

Collective Psychological Empowerment as a Model of Social Change: Researching Crowds and Power

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The issue of psychological empowerment in crowd events has important implications for both theory and practice. Theoretically, the issue throws light on both intergroup conflict and the nature and functions of social identity. Practically, empowerment in collective events can feed into societal change. The study of empowerment therefore tells us something about how the forces pressing for such change might succeed or fail. The present article first outlines some limitations in the conceptualization of both identity and empowerment in previous research on crowd events, before delineating the elaborated social identity model of crowds and power. We then describe recent empirical contributions to the field. These divide into two areas of research: (1) empowerment variables and (2) the dynamics of such empowerment. We finally suggest how psychological empowerment and social change are connected through crowd action. We conclude with some recommendations for practice following from the research described.

Conceptualizing Crowds and Power

The reference in this article's title to Canetti's (1962) *Crowds and Power* is an acknowledgement of his astute linkage of these two concepts. Historically, crowds are formed by those without institutional power. Crowds resisting the institutional order are all expressions of the powerless (Rudé, 1981; Thompson, 1971). Elements of the ruling class tend not to band together in crowds because they simply do not need to! Crowd psychology emerged as a science in 19th century Europe precisely to combat the newly emergent working-class crowds (Nye, 1975).

While the power of the reactionary crowd (Reicher, 1996c; Reicher & Haslam, 2006a,b) and the necessity for a discourse adequate to both liberatory

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and reactionary collectives (Drury, 2002) must be recognized, the concern here is in the power of the crowd to contribute to positive social change. The psychological interest in this process is in the collective empowerment of those who participate in such change. We define such empowerment as that positive social-psychological transformation, related to a sense of being able to (re)shape the social world, that takes place for members of subordinated groups who overturn (or at least challenge) existing relations of dominance. We will argue that this kind of phenomenon is social-psychologically important, for two reasons. First, empowerment is subjectively a life-changing experience; and second, empowerment links crowd events to social movements and hence possible social change. Indeed we will argue that social identity is the fulcrum of social change precisely because it is through the collective empowerment of those with otherwise subordinated identities that broader social relations can change.

The article focuses first on some research we have been involved in which delineates the factors—particularly invisibility—that contribute toward subjective empowerment among crowd members faced with powerful out-groups. We then suggest how collective empowerment is not simply due to external variables but is also a dynamic process at least partly explicable in terms of collective actors' own practices in intergroup contexts. We conclude theoretically with a model of empowerment in social change. Stressing the importance of empowerment in the social-psychological explanation of social change, we argue, restores emotions to the core of the discipline. Finally, we draw out some practical implications of this body of research.

Before describing our recent research, however, we need to provide some context by briefly tracing how empowerment has been examined (and ignored) in research on collective action in general and crowd behavior in particular.

The topic of subjective power in crowd events was raised at the very outset of the discipline of social psychology, in Le Bon's (1895/1968) influential text *The Crowd*. For all the objections subsequently amassed against Le Bon's distorted and partial perspective (McPhail, 1991; Reicher, 1987; Reicher & Potter, 1985), at least he acknowledged the importance of power in crowd phenomenology. However, Le Bon also argued that the subjective sense of power among crowd members was in fact illusory. The achievements of the crowd were simply those of atavistic destruction rather than progress. The crowd, he argued, was essentially a conservative force. Hence for Le Bon power in crowds was raised as a psychological issue only to be ultimately dismissed as a nonissue at a social level.

Research on collective action¹ took a number of directions following Le Bon's populist text. But his key ideas always remained a touchstone for those

¹The term *collective action* will be used here interchangeably with *crowd behavior* to reinforce the notion that such "behavior" is meaningful. Our argument is that there is no radical break from "rational" individual conduct to "irrational" collective conduct (Reicher, 1987).

who followed, whether they supported him or attacked him. Hence, starting in the 1950s, one strand of experimental social psychology borrowed Le Bon's suggestion that the self and hence self-control was lost in the crowd. However, these various "deindividuation" theories (Diener, 1980; Prentice-Dunn & Rogers, 1989; Zimbardo, 1970) had nothing to say about the transformation of subjective power. Crowd members did not display barbaric behavior through a sense of illusory empowerment, but simply out of behavioral disinhibition. In this sense, the whole tradition of deindividuation research can be considered a backward step from the pronouncements of Le Bon on the relation between crowds and power.

At around the same time, however, evidence from protests in U.S. college campuses against the Vietnam war, and the outbreak of urban "race" riots in many U.S. cities, prompted other social scientists to question the notion of crowd irrationality. Based on both their own experiences and detailed studies of these crowd events, social scientists suggested that even the most violent crowd behavior was meaningful (e.g., Turner & Killian, 1972.)

The emphasis on the "rationality" of crowd behavior was taken to a logical conclusion in game theory (Berk, 1974; Brown, 1965) and resource mobilization theory (RMT; e.g., Gamson, 1975). The latter sought to exorcise Le Bon by eliminating altogether the psychological element (such as grievances or strains) from the explanation of collective action. RMT explained the actions of collectives in resistance simply by reference to the objective resources available to them. In jettisoning psychology, however, these approaches also jettisoned the whole issue of psychological empowerment. Power became reduced to a matter of the balance of forces in the eye of the analyst.

More recent versions of RMT have attempted to reinsert a psychological dimension by acknowledging the importance of the self (e.g., Gamson, 1992). This is in line with developments in sociological social movement theory generally toward a greater emphasis on the subjective and the socially constructed (e.g., Melucci, 1989). Without such a shift in emphasis, theories of collective action could not begin to conceptualize let alone explain experiential phenomena such as those encapsulated in the following extract taken from the events of May 1968 in France:

The occupants of Censier suddenly cease to be unconscious, passive objects shaped by particular combinations of social forces; they become conscious, active subjects who begin to shape their own social activity . . . people who have never expressed ideas before, who have never spoken in front of professors and students, become confident in their ability. (Gregoire & Perlman, 1969, pp. 37–41)

The challenge for theory is to explain the emergence of these feelings of exhilarating power without slipping back into Le Bonian irrationalism, and to make sense of any social and psychological consequences deriving from empowered collective action. If this can be achieved, we can go some way toward showing how empowerment in crowd events is part of meaningful social change. The argument of this chapter is that the elaborated social identity model (ESIM; Drury

& Reicher, 2000; Reicher, 1996a,b, 2001; Stott & Reicher, 1998a), a model of crowd dynamics based on the tenets of self-categorization theory, can provide such an explanation.

Social Identity Conditions: Empowerment Variables

The several variants of deindividuation theory share the assumption that anonymity in groups and crowds leads to a loss of self and a loss of control over behavior (see Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995). By contrast, studies in the social identity tradition have shown that anonymity in the group typically leads to a shift from individual to group identity and hence increased conformity to the norms associated with the situationally relevant group (Reicher, 1982, 1984; Spears, Lea, & Lee, 1990). Moreover, a meta-analysis of all studies involving within-group anonymity showed that behavior becomes more normative rather than more uncontrolled (Postmes & Spears, 1998).

Social identity researchers make the further point that, in traditional deindividuation research, anonymity is often treated as a state of group membership rather than a social relationship (Reicher, 2001; Reicher et al., 1995). Hence there is insufficient precision over who precisely group members are anonymous to. This matters: the behavioral effects of invisibility to powerful out-groups (such as the police) or else to fellow group members will each be very different. In the former case, anonymity will undermine the ability of others to impose sanctions on us and hence empower the in-group. In the latter case anonymity will isolate us from our peers and disempower the in-group. Reicher and Levine (1994a,b) showed that increased visibility to a powerful out-group reduces the expression of behaviors punishable by the out-group but normative for the in-group. By contrast, Reicher, Levine, and Gordijn (1998) showed that increased visibility within an in-group specifically increases the expression of in-group normative behavior that are out-group punishable.

These studies move us away from an understanding of anonymity as an antecedent of behavioral disinhibition. Instead, they return us to issues of power, since in various ways they demonstrate constraints on and conditions for the effective expression of group identity in contexts of unequal power relations between groups. The experimental study of power and resistance was consolidated in Reicher and Haslam's (2006a) BBC prison study, a conceptual replication of Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973), which itself represents the apogee of traditional "deindividuation" reasoning. This study traced the pathway from rebellion to tyranny in two groups of participants. It gave rise to two key conclusions. First, people did not automatically slip into roles with which they then thoughtlessly complied. Rather, only when they actively identified with a group did they then (creatively) act in terms of group norms. Moreover, shared identification led to effective coordination of action and thereby

empowered in-group members in relation to the out-group (and conversely, lack of identification impeded coordination and disempowered the group). Second, where group members were unwilling or unable to use group power to reshape social reality according to their own beliefs, they became more willing to accept the tyrannical domination of others. Overall, then, the study demonstrated the links between identification, power, and the positives of collectivity (mutual aid, empowerment, positive social change) and its potential negatives and failures, while equal providing a vivid illustration of the dangers of group failure.

One of the strengths of the BBC study, and the reason why it provided such insights into the dynamics of identity and power, was the fact that it extended over 10 days and hence it was possible to investigate interactive dynamics which produced collective action. On the one hand it was possible to see how participants sought to define the meaning of events, the nature of groups and relations between groups, and how this affected what they did. On the other hand, one could analyze the way in which the actions of one group framed the responses of the other which in turn impacted back on the first group. This is in stark contrast to the increasing tendency of laboratory experiments to neglect both the ways in which categories are constructed and contested and also to neglect interaction (Haslam & McGarty, 2001; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Reicher, Haslam, & Platow, 2007).

We do not in any way wish to underplay the importance of experimentation in clarifying the precise relations between variables. Indeed, from the review above it should be clear that experimentation has been a key tool in the development of our ideas. However the lesson we draw is that a rounded understanding of empowerment as a process of psychological change occurring between people over time requires the additional use of more open and extended methodologies. The lab excels where control is needed, but the dynamics of empowerment in crowd events are by definition uncontrolled and open-ended, where what is of interest is the way participants struggle over definitions (of self, other, and context) rather than how they respond to the experimenter's given definitions. Hence, ethnographies of the unfolding dynamics of collective events—ethnographies which focus on how people feel, how they represent their situation, and what they do²—are of particular value. They allow us to see empowerment as an emergent process and not simply a variable which is either present or absent.

Social Identity Consequences: ESIM and the Dynamics of Empowerment

The recognition of the role of empowerment as cause and consequence of collective action came from studies which originally set out to examine the origin

²In most of the studies described below, ethnography or participant observation was used as a framework to collect observations, interviews, movement documents, and soundtrack recordings. These were then subjected to a thematic analysis. For more details see Drury and Reicher (2000).

of crowd conflict. Reicher and colleagues identified a common pattern across a variety of crowd events, including a student protest (Reicher, 1996b), a mass demonstration against local taxation which became a riot (Stott & Reicher, 1998a), and cases of football crowd “disorder” (Stott & Reicher, 1998b). In essence, the pattern was as follows. Events would start with a heterogeneous crowd, the majority of which identified themselves as moderates who simply wanted to express their view to the authorities, and a minority of whom were radical and saw the authorities as an antagonist. However, crowd members were perceived as homogeneously dangerous by the authorities (notably the police) and treated as such—that is denied the ability to express themselves as they wished. This then led to a radicalization among moderate crowd members who then joined with the radicals in challenging the police. Not only that, but they came to change their views about the authorities and hence about their own identity in relation to the authorities. In terms of conflict, then, the critical issue became explaining the process of escalation. However, insofar as escalation involved a change of social relations between crowd and authorities and a change of identity among crowd members, this raised a broader question about psychological and social change: how is it that people who enter a crowd event with one sense of identity emerge from it with a different identity? The social identity model of crowd behavior was elaborated into ESIM in order to address this issue.

ESIM involves three elements: concepts, conditions, and dynamics. First, then, ESIM involves, indeed requires, a reconceptualization of “context” and “social identity” and, crucially, of the relationship between them. In general, theorists in the social identity tradition tend to treat context (more accurately, “comparative context” which is to say the organization of social reality in categorical terms) as an objective determinant of social identity. However, if context is prior and separate to identity, it is hard to see how identity can change through action in context. For ESIM, then, the two are interdependent moments in a single historical process. That is, social identity should be seen as the way in which people understand how they are positioned relative to others, along with the forms of action which flow from that position. Context should be understood as those forces external to actors which enable or constrain their action. The key point is that, in crowds, the understandings of one group forms the actions which constrain the actions of the other. That is, identity constitutes context and vice versa.

This point is illustrated in studies of the 1990 London “poll tax” riot (Stott & Drury, 1999, 2000; Stott & Reicher, 1998a). Here, the context for protesters was the actions of the police—who formed cordons, initiated baton charges, and so on. But such actions were at the same time the expression of the police’s understanding of their relationship to the protesters—as a threatening, dangerous, hostile crowd.

Second, ESIM suggests that the conditions necessary for the emergence and development of crowd conflict are twofold: (1) There is an asymmetry of categorical representations between crowd participants and an out-group such as the

police. For example, during the poll tax riot, where crowd members understood their behavior in sitting down in the road as “legal and legitimate protest,” police defined it as a “threat to public order”; where police understood their own action as a defensive response to a situation of growing threat from the crowd, the crowd understood the police action as unprovoked and “heavy handed.” (2) There is also an asymmetry of power-relations such that the (police) out-group is able to impose its definition of legitimate practice on the in-group of crowd participants—for example, by having the technology, organization, and strength in numbers initially to form cordons, coordinate baton charges, and thereby determine the physical movement of the crowd.

Third, there is a dynamic whereby police assumptions concerning the homogeneity of the crowd, and police practices which impose a common fate on all crowd members (cf. Dovidio, Piliavin, Gaertner, Schroeder, & Clark, 1991) lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy on a collective scale. That is, the initially heterogeneous crowd becomes homogenous. Moreover, to the extent that police action is seen as not only indiscriminate but also illegitimate (e.g., denying the right to protest and using offensive tactics to disperse the crowd) then the entire crowd will unite around a sense of opposition to the police and the authorities they are protecting. This will be reflected in behavioral changes—notably, a willingness to enter into conflict with the police. It will also be reflected in psychological changes. That is, those who initially saw themselves as moderates change their understanding of their relationship with the authorities and hence their own identity. Being treated as radicals, they came to see themselves as radical. In addition, the emergence of a common radical self-categorization within the crowd leads to feelings of consensus and to expectations of mutual support which empowers crowd members to express their radicalism and to take on the police.

Putting all three elements together, ESIM can be summarized as follows: people’s sense of their social position (social identity) changes to the extent that, in acting on their identity (participating in a crowd event), they are repositioned as a consequence of the understandings and reactions of an out-group (treated as oppositionalists by the police), and this repositioning leads both to a new sense of identity and new forms of action (oppositional violence).

In due course, we shall deal in more detail with the various consequences brought about in the dynamic described in ESIM. For now, however, our focus is on psychological empowerment which, as the various studies we have referenced suggest, is central to understanding escalation. It is both an input and an output of the interactive dynamic between crowd and police: Police action created a strong unified crowd out of an initially fragmented collectivity, then crowd members’ sense of their strength led them to challenge the police, thus explaining how events developed from sporadic skirmishing into generalized conflict.

However, insofar as the issue of empowerment was an emergent finding from these studies rather than a focus of attention, evidence pertaining to the precise

processes involved was limited. Follow-up analyses therefore sought to gather data on group boundaries and subjective empowerment, to substantiate their suggested dynamic role in crowd events (Drury & Reicher, 1999; Drury, Reicher, & Stott, 2003).

Thus for example, Drury and Reicher (1999) showed that participants at a demonstration against the poll tax at a local council meeting began the event in small, exclusive groups of friends, but came together as a united force on the basis of their shared experience of illegitimate exclusion from the council meeting. The sense of crowd unity was evident in participants' behavior, as they oriented together, focusing on the same targets, sang and chanted together, and pushed in unison, rather than remaining in their small subgroups. But participants also explicitly report feeling more psychological empowerment—they felt increased support from others once there was this new sense of shared identity in relation to the council/police out-group. The enhanced sense of empowerment was also evident in both the observed and the self-reported increase in the boldness of their actions aimed at disrupting the meeting.

One of the unexpected outcomes of this study was the finding that for many interviewees the sense of empowerment and euphoria stayed with people after the event. Even though participants were not explicitly asked about such enduring effects, many mentioned them spontaneously. Indeed, some explained this as the reason why they felt confident enough to resist the poll tax in the months after the event itself. Indeed, the poll tax collapsed when the riots and town hall protests were followed up long term by a successful campaign of mass nonpayment (Burns, 1992).

Thus if feelings of empowerment endure beyond the collective event itself, they can explain much more than escalation and psychological change within a single episode. Such feelings can have enduring consequences on two levels. First, they can affect people's personal lives outside the protest event. Thus we found evidence of changes in participants' relationships with the police, their partners, their future career plans and so on:

I think now when I do see the police sometimes, you know, usually you might nod to them but now I'm very dismissive and I think if I got burgled again I don't know whether I would want to phone the police; I think I'd probably just deal with my the burglary in my own way, I wouldn't call upon their help.

(Antiroads protester, cited in Drury & Reicher, 2000, p. 592)

Second, feelings of empowerment can affect participants' motivation for involvement in subsequent collective action. Having more confidence in the movement and themselves as movement actors can lead to more action in the future:

I've progressed in that now I would, given time permitting and everything else, I would actually go and help in another campaign somewhere else even if it's only for a day if there's a rally [] that's what I'm saying when I said become more radical; I would actually take time out to help somebody else rather than just sort of being at the end of my road

and then once that's gone forget it, that—actually determined to keep on with the whole roads programme, fighting it wherever, (Antiroads protester, cited in Drury et al., 2003, p. 204)

The wider significance of this is that, to the extent that people feel increasingly able to participate in collective actions such as protests, demonstrations, and other social movement events, then social change becomes possible.

But what is it about the experience of collective action which leads to such an enduring feeling of empowerment which may inspire people to get more involved subsequently? In order to answer this question, we carried out a comparative study of two protest actions which formed part of an extended antiroads campaign (Drury & Reicher, 2005). The first, dubbed by participants a “tree-dressing ceremony” involved the occupation of common land which, along with the ancient tree at its centre, was about to be demolished for road construction. The second involved the mass eviction of protestors from this site a month later.

The two events were chosen for comparison because, *prima facie*, they each met the conditions of the ESIM, yet their psychological outcomes were different. In both cases there was an asymmetry of representations between police and protesters (“peaceful protest” vs. “disorder”; “illegitimate road” vs. “lawful construction site”) and a difference in power between the two groups such that the police and other authorities were in the first instance able to put their perceptions into practice (i.e., excluding and removing the protesters from the “common land”). In both cases also the action of the authorities was seen to be against the whole crowd, both “activists” and “locals” alike, irrespective of people’s different levels of involvement in the protest.

However, while the occupation led to joy and empowerment, the eviction was followed by anger and enhanced sense of the legitimacy of the collective cause. The united crowd were able to overpower the police and security in the act of occupation but were themselves overpowered at the eviction. There was something about these material outcomes that not only made people feel empowered (in the first case) or outraged (in the other) within the events, but stayed with them afterward and fed into their future actions.

The obvious answer is that the one was a success and the other was a failure, and in a sense we would agree with that. However, such an answer begs the question of what constitutes success and failure for participants. Some accounts (e.g., Bandura, 2000) root a sense of “collective self-efficacy” in terms of achieving personal goals in the mass.³ By contrast, just as we argue that crowd action

³Bandura’s distinction between self-efficacy and collective efficacy is itself revealing: for Bandura, the self is just the personal self. By contrast, the social identity approach suggests that the self or identity can be collective as well as personal (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994), each representing a psychologically valid level of self-categorization. As a corollary, the social identity approach also suggests that there are multiple selves or identities corresponding to the multiplicity of our social relations; by contrast, Bandura posits a single unitary self.

in general is underpinned by social identity, so we argue that the definition of success in particular relates to benefits to the collective self. That is, success is a function of actions that serve, even against the power of the out-group, to create a world which is organized on the basis of group beliefs, values, and understandings. Failure is a function of actions which do not achieve this. Thus one can only determine what is a success or a failure—and hence what does or does not lead to enduring empowerment—by understanding the significance of outcomes in relation to the specific understandings associated with a given social identity. Indeed, what might look very much like failure to outsiders may constitute a success as refracted through an in-group lens. Thus, in one of our studies (Drury, Cocking, Beale, Hanson, & Rapley, 2005), animal rights protestors were stopped in their ostensible aim of closing an animal testing laboratory. However, they nevertheless experienced the protest as a notable success, because they had challenged the power of the police over an extended period and, as they saw it, revealed the collusion of the state in animal experimentation.

In the case of the “tree-dressing ceremony” we have been discussing, the protestors collectively flattened fences round the construction site, physically enacting a collective identity defined in terms of concern for the green space of the local area—since it rendered the physical space into a “common,” rather than the construction site for the road (the out-group’s definition of the space). This is evidenced in comments in which participants celebrated their action as successful enactment of the principles that motivated them—as an assertion of what they were about.

At the eviction, however, the crowd failed to enact the collective self-definition they brought to the event—that is, saving the “common.” Instead, the actions of the police and bailiffs imposed an official conception of “public order” and the “rightful” and legal construction of the road. They obliterated the collective vision of campaigners as embodied in the tree-dressing ceremony and the occupation of the tree. And because campaigners described how closely their sense of self was bound up with the notion of common land, so they also described how “crushed” they felt when the tree was seized and destroyed.

This argument can now be stated as a hypothesis about one process by which empowerment emerges as an (enduring) outcome of collective action. Empowerment is an outcome of collective action if and when such action is successful in the specific sense that it serves to realize (or objectify) participants’ social identity (and hence their definition of legitimate practice) in the world, over against the power of dominant out-groups. Following Marx (1844/1975), we refer to this process as collective self-objectification (CSO).⁴ In other words, empowerment

⁴We also denote this same concept in some places as “collective self-realization” (e.g., Reicher & Haslam, 2006b).

as an experiential outcome of action is a function of that action being (for the participants) an imposition of self or identity in the world (and the word *imposition* seems appropriate here since the context is one of intergroup struggle).

While the comparative study was consistent with this hypothesis, CSO was simply “read off” from behaviors and reports of empowerment. In a follow-up study to assess the subjective importance of “identity imposition,” 37 activists were asked to describe and explain two or more empowering experiences, as well as two or more disempowering experiences (Drury et al., 2005). Responses were coded using ESIM categories (i.e., unity, support, and CSO) as well as from the “bottom-up” to take into account any subjective factors we had not considered a priori (e.g., “organization,” “atmosphere,” “others’ determination”).

CSO, unity, and support were the three most frequently cited types of explanation for feelings of empowerment. Unity and CSO were both significant predictors of increased participation. By the same token, the obverse of each of the three key factors implied by the ESIM—disunity, lack of support, failure of CSO (as well as “police control”)—featured prominently in participants’ accounts of disempowering experiences. Failure of CSO and the related notion of police control predicted reduced participation.⁵ This interview study therefore provides support for the posited role of CSO in processes of disempowerment and hence, along with other aspects of the ESIM, a link from empowering experiences within a particular event to ongoing participation in further events.

Our most recent studies (Drury & Cocking, 2007) have taken us back into the laboratory in order to tease out the different effects of success as a generic positive outcome and CSO as the successful imposition of social identity on social reality. To be more precise, we addressed a key prediction which flows from the argument that it is specifically CSO that leads to enduring empowerment: that is, the same positive achievement may be differentially empowering to different groups as a function of its relevance to their differing social identities. Thus we induced different identities in participants for which intellectual achievement was more or less central. They were then asked to complete a number of activities which were described as “intelligence/ability” tasks, and bogus feedback was given as to their success or failure. Finally, participants completed a number of analogue empowerment measures: “subjective success,” future expectations of success, desire for participation, and positive feelings. While there was evidence that positive feedback increased the sense of success for all participants, the key findings were that the effect of such feedback on feelings of empowerment was greater when the tasks were identity relevant, and the effects of failure feedback

⁵The close statistical relation between some of these variables, and the obvious conceptual connection between some of them (e.g., police control and failure of CSO) suggests that, while analytically separable, for participants themselves these factors may be experienced as aspects of a single “gestalt” of perceptions.

on feelings of disempowerment was also greater for those to whom the tasks were identity relevant. Thus it was not simply objective “success” per se that mattered in empowerment and motivation for future participation, but also whether that success was identity relevant.

Having reviewed the current research, we can now explicate four key conceptual aspects of CSO as a model of empowerment (Drury et al., 2005).

(a) Context Change as Self-Change

CSO is derivable from the tenets of self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987): identity is a function of, and varies with, social relational context. CSO is simply the application of this principle to the particular case of change in power relations. Thus, just as an oppositional self-concept is a function of involvement in relations with the authorities which become defined as antagonistic to the collective self (Drury & Reicher, 2000), so an empowered self-concept is a function of participation in social relations defined in terms of power-transformation—from the out-group to the in-group.

(b) Novelty

It is not mundane actions that are experienced as empowering and inspiring but rather ones which are perceived to turn the existing world “upside-down.” The preconditions for CSO are therefore ongoing relations of unequal power between social groups. CSO entails the overturning, disrupting or at least disturbing these relations (even if only temporarily). CSO refers to the actions of groups in resistance who challenge the status quo, rather than those of dominant groups whose actions serve to reproduce the status quo.

(c) Action as Realization of Legitimate Practice

But why should identity-based action upon the world lead to feelings of empowerment? Because action which expresses the collective definition of legitimacy over against that of dominant forces, which realizes the collective’s (hitherto suppressed) identity, turns an subjective imperative on how the world should be into an objective feature of the world. When one’s action serves to change the world to reflect one’s identity in this way, such an action–outcome thereby evidences, through the perceived changed context (point A, above), that one’s group is indeed an active and powerful subject. The self-changed context reflects back to the world-changing self. In short, being a subject rather than an object of others’ actions is a definition of empowerment or agency.

(d) Provisionality/Contingency

The endurance of feelings of empowerment reflects the extent to which these changed relations themselves can endure. Subsequent to any in-group CSO, sooner or later, the dominant out-group may be able to reassert itself. Such reassertion would entail the realization of the identity of the out-group and the suppression once again of that of the in-group. In such a case, the context reverts to one in which the in-group is defined as relatively powerless (cf. point (a), above). By the same token that successful in-group action provides evidence that one is a powerful agent (point (c), above), successful out-group action provides counterevidence to this self-perception. Therefore defeat, and hence the reimposition of out-group definitions of legitimate practice, is experienced as disempowering.

A Model of Collective Empowerment and Social Change

Simon and Klandermans (2001) recently proposed an integrative model of social and psychological factors behind mobilization, according to which empowerment or, in their terms, agency, is a function of politicized collective identity. Simon and Klandermans point out that, despite its importance, this agency or empowerment function has largely neglected in social psychology (though see Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995). We have sought to address this neglect through delineating a particular account of the emergence of collective empowerment. We now bring the different strands of this review together, complementing Simon and Klandermans's model of politicized collective identity, by outlining the place of empowerment within a broader ESIM account of collective action and social change.

The first point we wish to make is that, in laying renewed stress on the importance of empowerment, we reintroduce emotions to the core of crowd psychology. The sense of being able to shape one's world is necessarily a passionate and exhilarating affair. This might seem like a return to the classic crowd psychology tradition mainly associated with Le Bon and later "irrationalist" accounts of collective behavior (e.g., Berkowitz's, 1972, frustration-aggression model). However, LeBonian theorizing equates emotionality with negativity in at least two senses. One, the emotions that it highlights are predominantly aversive (frustration, anger fear, etc.). Two, it contrasts emotion to reason and hence takes collective passions as an indication of collective irrationality. By contrast, as should be clear from the foregoing discussion of CSO, we point to the role of positive emotions (joy, euphoria, exhilaration) as being linked to immediate empowerment, enduring meaningful psychological change and positive social change (Drury et al., 2005). In short, our model unlike classic accounts is a positive collective psychology (Drury, 2008). As should be equally clear, we see these feelings as integrally linked to a changed understanding of ourselves in the social world. In other words, collective emotions and reason are interdependent rather than counterposed.

We can take this argument one step further. When we talk of “reason,” a distinction can be made between what we have termed “cognitive” and “strategic” aspects of group behavior (Klein, Spears, & Reicher, 2007; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995). The former refers to the way in which we represent the world—both how things are and how they should be. The second refers to our practical ability to act in the world. When it comes to acts of resistance, both are implicated and both are related to emotion. Thus, on the one hand collective action depends upon a perception that the status quo is unfair and illegitimate (Tajfel, 1978) along with the accompanying sense of shared grievance or outrage (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). On the other hand, such action depends upon a calculation that one is able to overcome the forces that protect the status quo. The factors going into such a calculation include the size and level of unity among the in-group compared to the out-group (Drury & Reicher, 1999; Reicher, 1996a), the resources available to the in-group, the level of social movement organization that can sustain an extended mobilization (this is the critical insight provided by RMT—see McCarthy & Zald, 1977), and the personal resources available to group members—including time and energy—which allow them to sustain extended participation without “burnout” (Drury et al., 2005). All these will be related to the positive feelings associated with a sense of empowerment.

Our analysis of differential outcomes of collective action (Drury & Reicher, 2005) suggests that there are multiple determinants of collective action (and in-action) for social change. Some who may feel a greater sense of outrage feel able to take action in the form of expressing their voice (rather than in the expectation of directly overturning existing social relations); others take further action on the basis of an enhanced sense of what is possible, yet their sense of legitimacy in what they do remains constant. We therefore reject the traditional dualism of symbolic versus instrumental determinants of collective action. Rather, we suggest that there are different sorts of goals. Emotion and “reason” are always interwoven as causes of collective action, not separate pathways.

On the one hand, resistance may reflect enhanced definitions of legitimacy of own action and illegitimacy of out-group action, rather than enhanced empowerment. On the other hand, lack of resistance may reflect disempowerment (disunity, lack of support, lack of numbers relative to police power and control) rather than the acceptance of given social relations as legitimate (cf. Jost & Banaji, 1994). It is not failure of CSO per se, however, that enhances feelings of self-legitimacy—indeed, one can imagine circumstances where the sense of outrage and “victory” co-exist. However, we would suggest that outrage associated with failure of collective action can act as a spur to further action only to the extent that there are still practical arrangements (e.g., a social movement organization) to make such future action possible.

Empowerment, then, is but one element—albeit a necessary one—that feeds into the process of social change. We have stressed that empowerment is an output

from as well as an input into this process (as described in ESIM). Indeed change occurs as a cycle of interactions between groups in which subordinated groups emerge from each round at a higher level of empowerment which then sets the ground for the next cycle. But here again, empowerment is but one of several such outputs which go together in producing this positive cycle of radicalization. We earlier promised to return to these various psychological changes that take place as a consequence of the dynamic described by ESIM. They can be divided into three broad categories.

First, as crowd members are repositioned as a function of the reactions of out-groups (notably, the police) so their sense of identity changes along with the boundaries of collective selfhood and the sense that particular others are in-group or out-group to them. In the roads protests we have described, “respectable” local protestors found themselves positioned as radicals, came to see themselves as radicals, and therefore came to see other radical environmentalists (from whom they had previously distanced themselves) as part of the same overall group (Drury & Reicher, 2000).

Second, as protestors came to see the police as defenders of powerful interests in society rather than neutral arbiters among different interests, so their perception of the legitimacy of police actions changed. Policing as a whole came to be seen as illegitimate and particular actions came to be construed as instances of this illegitimacy: protestors complained of police colluding with private contractors, failing to protect the protestors from the actions of these contractors, indiscriminate arrests of protestors, and excessive violence (Drury et al., 2003).

Third, as their understanding of the nature of the social world changed, so the aims of the protest and even what counted as success (and hence led to a sense of empowerment) also changed. Thus, if the police come to be seen as “agents of the state” rather than “guardians of the peace,” so the very act of standing up to them and getting them to reveal their “true” nature became a goal of protest. Thus, we have described how, relatively early in the antiroads campaign, the eviction of protestors from common land was counted a failure in terms of stopping construction taking place. However, by the time of the later eviction of protestors from houses along the route of the road, protestors counted the event a great success due to the widespread publicity of police dragging protestors from precarious perches on the roofs of the condemned buildings (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Drury et al., 2003).

In sum, we can see an unfolding dynamic which operates simultaneously on all the constructs that we have identified as critical: how we represent ourselves in the world and how the world should be; what we count as success and the resources we have to achieve that success; the emotions that accompany a sense of living in an unjust world but being able to change it. Through the reactions of the authorities, a progressive process of delegitimation and radicalization can take place as the mounting challenge of the mass leads to more intense measures

by the authorities which in turn broadens and intensifies the radical beliefs and feelings of the crowd. That is, in combination, the various psychological changes we have outlined mobilize people to act in ways that produce social change. The development of the U.K. antiroads movement into the wider “anticapitalist” movement in the 1990s is a classic case in point (Drury, 2007; Drury et al., 2003).

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this body of research are threefold for those involved in collective action who seek to change the existing order. First, since collective empowerment is argued to be at the heart of social change, its preconditions clearly need to be established. The first of these is achieving shared identity. Thus, for example, with reference to some of the findings described here, those seeking social change will attempt to enhance identity salience and visibility within the in-group and to facilitate identity-normative conduct. In short, all practices which contribute toward enhancing shared identification should be employed.

Second, those seeking to mobilize masses for or against the existing order need to be able to define goals and hence CSO such that the actions of the group are understood as possible, successful, and identity relevant. Those seeking to change the existing order will recognize the role that even limited shared actions can play in building a powerful movement. No matter how small, if the action is understood as instantiating one’s collective identity over against one’s oppressors, then empowerment can develop into a virtuous cycle of broader, deeper, and more advanced resistance. If, as we have argued, identity and context are of the same order, the cycle needs to escalate to that level where the routines of the existing order are revealed as the (contingent) practices of other people rather than as inevitable, natural features of the world.

Third and finally, while no social movement can, from its start, transform the wider social world, it can at least structure its own internal reality so as to objectify its social identity. By so doing they increase the sense that a new world is possible. This is a version of the argument that ends and means should be consistent. Here, however, it is not a moral issue, but a matter of practicalities. To realize in the here and now aspects of a world that does not yet exist (e.g., freedom, authenticity, equality) is to bring that world closer—through empowering its agents with the belief that they can create it. In a very concrete sense, then, social movement activists need to be architects of the imagination.

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