

biofield therapy, in which light touch is used to affect the body's energy fields. *Bioelectromagnetic-based therapies* refer to practices that attempt to manipulate electromagnetic fields, such as the use of magnets, in the form of anything from magnetic jewelry to magnetic mattresses, to alleviate pain and treat certain existing medical conditions; for example, asthma or carpal tunnel.

All of these practices, and the many others that can be defined as facets of alternative health, share a tendency toward treating well-being holistically and acknowledging interconnectedness, whether that be between the mind and the body, different systems of the body, or the body and its surrounding environment. They are accepted to varying degrees, depending on the specific practice, surrounding culture, and the emerging research that will either support each practice or refute its effectiveness.

—Heidi Stevenson

*See also* Homeopathy Movement

### Further Readings

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## ALTERNATIVE MOVEMENTS

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Social movements are organized, collective efforts to promote or resist change to some aspect of society. Alternative movements are one type in which participants create their own social space and live differently, in defiance of mainstream social institutions.

Community currencies and home schooling are two notable examples. The struggle for social justice takes many forms, and some choose to exit the system and build their own alternative communities. Despite their prevalence, alternative social movements have received very little scientific attention from researchers.

In their attempt to understand the dynamics of social movements, scholars have defined and categorized movements in a variety of ways. Those with more stringent conceptions often cite five different elements: (1) collective challenge, (2) common claims and interests, (3) collective identity, (4) disruptive tactics, and (5) sustained interaction with opponents. In accord with the first three criteria, alternative social movements are collective efforts waged by people with common claims and a collective identity. Yet, alternative movements are not based on, nor do they usually involve, the use of disruptive tactics or interaction with opponents. As these are “do-it-yourself” efforts, alternative social movements do not necessarily directly protest against other groups or social institutions.

The lack of attention to alternative movements in the larger social movement literature is at least partially attributable to the fact that those adhering to strict conceptions do not consider these efforts to be social movements. Many other definitions of social movements are looser and do not stress the use of disruptive tactics, seeing these forms of collective behavior as movement activity.

Popular typologies of social movements tend to exclude alternative movements. One oft-cited scheme contains four movement types by differentiating between the amount of change sought (partial vs. total) and the locus of change (individual vs. social structure). *Alternative* movements seek partial change in individuals' behaviors or habits. Self-help movements such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Drug Abuse Resistance Education are representative of alternative movements. *Redemptive* movements seek total personal transformation and are typically religious in nature. *Reformative* movements, the most common form of social movements, attempt to change parts of existing society in some fashion. *Transformative* movements seek revolutionary change and replacement of the existing social order.

Alternative social movements are not easily placed within this typology. In the criterion concerning the amount of change sought, some alternatives seem to fit squarely in the “partial” side. The home schooling and community currency movements, for example, do not seek total change in either individuals or society. On the other hand, communes and utopian socialist communities may represent “total change” examples of these types of movements. Problems emerge when the other criterion of the typology—locus of change—is considered. These alternative efforts are more difficult to pigeonhole, as they do not really attempt to reform the existing social structure; rather, they create an alternative to it. Yet, the change is greater than at just the individual level, as whole new communities are created. Alternative social movements fall somewhere in between micro-level (individual) and macro-level (social structural) change. They are most appropriately considered as meso-level change because they build new communities.

Some have referred to alternative collective efforts to live everyday life differently as *communal* or *communitarian* social movements. These movements seek to create small-scale social systems to remedy the ills of the larger society. Participants choose to live (at least some portion of their lives) according to their own values, outside of mainstream social institutions. Unlike reformative and transformative movements, alternative social movements are not oppositional. They create their own social space to defy mainstream institutions (rather than engaging in sustained, disruptive interaction with them). The alternative versus oppositional dichotomy is an important one when considering social movements. Indeed, alternative movements may have greater impact on their participants than oppositional movements do. The alternative arrangements that are constructed make these efforts everyday social movements in which actions are history making insofar as participants are influencing the conditions and terms of their everyday lives.

Alternative social movements may also be considered as examples of new social movements because they break the boundary between politics and personal life. Major movements of the 1970s (such as the peace, environmental, feminist, gay rights, and animal

rights movements) are argued to represent a new postindustrial era in which class conflict is no longer fundamental. New social movements tend to emphasize quality of life and identity issues and result in participants living their everyday lives differently. Thus, alternative social movements are one form of new social movements.

In the United States, the growing home schooling and community currency efforts exemplify alternative social movements. Parents who have chosen to home educate their children do not tend to act in isolation. They work together through networks and organizations. By sharing teaching materials and ideas, taking their children on group field trips, and engaging in other social activities, home schooling parents build a community. Such interaction is likely to reinforce their decision to home educate and to contribute to the formation of a collective, “us” feeling.

Community currency systems are created by local activists seeking to empower the economically marginalized and build social capital. These local trading networks create an alternative currency as a medium for the exchange of services and goods. Unlike conventional bartering (where two actors trade directly with one another), local currencies expand commerce by connecting a network of people (and often businesses). Participants in these alternative local economies are intentionally building community and providing opportunities for the disadvantaged outside of the mainstream economy.

Alternative social movements span the political spectrum; they are not only waged by liberals and progressives. Parents critical of governmental control over their children’s education may seek to create their own alternatives just as those who are critical of the decline of the welfare state and the failure of the market economy to meet social needs may build local alternative solutions. The rising discontent and widespread activism witnessed in the past decade suggest that alternative social movements are likely to grow and continue to be an important avenue for the pursuit of social justice.

—Ed Collom

*See also* Community Currencies; Home Schooling

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**ALTERNATIVE PRESS**

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Alternative press, at its best, is a source of accurate, well-documented, counterhegemonic, investigative reporting and analysis that can advance social movements and serve as the basis for effective social and environmental justice activism. The term *alternative press* is most often used to refer to noncorporate social and environmental justice print and, more recently, Internet media. Other times, it refers to all sources of alternative media, including books, radio, video, film, and television. Although blogs may also serve as a source of independent information, this discussion will focus on alternative newspapers, magazines, journals, newsletters, and website media, primarily in the United States.

Accurate information and analysis are essential for ordinary people who care about and want to work

toward creating a better world. Democratic decision making can be based on nothing less. Self-serving elites, governments, and business interests have long been aware that the easiest way to control people is to restrict access to information and to shape public perspectives of reality in ways that increase power and profits for the rich and powerful. Thus, various methods of censorship and propaganda have been used separately and in combination to misinform and/or disinform (lie to) people. Yet, despite such manipulation, ordinary people have often sought or created alternative ways of investigating, analyzing, and sharing information crucial for the well-being of themselves, others, and the earth. Thus, it is not surprising that the first alternative press in the United States emerged from black, Native American, women's, and working-class movements.

To understand why independent media sources are viewed as a powerful alternative, it is necessary to examine significant characteristics of mainstream corporate-owned media. Media analysts Herbert Schiller, Benjamin Bagdikian, and Carl Jensen (founder of Project Censored) led scholars of journalism in critiquing and documenting the methods and consequences of corporate media ownership and concentration. They exposed the inherent conflict of interest between maximizing profits and informing the public. Early in the 20th century, media corporations discovered they could make more money by selling advertisements (actually selling affluent audiences to advertisers) than selling the most papers (circulation). With this change, Bagdikian documented how media businesses became uninterested in groups that had little or no disposable income.

As media companies grew larger, they found it beneficial to interlock their boards of directors with other large manufacturing corporations, thus consolidating the interests of wealthy elites. Through purchases and mergers, the mass media became concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer corporations, whose primary interest was—and still is—in maximizing profits, not informing the public. These corporations, who also dominate industries like weapons and fossil fuels, understand that if the public were fully informed about corporate and government