

Talking politics by william gamson

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The book of William Anthony Gamson entitled "Talking Politics" is a descriptive analysis and study of how political consciousness affects the contemporary culture. Social and political movements comprised by large number of average and middle class citizens have been a prominent feature of the American political scene throughout history. In his book, Gamson (1992) integrated a fine analysis of how people develop political consciousness and understanding that strongly influence social movements and social formulation of ideas.

The book specifically highlights the reasons why "so many people are quite capable of conducting informed and well reasoned discussions about political issues although most people are not inclined to become actively involved in politics" (Gamson, 1992, back cover). To find the answers he was looking for, Gamson (1992) conducted a series of interviews and discussions among small groups of working class citizens focusing on four controversial issues: affirmative action, nuclear power, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the troubles in American industry.

Using the results of the focused group discussions, Gamson (1992) analyzed how public ideas are being formulated and fragmented in society. To better understand the issues of public political consciousness that caused social movements, it is inevitable to relate the effectiveness of media in shaping people's ideas. People used to assume that public opinion is entirely based on media dialogue, thinking, and exposure of issues. However, media discourse is clearly not the only source that most people use to construct meaning on political issues.

Public constructed realities and interpretation are also based on peoples' personal experiences, accumulated ideas from the past, conscious and subconscious observation, culture definition and practices, etc. " People negotiate with media messages in complicated ways that vary from issue to issue" depending on their level of interest, importance, knowledge, and meaning these messages have for them (Gamson 1992, p. 3). Thus, the way media construct the concepts and reality of events is always unconsciously misinterpreted by people.

People's attitude in organizing rebellious collective action is always confronted by misinterpretation of events related to societal issues. Even social movement activists who base their ideas on common sense and knowledge of theories/the issue can at times become victims of false consciousness and misread the media's messages as well (Gamson, 1992). According to Gamson (1992), the story of how people construct meaning is, in fact, a series of parallel stories from which patterns emerge through juxtaposing the process on different issues on political issues.

The public tends to blend the accumulated information from popular wisdom of different topics either from media or personal experience. More often than not, common sense is in fact an expression of basic values from the working class. Gamson (1992) stated that in the context of conversations, people's topic of discussion and the level of interaction settings of particular news depend on its strength of the relationship of the community's norm.

For example, people's reaction on a particular current event sometimes depends on how this current event affects their culture. To illustrate this point, Gamson (1992) used as an example the issue on the Arab- Israeli

conflict where different religious denominations perceived the news with various treatments. Since the issue also touches religion, spiritual groups have the tendency to be defensive (Gamson, 1992).

To determine how people's political consciousness is being molded, Gamson (1992) used topics such as the troubled industry and affirmative action and observed how middle class Americans react to these issues. The apparent characteristics of issues according to Gamson (1992) depend on the meaning these issues have for 'them' (Gamson, 1992). Even if the proximity of an issue is remote to a person, its relevance to him or her is a matter of interpretation that taps people's daily experiences.

There is also a strong overall relationship between the prominence of injustice frames in media and popular discourse (Gamson, 1992). On affirmative action for example, where the injustice and racial discrimination are highly visible in media frames, the people's attempts to make sense of the issue are also equally visible. In terms of nuclear power and Arab- Israeli conflict where injustice frames have low prominence in media discourse; discussions about these issues rarely express moral offense and annoyance (Gamson, 1992).

When there is a higher threat of injustice about an event, there is also a higher probability of social or public movements. The book also explores the importance of broader cultural significance in enabling people to integrate different resources in support of the same overall framing of an issue (Gamson, 1992). In this concept, Gamson (1992) stated that it will be easier for people to connect and interpret the information from media discourse if it is related to their own experiential knowledge.

People can easily give ideas and opinion if the issue will closely affect and are related to them. The book also stresses that proximity, as it turns out, is an effective factor in promoting issue involvement(Gamson 1992). The stimulation of interest influenced by proximity will increase attention and will lead to nearby consequences. The results of Gamson's interviews show how political consciousness is formulated and how people react to the accumulated ideas Reference Gamson, W. A. (1992). Talking Politics. New York: Cambridge University Press.