

Review of the Literature on the Psychology of Social Movements: A Sociological Perspective

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Abstract: This article reviews the literature on the psychology of social movements from a sociological perspective. By integrating key psychological theories with sociological frameworks, this review explores how individual psychological factors, such as identity, emotions, and motivation, influence collective behavior in social movements. The paper also examines how social structures and cultural contexts shape these psychological processes. The review provides a comprehensive review of the interdisciplinary nature of social movements, offering insights into both individual and collective dimensions of mobilization. By bridging psychology and sociology, this article explores the driving forces behind social movements, focusing on the role of identity, motivation, emotions, and social context. Keywords: Social Movements, Psychology, Sociology, Identity, Collective Behavior, Motivation, Emotions, Social Structure. Copyright © 2024 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.	Review Paper
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INTRODUCTION

Social movements have long been a subject of scholarly inquiry, but the intersection of psychology and sociology in understanding these movements is relatively underexplored. Traditional sociological approaches to social movements focus on structures, institutions, and collective behavior, while psychological approaches emphasize individual-level factors like emotions, cognition, and identity (Snow, Soule, & Kriesi, 2004). This review aims to bridge these two fields by examining how psychological factors interact with sociological contexts to shape social movements. The primary focus is to understand how psychological processes contribute to the dynamics of collective behavior and how these processes are influenced by broader social structures.

Theoretical Background

Defining Social Movements

Social movements are defined as organized, collective efforts aimed at promoting or resisting social change (Tarrow, 1994). From a sociological standpoint, they are seen as phenomena that arise from structural inequalities, institutional barriers, or cultural shifts (Tilly, 2004). However, a psychological lens focuses on individual-level factors—particularly emotions, beliefs, and identity—that motivate participation (Jasper, 2011).

Psychological Theories in Social Movements

Psychology, particularly social and political psychology, provides frameworks for understanding why people engage in social movements. One key approach is the Relative Deprivation Theory, which suggests that individuals become motivated to act when they feel deprived relative to others (Runciman, 1966). Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is another framework, emphasizing how individuals' sense of belonging to a group shapes their participation in collective action.

Sociological Theories in Social Movements

Sociologically, movements are explained through Resource Mobilization Theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), which examines the material and organizational resources that enable movements to succeed. Political Opportunity Theory (McAdam, 1996) highlights how the external political environment affects movement success. Both approaches complement psychological perspectives by providing context on the social and structural conditions that fuel collective action.

The Psychological Dimensions of Social Movements Identity and Social Movements

Identity is a critical factor in the psychology of social movements, serving as a bridge between

individual psychology and collective behavior. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explains how individuals identify with groups and develop a sense of belonging, which is crucial in mobilizing for collective action. Scholars argue that movements often form around shared identities, such as ethnicity, gender, or class, which provide a psychological foundation for participation (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Identity formation in social movements is a dynamic process, shaped by both personal identification with the cause and interaction with broader social and political contexts.

Motivation and Participation

Psychological motivation is another key factor influencing participation in social movements. Resource Mobilization Theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) has traditionally focused on material resources, but recent studies incorporate psychological motivations, such as moral outrage, collective efficacy, and emotional gratification (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). People join movements not only because they seek tangible change but also due to intrinsic psychological rewards, such as a sense of purpose or emotional solidarity with others.

Emotions in Social Movements

Emotions play a vital role in the psychology of social movements. Scholars have emphasized the importance of affective factors, such as anger, hope, and fear, in driving collective action (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2001). Emotional appeals often serve as catalysts for mobilization, while shared emotions among participants can enhance group solidarity and commitment. Moreover, emotional dynamics within social movements are influenced by social contexts, media portrayals, and political environments.

Sociological Frameworks on Social Movements Structural and Institutional Influences

While psychology provides insights into individual motivations and emotions, sociology examines the structural factors that shape social movements. The Political Process Model (McAdam, 1982) highlights the importance of political opportunities and resources in enabling or constraining collective action. Social movements do not occur in isolation; they emerge within specific sociopolitical contexts that influence their trajectory and outcomes. Structural inequalities, state policies, and institutional responses all play a role in shaping the scope and nature of movements (Tarrow, 2011).

Collective Behavior and Social Networks

Sociology also provides a framework for understanding how individual psychological factors are influenced by social networks and collective behavior. Social networks facilitate the diffusion of movement ideologies, strategies, and emotional energies (Diani, 2003). Through networks, individuals are exposed to movement frames that resonate with their personal

experiences and psychological states, reinforcing their participation. Collective behavior theories emphasize how psychological factors like emotional contagion and collective identity are reinforced within group dynamics (Smelser, 1962).

Interdisciplinary Perspectives: Psychology Meets Sociology

Framing Processes and Psychological Resonance

The concept of "framing" is crucial in integrating psychological and sociological approaches to social movements. Framing refers to how movements construct meaning around their causes, which in turn influences individual psychology (Benford & Snow, 2000). Effective frames resonate with participants' values, emotions, and identities, creating psychological alignment with the movement's goals. However, framing is not just a psychological process; it is shaped by social structures, cultural norms, and political opportunities.

Collective Efficacy and Structural Contexts

Collective efficacy, or the belief in a group's ability to achieve its goals, is both a psychological and sociological concept (Bandura, 1997). On the one hand, individuals' sense of efficacy is shaped by personal experiences and perceptions. On the other hand, this belief is heavily influenced by external factors, such as the availability of resources, political climate, and the strength of social networks. Research shows that when social movements are embedded in supportive structural contexts, collective efficacy is heightened, leading to increased participation and success (Gamson, 1992).

The Role of Identity in Social Movements

Collective Identity

The concept of collective identity (Polletta & Jasper, 2001) refers to a shared sense of belonging among individuals within a movement. This identity is often constructed in opposition to perceived injustice or societal structures. The psychological commitment to this collective identity is crucial, as it fosters solidarity and sustains engagement in social movements.

The Role of Personal Identity

While collective identity is central, individual personal identity also plays a role. Research by van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears (2008) suggests that people are more likely to participate in movements when the movement's goals align with their personal identity and values. In this way, personal psychological factors interact with broader social forces.

Social Movements and the Role of Social Context Cultural Context

Social movements are influenced by the broader cultural context in which they arise. Framing Theory (Snow & Benford, 1988) argues that the way issues are framed within the cultural discourse can shape individuals' understanding of the movement and their likelihood of joining. Effective framing can create a

sense of urgency, moral obligation, or solidarity among potential participants.

Structural Factors

Sociological perspectives also emphasize the importance of structural conditions, such as political opportunities and constraints. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) argue that favorable political conditions can provide openings for movements to grow, while repressive environments may lead to mobilization through radicalization.

Emotions as Drivers of Social Movements

The Role of Emotions

Emotions are vital in motivating participation in social movements. Moral outrage (Jasper, 1998) is often a key emotional response to perceived injustice, motivating individuals to take action. Similarly, feelings of hope and empowerment can sustain long-term involvement, while emotions like fear and apathy may deter participation.

Emotional Contagion and Group Dynamics

In group settings, emotions can be contagious, spreading rapidly and amplifying collective action (Barsade, 2002). Emotional resonance, the alignment of an individual's emotional state with the movement's emotional tone, plays a critical role in maintaining collective action (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2001).

Motivation and Participation in Social Movements

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Participation in social movements is often driven by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivation arises from internal satisfaction with participating in meaningful action, while extrinsic motivation can stem from social recognition or material rewards.

Motivational Theories

Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964) suggests that individuals weigh the potential outcomes of participation against the costs. Similarly, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) highlights the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering sustained involvement.

The Psychology of Sustaining Social Movements

Commitment and Long-Term Engagement

Sustaining social movements over time requires a deep psychological commitment from participants. Research by Klandermans (1997) highlights the importance of continuous reinforcement, including positive feedback and successes, to maintain long-term involvement.

The Role of Social Networks

Social networks are also critical in maintaining participation (Granovetter, 1973). Strong interpersonal ties within a movement foster emotional and practical

support, helping individuals remain engaged even when challenges arise.

Case Studies of Social Movements

To illustrate the interplay between psychology and sociology in social movements, we can examine case studies such as the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Movement, and contemporary environmental activism. These movements demonstrate how psychological factors like identity, emotion, and motivation are shaped by and interact with broader social structures and political opportunities.

For instance, the Civil Rights Movement relied on strong collective identities rooted in shared experiences of racial oppression, while its success was facilitated by favorable political opportunities and supportive social networks (Morris, 1984). Similarly, contemporary environmental movements, such as Fridays for Future, blend psychological appeals to moral responsibility and fear with strategic framing and structural opportunities provided by global media and transnational networks (Brulle, 2010).

Challenges to Participation and Psychological Barriers

The Bystander Effect

One key psychological barrier to participation is the bystander effect (Darley & Latane, 1968), where individuals are less likely to engage in collective action when they assume others will do so. Overcoming this requires a strong sense of personal responsibility and empowerment.

Burnout and Disillusionment

Sustained involvement in social movements can also lead to activist burnout, where individuals become emotionally and physically exhausted from prolonged activism (Chen & Gorski, 2015). Preventing burnout requires providing social and emotional support within movements, as well as ensuring tangible progress toward goals.

CONCLUSION

The psychology of social movements cannot be fully understood without considering the sociological contexts in which they arise. By combining psychological insights into individual motivation, emotion, and identity with sociological frameworks on structure, institutions, and networks, scholars can develop a more comprehensive understanding of social movements. This interdisciplinary approach highlights the dynamic interplay between individual psychological processes and broader social forces, offering a nuanced perspective on collective action. Future research should continue to explore the intersection of psychology and sociology in social movements, paying particular attention to how changing social and political environments influence both individual and collective

behavior. The interdisciplinary nature of this field highlights the complex interplay between individual psychological factors and broader societal forces, ultimately shaping the trajectory of social movements.

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