing to marry, and avoiding sexist, racist, and homophobic language. Yet, by virtue of their orientation to a value identity expressed in daily life, and their loose affiliation with a collective identity, they can periodically be called to action around a common purpose, for example, in demanding government funds for women’s health clinics or marching in a ‘Take Back the Night’ rally against sexual violence. The divide between an LM participant and an activist engaged in CP is not absolute; rather, LM participants may be occasional/temporary activists, and CP activists may incorporate lifestyle actions into their repertoires. Still, an LM participant is oriented toward individual efforts at cultural change, driven especially by a desire to live out a moral identity or code. Relatively speaking, a social movement activist engages in collective action, typically in the context of a more organized group such as an SMO, driven by the express goal of changing public policy.

Similarly, LMs may serve as refuges in times of unfavorable political opportunity, acting as abeyance structures until opportunities improve (Rupp & Taylor, 1987; Taylor, 1989). Some LM participants come to the cause without previous connection to (or interest in) CP, but others may be activists discouraged by political setbacks or burned out from social change work. When *political* movements wane, entering abeyance, LMs endure, and when political activists drop out (temporarily or permanently) they may continue taking action in their daily lives. Some participants in the social responsibility movement had been activists but became disillusioned with politics, turning instead to lifestyle action as a means of change (Jones, 2002).³ For example, global justice and democracy activists of the late 1990s and early 2000s in the USA saw their political opportunities diminish with the election of George W. Bush, the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet, it is likely that even as protest activity cooled, activists continued to boycott corporations with the most egregious environmental/human rights records and boycott fairly traded goods. Unlike previous theorists who often locate abeyance structures in relatively small, solitary groups, we propose that LMs may be *broader* than their related political movements. Serving as

abeyance structures, LMs maintain a collective identity that nurtures participants' sense 'of mission and moral purpose' even if outside the political realm (Taylor, 1989, p. 762). When political opportunities arise and a new protest cycle commences, some LM participants may reengage with CP.

Lifestyle Movements and Conventional Politics

Finally, as we've shown, LMs generally do not explicitly target the state, yet such movements *may* serve as a bridge to direct involvement in more conventional politics. As Tuğal (2001, p. 452) notes, 'daily conduct can be part and parcel of political struggles.' Virginité pledgers, Promise Keepers, Quiverfull, and other ostensibly apolitical religious groups seek to change culture via changing adherents' lifestyles and, in nurturing conservative values and networks, may produce foot soldiers for the conservative *political* movement. Green America's website includes information about 'green' dry-cleaning alongside a campaign to persuade Congressional leaders to hold the nuclear industry accountable for the risks of nuclear power. Tips on 'greening' one's wedding coexist with guides on organizing 'No Sweatshop' campaigns, and fair trade coffee websites advocate lobbying for 'fair trade' legislation. In an age of online politics and political action, LM adherents may provide fertile ground for virtual mobilization, becoming occasional point-and-click 'activists' as they sign online petitions, send donations, and email political leaders on behalf of organizations. Socially responsible phone company CREDO offers 30 'free speech minutes' each month, at no cost, for subscribers to lobby government officials regarding pressing legislation. Thus, a lifestyle choice (phone service) can serve as a bridge to conventional political involvement. In this case, the consumer can become a citizen consumer as choices made in the economic sphere facilitate action in the political sphere.

Conclusions

In this paper, we respond to scholars' call to expand theories of social movements beyond the contentious politics paradigm, seeking to develop an alternative – lifestyle movements – meant to describe the characteristics of movements that do not neatly fit the organizational/political theories available. To review, lifestyle movements are loosely bound collectivities in which participants advocate lifestyle change as a primary means to social change, politicizing daily life while pursuing morally coherent 'authentic' identities. They span the political spectrum and are not confined to one particular historical era. We think the LM framework should prove useful in analyses of many other groups: anarchists and intentional communities; global justice and fair trade movements; political punk and hip-hop; vegetarianism, veganism, and animal rights; 'craftivism,' which connects handicrafts to social justice; 'healthy livers' and temperance movements; religious revival movements; advocates of 'random acts of kindness' and branches of the environmental, feminist, and queer movements – wherever people actively spread a 'way of life' in service to larger social change goals.

As we have shown, LMs encourage adherents to take action in their daily lives, an aspect of movements that demands further study. Indeed, while the vast majority of people will never engage in civil disobedience or even symbolic demonstration, many more consider the impacts that their daily choices have on their social world. They subjectively

understand their choices as part of larger efforts toward social change. Self-actualization and social transformation overlap; lifestyle politics and the politics of personal identity are important components of movements. Giddens (1991, pp. 214–215) distinguishes between emancipatory politics – seeking to liberate people from oppressive, hierarchical constraints – and life politics, a politics of self-actualization asking ‘how should we live’ a moral life. ‘While emancipatory politics is a politics of life chances, life politics is a politics of lifestyle [and] life decisions.’ In this context, LMs assert themselves as moral vehicles where ‘life politics’ can become part of a collective challenge as participants seek to ‘be the change they wish to see in the world.’ Lifestyle action can be an exercise in prefigurative politics – prefiguring on a small, manageable scale more expansive collective challenges – that could be enacted if political opportunities become more favorable.

LMs do not primarily rest on formal organizations, instead relying on cultural entrepreneurs, social networks, and shared media to shape an ongoing movement discourse and provide some degree of ‘structure.’ These ‘communities of meaning’ provide ideological frameworks, action repertoires for creating ‘authentic’ lifestyles, and models for personally sustainable, long-term social action. In lieu of formal organization, many LMs create ‘a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly’ (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p. 285). This loose collective identity supports the personal identity work central to LMs, as participants undertake a perpetual personal quest for integrity, meaning, and authenticity. Collective identity is a reference point available to adherents as they consider various personal choices (Haenfler, 2004). It sustains commitment or ‘an individual’s identification with a collectivity that leads to instrumental, affective, and moral attachments that lead to investments in movement lines of activity’ (Hunt & Benford, 2004, p. 440). Participants in LMs gain personal satisfaction in living out value identities, in living a life in line with their personal moral values. As Melucci writes, ‘To an increasing degree, problems of individual identity and collective action become meshed together; the solidarity of the group is inseparable from the personal quest’ (1996, p. 115). In LMs, the self, rather than the streets, becomes the site of social change.

While the mobilization of lifestyle has long coexisted with social movements (e.g., Gandhi’s khadi campaign, consumer boycotts in the anti-apartheid movement), LMs feature prominently in postindustrial societies for many of the same reasons used to explain the emergence of NSMs such as the rise of postmaterialist values (Inglehart, 1990). However, LMs are in a sense *newer* than typically studied NSMs, that is, LMs are more individualized and more deeply infused with *personal* identity work. Individualistic, consumer-oriented societies emphasize the importance of lifestyle in identity construction, encouraging people to individualize the self by altering daily habits (especially consumption). Just as people ‘shop’ for and attempt to personalize their style, hobbies, and religious/spiritual identities, so too do they customize their involvement in social change. Reflective of Beck’s ‘individualization thesis,’ in which self-reflexive individuals are increasingly responsible for directing their own lives, individuals must navigate a plurality of behavioral guidelines and ‘import them into their biographies through their own actions’ (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 2). In this context, where individuals feel both responsible for and empowered in dealing with social problems (Connolly & Prothero, 2008), LMs can serve as blueprints for the construction of lifestyles oriented toward authentic identities and social change.

Engagement in LMs reflects a broader shift in politics as ‘personal identity is replacing collective identity as the basis for contemporary political engagement’ (Bennett, 1998, p. 755). Beck (1997, p. 98) warns against ‘*the equation of politics and state*, politics and the political system,’ seeing ‘subpolitics’ as representing the ‘struggle for a new dimension of politics’ (p. 101), less institutionalized and built upon individual decisions given a political frame. New communication technologies offer individuals greater access to information (e.g., ideologies and opportunities for *action*), ability to share ideas and actions, and opportunities to connect with others with little formal obligation, giving them a subjective feeling of empowerment. Perhaps some citizens are not disengaging from politics but rather engaging in a ‘newer,’ more personalized form of social change. It is the *individual’s* responsibility to craft a different world (loosely connected to others doing likewise) rather than solely the domain of the state or even traditional social movements.

Scholars and activists of LMs may be tempted to dismiss LMs as somehow trivial when compared to protest action aimed at altering state policy or enacting structural change. While participants often take lifestyle actions perceiving them as effective (Shah *et al.*, 2007), critics worry that individually oriented action may supplant more effective collective action targeted at social institutions, substituting (largely ineffective) individual responses to collective threats (Maniates, 2001; Szasz, 2007). Evaluating the ‘effectiveness’ or outcomes of LMs is beyond the scope of this paper. Without further research, there is no easy way to know the degree to which people engage in LMs *instead of*, *in addition to*, or *in the context of* manifestly political movements. While ‘purifying’ the social and environmental ‘sins’ from one’s lifestyle might decrease the motivation for activism, Snow (2004) suggests that individual-level direct and indirect action can sow the seeds of collective action. Additionally, individuals may adopt a lifestyle (such as vegetarianism and ‘downshifting’) exclusively for individual health, mental, or financial benefits while being largely unaware of the societal impacts asserted by the lifestyle movement (Chhetri *et al.*, 2009). The links between lifestyle movements, electoral politics, and protest movements need further study in addition to the social, economic, and cultural change potential of lifestyle movements.

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Notes

1. It is worth noting that even resource mobilization originators McCarthy & Zald (1977) distinguished between movements, or preferences for change, and social movement *organizations* that typically carried out a movement’s goals.
2. While Jones’ (2002) survey of Green America (formerly Co-op America) members revealed that 77% of respondents consider themselves part of a ‘social responsibility movement,’ that phrase is rarely mentioned in movement discourse.

3. A similar profile has been reported for participants in political consumerism who tend to be distrustful of formal political institutions (Zijderveld, 2000; Stolle *et al.*, 2005) as well as an even broader trend toward the adoption of lifestyle-based solutions to the perception of broken or nonresponsive political systems (Eliasoph, 1998).

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