

It is hard to make everything to perfection in this world, especially because there is no such thing. It is interesting to think about where striving for perfection originates. Perfection seems to come from the roots of people's hopes and desires, toying with the mind, tickling and teasing it. The mind will then start brainstorming ways to make these hopes possible. Luckily, with the tool of collaboration people may just be able to make any of these things possible. I was very interested in looking at the decisions people make as individuals and as groups to make what they imagine for our world possible. It starts by quitting past actions and starting new ones, which is a lot of what I learned this past semester at Oxbow. It was very important to me to incorporate important information that had been divulged to me this year that also provided me with important realizations. I have realized that with simple actions in my own day-to-day life it is very possible to contribute to greater causes that are in need of the most attention. It has also been made clear that people with a good education and the right tools can be helped to develop the ability to stand up for the same causes. So in this new reality I have found, and as I dive deeper in what it has to offer, I choose to pose the question: if everyone took action against corruption, would there be hope for our society?

During the period of time before Final Projects was assigned here at Oxbow I had no idea what area of research my project was going to be focused on. Then one day by a stroke of luck I stumbled upon something that would give me the inspiration I needed. My favorite singer Kris Allen had just come out with his new single called "The Vision of Love." The same day the music video was released I proceeded to watch it. His music video shows acts of kindness, such as when a young man stands up for another boy being bullied. This video embodies the hope that his lyrics desire for people to be able to help one another in their times of need. In this song he dares to ask, "Will we stand for the vision of love?" Which then brought me to my next question: would the general population stand up for each other during our times of need? Similar questions in essence, but I was thinking on a totally different scale. Kris Allen's song seems to be talking more about the grief imposed on individuals by different social issues that are related to physical and mental bullying that can result in insecurities. My question has more to do with the general population being bullied by those in power, ostracized and kept in the dark. Kris's video strikes close to home because those problems are happening around us all the time and within close proximity. Yet the fact of the matter is there are so many things going on in the political and economical world that have an even closer effect on us than we even know. Most of the general population chooses to stay ignorant to these problems. I chose to stop being that way after I came to Oxbow.

Whether my teachers knew it or not, they jump-started my research for this project early in the semester. The first book we read during my time here was Walden: and "Civil Disobedience." Henry David Thoreau seems to have had a lot figured out. The book is filled with his passion of the simple lifestyle. All he needs is the shelter in which he resides, some clothes, food — in basic terms, only the essentials. He finds it a waste of his time to be concerned and involved with the superfluous. Thoreau wrote, "I speak understandingly on this subject, for I have made myself acquainted with it both theoretically and practically. With a little more wit we might use these materials so as to become richer than the richest now are, and make our civilization a blessing." He makes a convincing argument because now I do not understand why any other people have the habits they currently practice either. His strategy of just being concerned with the things you know you really need for your day-to-day life is genius in so many ways. By just doing this, it could probably solve some of our environmental problems in one big swoop. It would be a very good way to help our growing consumption and waste

problems. A lot of our environmental problems can be solved with simple answers, as I learned in my science class this semester. One day we did an exercise where we told our teacher Lenora all of the problems with the current day food system and she would write them down on the board. After, she would ask us for the solutions to these particular problems. Once we came up with a solution, she would erase and replace the problem with its respective solution. It took us maybe about a half an hour to discuss and find solutions. If it only took us this long to figure out how to fix the food system — with only sixteen of us — imagine what the world could accomplish. Therefore I decided to look into the group decision making process, and what can then be achieved by it.

Group action can be one of the best ways to start social and economic reform movements that will create fast results. People should not be afraid to get involved with issues they find important because time is of the essence. It seems as though group action is being held off because people feel the need to rely on finding a leader to start a movement. They are too scared to spearhead something on their own because of the lingering worry of failure. A wise writer named James Surowiecki wrote, “under the right circumstances, groups are remarkably intelligent, and are often smarter than the smartest people in them. Groups do not need to be dominated by exceptionally intelligent people in order to be smart.” I feel he had a very good point here because people should not shy away from matters that seem important because of intimidation; every one’s well thought out opinion is a valuable one. With a democratic atmosphere that a group can provide, it gives each member a sense of involvement. This sense of involvement can also help the group reach higher spirits to sustain them through their endeavors to support a certain cause. Another beneficial aspect of group action is that you have more resources available to you rather than if you were to work on your own.

Like any other strategies though, there are flaws to group action and decision making. One of the cons can be that it is slow. Sometimes, depending on the cause that is being fought for, it can be slower trying to accomplish things in a large group as opposed to little tasks that can be accomplished by the individual. Another problem that affects the speed and the buoyancy of the plan is that the initial ideals and goals can be watered down because of the fact that so many compromises had to be made and conditions changed. This is due to the fact many people think that their opinions are the right ones, and while they are viable, lines have to be smudged in order to reach a final decision that everyone can agree on. Lastly, a problem with group decision making is that individuals can feel unhappy about the final consensus and the plan that will be carried out because it is not the same as their original idea.

There are also harsh critics of this method. One of them is an English historian named Thomas Carlyle who wrote, “I do not believe in the collective wisdom of individual ignorance.” It is a sad thing to say that I know he might be right. I have learned a lot about what people in my own country are turning a blind eye to recently that can support his accusations about people and their ignorance. One example is that people in America are ignoring the fact that they are losing their sense to question things left and right, which is by far limiting their potential knowledge. Another critic includes one of my new favorite writers Henry David Thoreau. On the subject matter he wrote, “The mass never comes up to the standard of its best member, but on the contrary degrades itself to a level with the lowest.” Although I agree with a lot of Thoreau’s writing that I have read, I do not think we will ever know of the potential of coalitions if we do not try. Also by using the right methods, we can probably turn that ignorance Carlyle wrote about into a proper base of knowledge and resources that can help the fights become a little bit easier to win.

There are a lot of things we can do to make sure we have coalitions that can succeed. First off, and maybe the most important step, is to make sure that everyone is getting a good education. It is very important for everybody to know and understand what they support and why. I feel like most people go about their lives not bothering to see all the good and the bad of what they support. Decisions made seem to be based off a popular consensus and whoever supports something that might be different is ignored. It is similar to what Gene Sharp writes about, and his beliefs that the big power structures only rely on their subjects' obedience and that they have methods and means in which to encourage obedience and ostracize those who do not comply. So if someone really believes in a reform movement or a figure that they support, they should have the motivation to educate themselves so they can then make educated statements and contributions. This can most likely be achieved through forms of popular education and having better support systems for the schools alive today. One of the most important things adults can do, although it may sound redundant, is to educate the youth. The youth holds all of the power for our world in the future, and their visions will become our new world. So if we are teaching the children to heavily rely on consumerism and be passive on the issues, our society will not change much from how it is in the present day.

One other important thing to keep in mind when forming a group is to include a wide variety of people. It is as Walda Katz- Fishman and Jerome Scott co-wrote, "What this means for conscious movement-building folk is that we must focus on developing a bottom-up leadership that is broad and deep. It must include leaders from all sections of society, but concentrate on those most adversely affected." It is important to have those who are the most affected because then you really know the purpose of what you are fighting for. It is important to have the population that might not be as directly affected represented in the group as well so hopefully it forces the decision making process to be more rational. It is possible to have the people who are being currently affected at the time, or someone who knows people who are, decisions be tainted by emotion. Others might also have knowledge about tactics used by other philosophers, popular figures or related groups that could help with forming a game plan. So when the group combines all their knowledge and resources, and other groups in other places decide to do the same, we as the majority of the decision makers, could take on the banks, the big corporations, and the injustice flowing through political, economic and social systems today.

So where do all these big potential groups come from? They come from different individuals that think their causes are important enough to seek out others. It is the decision of the individual to put themselves out there and become involved in what they want to see changed. As a result, I started my process of researching the many sides of individual decision making, as far as wanting to take action against the current large bodies of unjust power goes. One of the benefits of individual decision making is that it can be quicker than acting and waiting as a group. Individuals can start projects on their own in a quick amount of time given the resources that they have. Also, as individuals, they can act based on instinct or by their own morals. The problem with this though is that people can get carried away because of emotions. Especially for those who may be paying a heftier price for wrong being done to them. Also morals are biased; therefore an individual can get carried away to a point of doing what is completely socially unacceptable to others. It can be as simple as the decision between the choices of violence and passive resistance and which one is more acceptable than the other. Yet there have been people who have acted on terms they deem to be effective and they have influenced people around the world to see them as effective as well.

Two people that I researched who were very profound in both their thoughts and their work were Gandhi and Gene Sharp. They both share the same views on passive resistance and how it is one of the most effective ways to get the institutions and large bodies of power to change their ways. During my research I found many articles that talked about how it is speculated that many of the current actions taking place, such as the Serbian movement in Otpor and the movements in Egypt, are influenced by Sharp's writings. I have not kept up very much with the current status of Egypt, but it seems as though his non-violent methods of resistance are almost fool-proof. In my mind it seems like violence will never solve problems in a mature. It was bluntly said by Sharp, "If you fight with violence, you are fighting with your enemy's best weapon, and you may be a brave but dead hero." With violence, there is only one method which is to engage in some sort of physical combat with your opponent. With passive resistance, there is such long list of methods — such as in Sharp's 198 Methods of Nonviolent Action — in which to scare your dictatorship into change. Violence is only a temporary solution and can have very costly results. It can harm both the people that are the intended targets and a lot of innocent people who might get in the way. With passive resistance, it still has the gamble that innocent people will be harmed if plans made by coalitions do not succeed, but it seems to run less of a risk. Gandhi once said, "I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent." Gandhi was one, I soon learned, that had the possibly best and the most insight into the individual and how that one person can obtain the best results in what they are fighting for.

One of Gandhi's core beliefs was that people could not have ill intentions behind whatever they fight for. He once said, "Disobedience to be civil must be sincere, respectful, restrained, never defiant, must be based on some well-understood principle, must not be capricious and, above all, must have no ill will or hatred behind it." He understood well that hatred would never really get anyone anywhere and no one would ever really succeed if they were not being the most genuine human being they could be. He believed strongly that in order for there to be no negative energy behind peoples actions, they had to find true and perfect love (*Ahimsa*), which means to put others welfare before one's own and truly care and live for the sake of others. By doing this it seems it will be easier to understand others to know what is truly going on in other peoples' lives.

When people find their true love for people and the environment, as *Ahimsa* entails, it will be easier for people to evolve as a collective group. It starts with the individuals' decision to truly understand one's self in order for the collective process to start. When the evolving process grows within an individual, it will teach them self-reliance, which will then give the person, just as Gandhi said, "self-employment, self-reliance, and self-respect." Once the individual learns to be self-reliant, they are not dependant on those with power anymore. They also have no reason to be scared of them because they have made their own success and can produce their own satisfaction. It is important for an individual not to be afraid of the big figures of society, because then they can find no weakness in that person, and then institutions will truly then be afraid. If this can be achieved among numerous individuals who can then find others with the same interest and form groups all around the world, the people in power won't know what to do with themselves. With practice the groups will learn and therefore continue to get stronger. There will be better quality seen in the movements. So it is important now to start the education process with adults who want to learn and the youth who does not know about what is going on in the world that is corrupt, so we can stand a better chance at making a society something that we want our children to grow up in. If we can at least get this far, and have a great number of both

individual action and group action working together, I think that there will be hope for our society.

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