



The phenomenology of empowerment in collective action

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Recent research has hypothesized that empowerment can arise from collective action through collective self-objectification (CSO), defined as action that actualizes participants' social identity against the power of dominant groups. Activists ($N = 37$) described several experiences that made them feel empowered (and disempowered). Among the various explanations they offered for these feelings, the most prominent were CSO, unity, and support (or their absence). CSO was also predictive of reports of positive emotion, although unity was the best predictor of reports of further involvement. Overall, the study suggests that actualizing one's social identity through collective action has personal as well as political significance.

This paper concerns the question of what it is about collective action that might give rise to subsequent empowerment and other positive feelings. While existing research points to a variety of factors which might account for such empowerment, it is suggested here that a crucial explanatory factor is participants' realization of their social identity against the power of dominant forces, a process termed collective self-objectification (CSO; Drury & Reicher, 2005). The paper describes a phenomenological interview study which examines the relative importance of CSO in activists' accounts of empowering (and disempowering) experiences of collective action. Before describing the theoretical derivation of CSO and its predictions, we begin by reviewing existing approaches to empowerment in collective action.

Empowerment in collective action

In one of the earliest social scientific accounts of collective action, participants' subjective sense of power is seen as due to the irrationality that arises from involvement in collectives (Le Bon, 1896/1947). Later accounts have gone beyond this account by stressing the meaningfulness of empowered collective action. Thus in accounts of social movements, empowerment is conceptualized as a narrative of self-transformation

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(Britt & Heise, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 1994), or as a set of skills (e.g. communication, organization) participants acquire through involvement in campaign activities (e.g. Martinez, 2003; Salt & Layzell, 1985). Therefore the focus in these and other accounts of empowerment in collective action focus is on knowledge or the self. For example, research on pacifists and animal rights activists suggests that self-sacrifice might be a factor (Jasper, 1997; Pelton, 1974) – in such cases activists felt that, having been assaulted or imprisoned, there was nothing further their enemies could do to hurt them.

The concepts of cognition and self come together in efficacy theory (e.g. Bandura, 1995, 1997), which understands empowerment¹ as a set of beliefs about the self in relation to particular activities. Efficacy theory began as a model of individual behaviour change, and suggests that such self-beliefs derive from performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and physiological states (Bandura, 1978). More recently, Bandura (e.g. 2000) has applied it to collective agency and collective action; ‘collective efficacy’ is said to be an emergent property of the individual selves making up the collective.

Versions of efficacy theory have been applied to anti-nuclear protest (Fiske, 1987; Fox-Cardamone, Hinkle, & Hogue, 2000), environmental activism (Cocking, 1995, 1999), women’s support groups (Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995) and political participation generally (Breakwell, 1992). For example, it has been shown that nuclear protesters have higher self-efficacy than non-protestors (Bandura, 1997). Some studies have suggested that collective self-efficacy has different predictors (e.g. leadership climate) than personal self-efficacy (e.g. Chen & Bliese, 2002). On the whole, however, the emphasis in this kind of research has been in showing that efficacy beliefs are themselves predictors of collective action rather than in examining the antecedents of efficacy itself.

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, can be considered a function of politicized collective identity. Politicized collective identity in turn is said to derive from awareness of shared grievances, adversarial attribution and the involvement of society in the dispute. Simon and Klandermans point out that, despite its importance both subjectively and theoretically, this agency or empowerment function has been under-researched. The present paper seeks to address this neglect through testing a particular account of the emergence of collective empowerment.

Collective self-objectification

The particular account of empowerment to be examined here – CSO – derives from work on the Elaborated Social Identity Model (ESIM) of crowd behaviour (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Reicher, 1996a, 1996b; Stott & Reicher, 1998). The ESIM suggests that identities should be understood not simply as sets of cognitions but as practical projects. In this account, identities and practice are in reciprocal interaction, each mutually enabling and constraining the other. The ESIM posits collective empowerment as a possible function of this duality of selfhood as it operates within intergroup dynamics.

This latter point is illustrated in studies of demonstrations the took place in the UK in 1990 (Drury & Reicher, 1999; Stott & Drury, 1999). These suggested that, within crowd

¹ Bandura (1997) finds the concept of empowerment too vague to be useful and refers instead to abilities.

events, psychological change generally and empowerment in particular can be explained in terms of a number of key features. First, there is an asymmetry of categorical representations between crowd participants and an out-group such as the police. Second, there will be 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. Where such out-group action is experienced by crowd participants as not only illegitimate (thereby legitimizing crowd action against it) but also indiscriminate (i.e. as an action against everyone in the crowd) then crowd participants adopt a more inclusive in-group self-categorization, superseding any prior internal divisions (e.g. between the 'peaceful' majority and the minority of 'troublemakers'). The formation of a single large self-category, along with the feelings of consensus and the expectations of mutual in-group support that are thereby engendered, is what empowers members of the in-group actively to oppose the out-group.

However, while this account explains empowerment as a process within episodes of collective action, it does not address the issue of empowerment as an experiential outcome of such action. Anecdotal examples suggest that a common self-categorization and hence collective support are necessary but are not sufficient for such empowerment (e.g. Drury & Reicher, 1999). What is also necessary is CSO, which is defined as action which serves to realize participants' social identity (and hence their definition of proper practice) over against the power of dominant out-groups (Drury & Reicher, 2005). There are four conceptual features of CSO.

Context change as self-change

The mechanism of CSO is that specified in the tenets of self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987): identity derives from, and varies with, social relational context. The ESIM has already applied this principle to explain psychological change generally (Drury & Reicher, 2000). CSO simply applies it to the particular case of change in power-relations. Thus, just as a *radicalized* self-concept is a function of involvement in social relations which become defined as antagonistic to the collective self, 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.

Novelty

It follows from the above that it is not mundane 'acts upon the world' that are experienced as empowering and inspiring but rather ones which 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). As an explanation for empowerment, it 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.

Action as realization of legitimate practice

But why should own action upon the world lead to feelings of empowerment? Because that action expresses the collective definition of legitimacy over against that of dominant forces. It realizes the collective's hitherto suppressed identity, turning a 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 is indeed active and powerful. The self-changed context reflects back to the world-changing self. Putting this slightly differently, to collectively self-objectify means to be a subject – and being a subject rather than an object of others' actions is a definition of empowerment or agency (Deprét & Fiske, 1993).

Provisionality

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 counter-evidence to this self-perception. Therefore defeat, and hence the reimposition of out-group definitions of legitimate practice, is experienced as disempowering.

A first empirical prediction that flows from this account is that, since CSO is a cause of empowerment as an outcome of collective action, it should feature in participants' accounts of empowered experiences, in the same way that unity and mutual support have done (Drury & Reicher, 1999, 2005). By the same token, failure of CSO should feature in participants' accounts of disempowerment. A second empirical prediction is that CSO should be associated with future participation in collective action, and hence failure of CSO associated with reduced participation.

A third prediction requires a brief reprise of the background literature. Participant accounts of empowerment in collective action are rich in expressions of positive feeling (e.g. Taylor, 2000). But the academic literature has hardly done justice to this. While he is rightly criticized for irrationalizing the meaningful behaviour of the crowd (Reicher, 1984, 1987), Le Bon (1896, 1947) at least had the virtue of attempting to capture the exhilaration that arises with crowd empowerment. Subsequent accounts of the crowd have lost this. The absence has been reproduced in the social identity tradition, where at least until recently, the emphasis on (cold) cognition has led to a neglect of questions of emotion, or has reduced the affective aspect of identification to narrow conceptions of self-esteem (For recent work that has gone beyond this, see Leach, Spears, Branscombe, & Doosje, 2003; Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000; Smith, 1999; Spears & Leach, 2004). In the sociology of social movements, too, the issue of emotion has been largely overlooked, despite its importance for participants themselves and its recognized significance in other areas of social life (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2000; Jasper, 1997). The concept of CSO suggests that action which affirms the collective self in relation to dominant out-group forces should feel life-enhancing, joyful, and positive. Hence our third empirical prediction is that CSO is predictive of such positive emotions.

Aims of the present paper

The aim of this paper is therefore to examine the importance of CSO in collective empowerment. How important is CSO subjectively relative to factors already established by research, such as unity and support? How far does it predict further involvement and positive emotions? These questions are addressed through an analysis of interviews with 37 activists who were each asked about collective action events in

which they had participated. Participants were asked to describe and explain two or more empowering experiences, as well as two or more disempowering experiences to examine the reverse process.

The first section of the analysis examines the factors participants refer to when describing experiences of empowerment following collective action. Since CSO is hypothesized to be the crucial variable affecting the extent to which people take positive feelings from the event, we would expect references coded as CSO to be at least as frequent as references coded as unity and mutual support. The second section examines disempowering factors, with the expectation that a lack of CSO is the key factor here. The third section examines how far the causes of (dis)empowerment predict subsequent participation and emotional experiences.

Method

Participants

We sought to recruit experienced participants, or activists, who would have a number of different empowering and disempowering experiences to talk about. The background of three of the researchers in recent protest campaigns meant that some of the recruitment was carried out through personal contacts. Other participants were recruited through snowballing from those already recruited and through approaching participants at Sussex University during protests against the (2001–2002) war in Afghanistan.

Since each participant described a number of different experiences, the total of 37 participants was considered sufficient for the analysis. We spoke to activists from a variety of political traditions to be able to get some sense of the variety of types of explanation available. Sixteen participants had a background in the movement of direct action against the UK Criminal Justice Bill in the mid-1990s. Eight participants were hunt saboteurs with a background in animal rights activism and blood-sport sabotage. One participant was an anti-nuclear peace campaigner. The remainder of the participants could be classified by their doctrinal tradition rather than favoured forms of action or campaign: six were socialist (members of Trotskyist or Marxist-Leninist parties), five were (non-partyist) communist, and one was an anarchist.

A large number of different marches, occupations, and hunt sabotages were described. Those most frequently cited were the Brighton Labour Party Conference demonstration in 2001 (12 participants), the M41 'Reclaim the Streets' party in 1996 (9 participants), the protest against the DSIE Arms Fair in 2001 (8 participants), the 'J18 Carnival against Capital' of 1999, the national anti-war demonstration of November 2001, and Mayday 2000 (6 participants each).

No details were taken of participants' ages or gender. This absence of identifying information was to provide the participants with reassurance about anonymity, since some were describing experiences for which they could have been arrested. However, we can say that, broadly, most participants were in the age range of 25–40, and that a little over half were male.

Interview procedure

The interviews were semi-structured in nature; a set framework of items (see Appendix) was supplemented where necessary by prompts and follow-up questions, and interviewees were able to speak as much as they wished, within the concerns of the interview. Participants were asked about particular experiences, first using open

questions (e.g. 'What made you feel empowered?') then closed ones (e.g. 'Was there much support . . .?').²

Each interview lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. All interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. The maximum word length of the transcribed interviews was 16,198, the minimum 757, and the mean 6,620 words per participant. One hundred and four empowering experiences and 65 disempowering experiences were described in the interviews (counting separately events described by one or more participant). The mean number of empowering events described by each participant therefore was 2.81 (mode = 2), while the mean number of disempowering events was 1.76 (mode = 2).

Analytic procedure

The analysis took place in two stages, the first qualitative, the second quantitative. The qualitative analysis was based on principles common to thematic analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis, and grounded theory. Procedurally, this first involved reading through each transcript, underlining and making notes in the right-hand margin of any explanations given for (dis)empowerment, references to emotion, and accounts of the consequences of such experiences. Second, through notes in the left-hand margin, the different references to causes of empowerment were organized into various overarching themes, reflecting both the factors specified in the ESIM as well as any new factors.

Our coding scheme comprised primarily the various explanatory factors cited by participants as causing their feelings of empowerment ($N = 14$) and disempowerment ($N = 13$), some of which were pre-given by existing theory (i.e. CSO, unity, support), others of which emerged from the analysis. References to emotion were coded as either negative or positive, and references to subsequent action as either increased/continued or curtailed involvement. This produced a scheme of 31 categories.

Based on the definition given in the introduction, explanations for empowerment were coded as CSO not only where they refer to a collective (in-group) assertion against out-group power, but also where they relate to the particular social identity described by the participant – that is, where the action is successful in terms of the legitimate practices and aims that defines the identity at the time of action. Definitions and examples of other coded themes are presented in the analysis itself.

The size of a piece of coded text varied from a sentence to a multi-sentence chunk. Sentences or chunks were coded according to the rule of thumb: assign the single most appropriate code in the scheme (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 65). No instance assigned to one coding category could also be assigned to another one. Furthermore, while references to (for example) CSO might occur more than once in a single account, CSO would only be coded once per account; the principle was presence (of the factor) per participant account rather than number of references per participant account.

The reliability of the analysis was assessed through the standard approach of interrater reliability (IRR; Graziano & Raulin, 2004, p. 88; Silverman, 1993, p. 148). In the present case, this entailed four independent judges being trained to use the analytic scheme by having one of the researchers separately talk them through the nature of the

² The method of asking people about their memories of past positive and negative experiences has a number of precedents, including the study of work experiences by Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959). They asked interviewees, 'Think of a time when you felt exceptionally good or exceptionally bad about your job. . . Tell me what happened' (p. 141).

analysis and the rationale for each coding category and then presenting examples of coded text. The judge was then given a sample of material with which to practice using the scheme until she was comfortable with it (Stock, 1994, pp. 134–135). Next, an Agreement Rate (AR)³ was calculated by presenting each judge independently with (a different) 10% of the material, in the form of given pieces of material. Blind to the analyst's own codings, the judge had to assign the material to the given coding categories. For each judge, the total number of observations agreed upon was divided by the number of pieces presented (i.e. both agreements and disagreements; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Orwin, 1994). These AR scores ranged from 0.75 to 0.96, with a mean of 0.85, an acceptable level of AR (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The final stage of the qualitative analysis involved tabulating the coded themes, and the instances of references to emotions and further participation into a summary table of events for each participant. Once tabulated, the coded interview data could be subjected to quantitative analysis.

Analysis

Factors responsible for empowerment

As expected, CSO featured prominently in participants' accounts of empowering experiences in collective action (see Table 1, below).

Each interview began with a question on the nature and aims of the crowd event itself, in an attempt to get participants to express any identity concerns that may have motivated the action. These could then be compared to participants' accounts of the nature of the action, such that it could be shown whether or not any successes were defined in terms of the particular identity content. Thus, responses coded under the category CSO referred to achievements in relation to the specific definition of their collective identity (anti-roads direct activist, anti-capitalist, socialist, etc.); it was not simply any material effect that was empowering, but those effects seen as furthering the particular aims of the collective, as in the following example from an anti-roads protest:

1. It was empowering jumping on the digger and. . . empowering in that you were able to stop them working (P21, Twyford action).

Any existing order needs to be maintained, and, for those attempting to bring about social change, dealing with police power comes as part of the territory. One of the most interesting findings of recent research in crowd dynamics is the way relations with the police become foregrounded for participants whose original intentions in getting involved in collective action make no reference to the police at all (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Stott & Drury, 2000). Where overcoming the police arises as an emergent aim of the collective action – where the police stand in the way of the collective – it can be understood as a form of CSO: police power is a social relation over against which participants attempt to impose their shared identity. However, since overcoming the police was typically not part of the original aims of the actions described by our

³ While superseded by more rigorous reliability statistics, AR, or per cent agreement, remains the most widely used index of interrater reliability, being intuitively interpretable (Orwin, 1994). One of its main disadvantages is its proneness to produce misleadingly high IRR; yet this is less likely when there are a large number of coding categories (as in the present case) when the likelihood of agreement just through guessing is low.

Table 1. Frequency per participant of types of empowering factor, and correlations with reported emotions and subsequent participation

	Maximum per participant	Mean	SD	No. of participants citing factor once or more	Positive emotion	Subsequent participation
CSO	4.00	2.03	0.99	34	0.46**	0.31
Unity	5.00	1.65	0.92	35	0.32*	0.48**
Support	3.00	1.24	0.95	28	0.23	0.19
Numbers	3.00	0.59	0.69	19	0.06	0.15
Movement potential	3.00	0.59	0.86	15	0.04	0.23
Overcoming the police	3.00	0.41	0.72	11	< 0.01	0.13
Others' determination	3.00	0.27	0.73	5	0.15	0.53***
Impunity	1.00	0.14	0.35	5	0.16	0.16
Organization	2.00	0.14	0.42	4	0.13	0.15
Police disunity	1.00	0.14	0.35	5	-0.19	-0.29
Other people	2.00	0.05	0.33	1	0.07	-0.16
Atmosphere and energy	1.00	0.05	0.23	2	-0.08	0.34*
Close to target	1.00	0.05	0.23	2	0.09	0.34*
Variety of people	1.00	0.03	0.16	1	-0.18	0.24

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

participants, and because they themselves separated out such experiences from other forms of achievement, we have coded 'overcoming the police' separately from CSO (which, for the later statistical comparisons, makes this a conservative test of the prevalence of CSO in participants' accounts). The significance of overcoming the police lies firstly in its implications for the action itself; once the police have been overcome, then the participants are free to enact their other aims:

2. That felt really brilliant, cos it was just. . . I don't know, there's something about overcoming opposition. Like if we'd just walked out of the tube station and walked straight onto the road, it wouldn't have been as good, as having to have got round the police lines first. So it was that kind of, you know, makes you feel more like you've achieved something. []⁴ If you're left completely free to do whatever you want, it doesn't feel as wa-heh! exciting as, as the whole crowd pulling together against some opposition and then achieving what it wants, cos you all feel like this sense of unity, and purpose. (P27, M41 Reclaim the Streets party).

Such experiences also have implications for the future. To the extent that the police are, at least on one occasion, seen as vulnerable to collective resistance, then they may be overcome also in the future, opening up the possibility of further and wider change.⁵ Interviewees located defeats of the police in a broader historical context of subordination. Through such temporal social comparisons, the significance of such victories is emphasized as a significant achievement. Indeed, relations with the police are so important that a victory over them is seen as a great achievement even when the aims of the protest itself are seen to fail:

⁴ Empty square brackets indicate that material has been edited out of a quote.

⁵ To put things from the point of view of those in authority, successful 'riots demonstrate that when significant numbers of people act in concert, they can get away with it' (Waddington, 1991, p. 161).

3. Just giving the police such a run-around, you know, that was empowering, just like, um, seeing that the police were, like, quite pissed off, and. . . just a chance to demoralise the police, I think, although we couldn't liberate any animals or anything like that, it was good to see the police demoralized. (P14, Shamrock).

Participants talked about *unity* in a variety of ways, often emphasizing feelings of 'solidarity', people acting or feeling 'together', being 'on the same wave-length' and having a 'common cause':

4. I: So did anything occur that made you feel empowered at this point?

P: That in itself, that solidarity, that unity between people made me feel empowered. (P1, Cuba demonstration).

Given the suggestion that unity is necessary but not always sufficient for empowerment (Drury & Reicher, 2004), it is also important to note that unity was mentioned (by 7 participants) even in relation to some disempowering events as well as empowering ones.

When *support* was cited by participants it was often explicitly linked to unity (and no one who said that they experienced unity denied that there was support), as the ESIM would predict:

5. P: We all felt like one group, anyone with us was, like, part of our group. . . that day.

I: So, you felt like one, unified group?

P: Oh yeah, yeah, totally. . . it was like, 'one for all and all for one', or whatever. . . I mean, if anyone had been attacked or whatever, everyone else would have helped them out, and we all just worked really well that day, and got the job done. (P15, shooting sab).

The sense of *movement potential* was found to be another important experience in empowering events. This factor conveys a sense of future orientation: the possible ability of the movement to develop and therefore achieve more. References to feeling 'part of something bigger' were also coded under this heading, as when participants expressed a sense that they were involved in a growing movement rather than an isolated action:

6. I think because of the amount of people there that certainly had a psychological effect and think yeah, you know, this is going somewhere this is this is moving and this is going to build up momentum and get larger and larger, and because of that this is going to turn into something really positive (P20, November 2001 war demonstration).

While some participants referred to 'numbers' as a factor that made them feel empowered, when they elaborated it was clear that it was not numbers *per se* that was important. There may be large numbers in a disunited crowd, for example. It is where there are shared aims that large numbers can engender a sense of confidence and support within the collective:

7. Just the fact that there were so many other people there and they all felt pretty much the same way. It felt safer with like fifteen thousand people there, because of the police. (P7, Mayday 2000).

In the longer term, if the size of turnout is large, relative to what might be expected, it can be taken as an indication of movement potential.

Simply inspecting these descriptive data shows that those factors specified by the ESIM - CSO, unity and support - were the three most frequently-cited types of explanation (see Table 1, above). While these factors seem to be more important than the others, a further question is their relative importance to each other. These three

factors were therefore compared in a repeated measures analysis of variance, with the number of empowering events cited per participant as a covariate.⁶ This test identified a significant overall difference between the three types of explanation: $F_{lin}(1, 35) = 12.80, p = .001$. Paired sample t tests revealed that the number of references to CSO were significantly more frequent than references to each of unity ($t(36) = 2.07, p < .05$) and support ($t(36) = 3.69, p = .001$), and that references to unity were significantly more frequent than those for support ($t(36) = 2.44, p = .02$).

Factors responsible for disempowerment

Failure of CSO was evident in accounts where participants referred to a lack of impact, their action having no effect, or achieving nothing. Again, all references were in terms of the aims of the collective action and thus the definition of the relevant collective identity (against the arms trade, hunt-saboteur, anti-road, etc.):

8. . . .that was disempowering, actually, seeing these delegates being shown around actually on these, sort of, sort of amphibious speedboats and things with all these machine-gun mountings and all that on it, and not even being able to hear this demonstration. (P14, DSIE protest).

In the accounts, one of the reasons why a collective action failed to achieve anything, beyond or even in addition to disunity and a lack of support, is the successful *control of the situation by the police*. The assertion of police power is, for a movement of social change, the continued maintenance of illegitimate social relations; just as the movement's CSO restricts or undermines the power of the out-group (police, capital and state), so the realization of the police's aims (of maintaining public order) restricts or undermines the power of the social movement:

9. I: Did anything specific occur to make you feel disempowered?

P: Um. . . well, just the way the police had stopped anyone moving about, I suppose. . . That was the difference compared to June the 18th, they just, there just wasn't the mobility we had last year, the police had these new containing tactics, and there wasn't this, like, liberated feeling, of freedom, which made it so good before. . . (P15, Mayday 2001).

Table 2 displays the number of references to factors mentioned in relation to disempowering experiences.

Disunity was referred to in terms of different participants at an event having 'different agendas' or there being a lack of 'shared focus' in the crowd. Sometimes the crowd was multiply split, but at other times there was a simple two-way division in terms of aims and tactics:

10. I: Would you say it was like one united group?

P: No, not really, just that reason I just explained to you. . . people who were up for doing stuff and. . . You know, you get, sort of, Saturday nights out for that kind of party, going round a mate's house and stuff like that, um. . . I suppose there were as many. . . people who weren't in that party mode who were up for stuff, it was such, such a mixed crowd at that time (P14, DSIE protest)

⁶ There is a question over the independence of participants, which the test assumes, but which may have been violated. While for some events a minority of our interviewees may conceivably have been responding to each other as individuals rather than to the crowd as such, most did not take part in the same collective actions. Hence they can be said to have reacted to features of the crowd itself rather than to each other as empowered individuals.

Such divisions meant either that collective action was unable to take place, or that a dominant majority within the physical crowd was able to instantiate a particular definition of collective action over against a dissident minority – who then felt alienated and disempowered:

11. I: Did you feel part of a unified group?

P: Um, well that was the weird thing, the Socialist Workers Party [SWP]⁷ was trying to say that they organized it and everyone there were part of the SWP or whatever and they were just constantly trying to like join up or sell you a paper or something. It was almost a struggle to try not be part of a unified group (P4, Labour Party conference demonstration).

It was often the same events where people said that unity was absent that there was also a lack of support within the crowd. The Brighton demonstration against the Labour Party conference again is an illustrative example:

12. Police waded in and arrested them immediately and like I think that was the part that completely turned for me, because not many people at all went to help (P30, Labour Party conference demonstration).

As Table 2 illustrates, the obverse of each of the three key factors implied by the ESIM – failure of CSO, disunity and lack of support – feature prominently in participants' accounts. As might be expected, after failure of CSO, the related theme of police control was the most frequently cited. All four factors were entered into a repeated measures analysis of variance, with number of disempowering events cited per person as a covariate. This identified an overall significant difference between the frequency of the factors cited: $F_{lin}(1, 35) = 14.66, p = .001$. Paired sample t tests revealed that failure of CSO was cited significantly more frequently than police control ($t(36) = 2.79, p < .01$), disunity ($t(36) = 5.17, p < .001$) and lack of support ($t(36) = 5.27, p < .001$). Police control was cited significantly more frequently than disunity ($t(36) = -2.78, p < .01$) and lack of support ($t(36) = -2.58, p = .01$), but there was no significant difference in the number of references to disunity and lack of support ($t(36) = 1.23, ns$).

After-effects of empowering and disempowering experiences

Participants were asked how they felt after their participation in the collective actions they described. The phenomenology of participants' positive feelings included confidence (in the collective and personally), pride, enthusiasm, joy, feeling good and being on a high. For example:

13. I: How did you feel in the next few days after it?

P: Very happy. Very happy indeed; it was great (P10, Hillgrove).

The most prevalent word expressing how participants felt was *encouragement*. These references and all the other positive feelings after the event were coded together. Thirty-four participants described such positive emotional experiences after empowering events (others couldn't recall how they felt), 23 of them recalling emotions for more than one such event (M number of such emotional after-effects recalled per participant = 1.73).

Participants were also asked whether their experiences affected what they actually did afterwards – that is, whether they got further involved in actions because of their

⁷ Text in square brackets indicates where information has been added for clarification.

Table 2. Frequency per participant of types of disempowering factor, and correlations with references to (negative) emotions and reduced participation

	Maximum per participant	Mean	SD	No. of participants citing factor once or more	Negative emotion	Reduced participation
Failure of CSO	4.00	1.49	1.07	28	0.29	0.38*
Police control/ power	3.00	0.97	0.89	24	0.46**	0.38*
Disunity	2.00	0.65	0.75	18	0.46**	0.28
No support	2.00	0.49	0.69	14	0.31	-0.04
Not enough people	2.00	0.35	0.63	10	0.10	0.11
Unable to act	2.00	0.32	0.63	9	0.11	0.20
Isolation	1.00	0.14	0.35	5	0.46**	0.07
Unclear aims	1.00	0.14	0.35	3	0.06	0.07
No potential	2.00	0.05	0.33	1	-0.15	0.37*
Lack of knowledge	1.00	0.05	0.23	2	0.09	-0.17
People not up for it	1.00	0.03	0.16	1	-0.15	0.37*
Betrayal	1.00	0.03	0.16	1	-0.15	0.37*
Disorganization	1.00	0.03	0.16	1	0.06	0.13

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

positive empowering experiences. A number of participants said that they were involved in a campaign anyway, and so were unable to identify independent effects of the particular experience. On the other hand, while 2 participants were clear that the empowering experience they described had no effect on what they did subsequently, 21 stated that their involvement did increase due to the particular experiences (and eight of these cited more than one such increase in involvement). Some of these accounts were unspecific, but others cited particular examples of activity that the participants said would not have happened without the empowering experience:

14. It was empowering in the sense that after that I had a lot of energy and, you know, the feeling after that 'Wow!', you know, we can do anything, and I personally can, you know, do things, I think that was quite important cos then, you know, we decided to do Reclaim the Streets [] feeling like I'm actually capable of doing it (P22, No M11 Clarendon Road eviction).

The analysis sought to determine which of the empowering factors might have contributed most to these emotional and behavioural consequences. As Table 1, shows, there were significant correlations between positive emotion and both CSO and unity. Unity (first step) and CSO (second step) were entered into a hierarchical regression equation with positive emotion as the dependent variable. As Table 3 (below) shows, unity explained 11% of the variance and was a significant predictor. The addition of CSO contributed an increment of 3% of the variance ($F_{\text{change}} = 6.31, p < .05$). Unity was no longer a significant predictor, suggesting that CSO accounts for most of the variance of unity.

A number of factors correlated with increased involvement, but too few participants referred to these (see Table 1). Unity (first step) and CSO (second step) were entered into a hierarchical regression equation, with reported further action as the dependent

variable. As Table 3 (below) shows, unity accounted for 24% of the variance in, and was a significant predictor of, increased participation. Adding CSO to the equation contributed an increment of 6% of the variance ($F_{\text{change}} = 3.04, p = .09$), but CSO did not reach conventional levels of significance as a predictor, and unity remained a significant predictor.

When asked how they felt emotionally after disempowering events, participants referred to feeling discouraged, demotivated, upset, fearful, and disappointed. Eighteen participants recounted such emotional experiences, covering 26 events. Participants were finally asked whether this negative experience put them off further collective actions. Fourteen participants said the experience did have such negative behavioural consequences, four of them describing more than one event that had this effect on them. Such responses were somewhat nuanced, in that such discouragement was qualified and selective. A strategy of differentiation was often evident, whereby participants said they would no longer get involved in a particular type of action (rather than collective action in general). Thus some said that they came to avoid large marches and demonstrations in favour of small direct actions based around affinity groups.

As Table 2 shows, disunity, police control and isolation were the only significant correlations with negative emotions. Since only four participants mentioned isolation, disunity (first step) and police control (second step) were the items entered into a hierarchical regression equation, with negative emotion as the dependent variable. Table 3 shows that disunity explained 21% of the variance, and was a significant predictor. The addition of police control contributed an increment of 4%. However, this addition was not significant ($F_{\text{change}} = 1.75, ns$), and neither disunity nor police control were significant predictors when entered together.

Table 3. Hierarchical regression analyses of factors predictive of (a) positive emotion; (b) increased involvement; (c) negative emotion; and (d) reduced involvement

	Step	Variable entered	β	
(a)	1.	Unity	0.33*	0.20
	2.	CSO		0.39*
	R^2		0.11	0.14
Model F			4.17*	5.56**
(b)	1.	Unity	0.48**	0.43**
	2.	CSO		0.26
	R^2		0.24	0.30
Model F			10.73**	7.20**
(c)	1.	Disunity	0.46**	0.29
	2.	Police control/power		0.26
	R^2		0.21	0.25
Model F			9.41**	5.68**
(d)	1.	Police control/power	0.38*	0.28
	2.	Failure of CSO		0.28
	R^2		0.14	0.21
Model F			5.90*	4.64*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Based on the correlations and numbers citing each factor for reduced participation, a final hierarchical regression analysis was carried out with police control entered as the first step and failure of CSO entered as the second. As Table 3 shows, police control explained 14% of the variance and was a significant predictor. The addition of failure of CSO contributed an increment of 7% of the variance, an addition which did not quite reach conventional levels of significance ($F_{\text{change}} = 3.04$, $p = .09$). Although the full model F was itself significant, with both variables in the regression equation, neither reached conventional significance levels ($p = .09$ for each). However, when entered alone, failure of CSO was a significant predictor of reduced participation ($\beta = 0.25$, $R^2 = .15$, $p = .02$).

Discussion

The analysis of activists' accounts suggested that, while empowerment in collective action may be attributable to a number of factors, those specified by the ESIM are particularly prominent. Moreover, the present study goes beyond previous research by showing how CSO is the key contributor both to feelings of empowerment arising through participation in collective action and to positive emotions. Although CSO did not predict subsequent participation, unity, another ESIM variable, did. Mirroring this, failure of CSO was the factor most predictive of disempowerment; it was also predictive of reduced participation. The related variable of police control along with lack of unity, were the factors most predictive of negative emotions.

Empowering factors which emerged from the analysis yet which were not directly predicted by the ESIM included the sense of movement potential, overcoming the police, impunity, and numbers. However, knowledge as an empowering factor (cf. Giddens, 1991) was cited only once, and self-sacrifice (Jasper, 1997) was entirely absent. The latter has been identified as factor in previous research on pacifism (Pelton, 1974), and it may be that its absence in the present data-set reflected the political make-up of the sample, which only contained one self-defined pacifist. While the present study sampled from a variety of political traditions, if we are interested in the range of discourses of empowerment available in a broader political culture, future studies might sample more widely still (for example, right-wing campaigns as well as left-wing; mainland European traditions of militancy as well as ones simply from the UK; 'peasant'-based movements as well as those from urban centres).

A model of collective empowerment and social change

The interest of collective empowerment lies in its relation to the social psychology of social change. Based on the present study, we can now suggest how CSO and other factors might fit together as part of a broader model of change. The following can be considered as a model to be tested in future research.

As we have seen, the preconditions for CSO, and hence empowerment, are in-group unity and hence expectations of in-group mutual support for in-group-normative action. Such unity can arise from proximal intergroup dynamics (Reicher, 1996a, 1996b; Drury & Reicher, 1999) or a more distal shared history of inclusive in-group boundaries. The ability of a unified group with expectations of mutual support to act to bring about social change, however, depends on further factors, both ideological and practical. Ideological factors include definitions of shared grievances (Simon & Klandermans, 2001), conceptions of the fairness or otherwise of given social relations (Tajfel, 1978), and conceptions of legitimate and effective practice (e.g. direct action, pacifism, demonstrations, etc.). Practical factors would include the balance of relevant resources

(numbers, organizational factors, equipment, etc.) between in-group and out-group (Drury & Reicher, 2005). In recent research on social change and social stability, the issue of legitimacy has been emphasized. Thus there is a concern with how social relations of dominance become legitimized (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) or how, when dominant social relations are seen as illegitimate, collective resistance becomes legitimized (Spears, Jetten, & Doosje, 2001; Stott & Drury, 2004). As a counterweight, the present account suggests that 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.

If a group in resistance is able to enact its definition of legitimate practice against the dominant out-group, that action is defined as CSO, which is empowering. However, such action may be just one step in a possible process of social change, and needs to be built upon with further actions if change is to be thoroughgoing and enduring. The extent of future participation is therefore crucial. CSO and hence empowerment are associated with positive emotions such as encouragement. But whether this encouragement translates into further participation depends not only on continued unity and support and the ideological and practical factors referred to earlier, but also on the extent to which participant energy and excitement can be maintained. In the phenomenon of burn-out, the emotional and practical effort participants put into the build-up to the action leaves them too exhausted to continue at the same level, despite (or even because of) its success. Therefore, perhaps the collective actions which are most likely to lead to further participation are those which not only collectively self-objectify the movement's identity, but for which there is a relatively even spread of the burden of responsibility and commitment across the collective.

A point made in the present study, echoing previous research, is that failure of CSO, rather than discouraging further participants, might in fact motivate them further (Drury & Reicher, 2000, 2005). In such cases, the participant takes an experience of repression as a confirmation of the legitimacy of their own cause and hence a further reason to continue. The present study pointed to a further ideological factor mitigating the negative effects of defeat: the availability of strategies to cope with disappointment. Participants for example referred to treating a disempowering event as a 'learning experience', thereby taking something positive from it, or sought to place the experience in a wider context of more successful actions. The availability of these strategies may be a function of the extent of the participant's experience as an activist. It may be that political neophytes have at their disposal fewer strategies to counter the demoralizing experience of failure of CSO. If they do not gain an enhanced sense of self-legitimacy they may be left with just the feeling of material defeat and hence be put off further action. Or they might take a single defeat as representative of the general inability of the movement to effect change. By contrast, experienced activists can refer to a whole history of events, including a large number of happy and successful occasions, both in their own experience and from the accounts of comrades, against which to offset the particular disappointment. Thus they can, through their access to such collective resources, renew their own motivation for involvement.

What has been described so far takes the form of a possible cycle of empowerment and social change, with successful actions possibly encouraging further participation, and so on. This cycle is potentially virtuous where participants begin each new round of action at a different, higher, level of empowerment. The ESIM suggests the social-psychological basis for this upward shift in aspirations: intentional action that has unintended consequences in terms of its effect on the social context through which the

actors define themselves (Drury & Reicher, 2000). Thus, successful action even against a particular and specific injustice can serve inadvertently to alter social relations, which then come to appear more generally unjust and also more vulnerable. In other words, where even limited collective actions serve to reflect back the power of the active collective subject (CSO), then the emergence of movements toward social change are more likely. The development of the UK anti-roads movement into the wider anti-capitalist movement in the 1990s is an example of this political generalization (Drury, Reicher, & Stott, 2003).

Such a psychological change entails not only empowerment and revised conceptions of legitimacy, but also a shift in the content of the identity: who we are, and what the struggle is about (Drury & Reicher, 2000). For participants in the present study there was a shift in emphasis if not in aims for many participants, whose action came to focus on the police rather than their original object (cf. Stott & Drury, 1999, 2000). But other, more profound, changes were reported, more indicative of a qualitative alteration in identity-content. Thus interviewees described events as 'self-changing', 'radicalizing' or 'transformative'. This kind of evidence points to the difference between CSO and humanistic notions of self-actualization or self-realization (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1959), which, on the surface, might appear similar. In such humanistic accounts, the self is understood as a pre-given individual essence or potential which merely comes to express itself. In contrast, in the present account, and in line with the social identity approach more broadly, the self is understood as socially and historically constructed and thus mutable. Thus we can say that while there is a historical continuity between the self that intended to act and the (empowered) self that emerges from this self-determined action, they may not necessarily be the same. Self-determined action - CSO - may serve to change the social relations from which the self derives its meaning (Drury & Reicher, 2000). As a reflexive being, one can recognize that oneself is the same locus of experience but also that, through the (possibly unforeseen) consequences of one's own actions, one is now also a different person. In this way, CSO and hence the ESIM show the interrelation between psychological changes, such as empowerment, and social change.

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Appendix:

Interview schedule items

Empowering events

- Can you first describe a protest event at which you felt empowered. Tell me what it was about and where it took place.
- What were your aims at the beginning?
- What were your expectations?
- What was it about the event that made you feel empowered?
(What was empowering about that? Can you say a bit more about why that was empowering?)
- Were there police present? Did they have an effect on how you felt?
(Did their action contribute to your feelings of empowerment?)
- Was there much public support for the action? (Did that contribute to your feelings of empowerment?)
- Were there many people involved? (Did that contribute to your feelings of empowerment?)
- How much unity was there among people taking part? (Did that contribute to your feelings of empowerment?)
- Was there a great deal of support amongst people at the protest? (Did that contribute to your feelings of empowerment?)
- Did you achieve what you wanted?
- Were you successful? (Did that contribute to your feelings of empowerment?)
- Did you feel you made a difference by participating?
- How did you feel in the hours and days afterwards?
- What did you feel able to do afterwards?
- Did the experience affect other areas of your life?
- Did the experience encourage you to take part in other actions?
- Now can you tell me about another collective action at which you felt empowered.
[Back to top]

Disempowering events

- Can you describe a protest event at which you felt disempowered. Tell me what it was about and where it took place.

What were your aims at the beginning?

What were your expectations?

What was it about the event that made you feel disempowered? (What was disempowering about that? Can you say a bit more about why that was disempowering?)

Were there police present? Did they have an effect on how you felt? (Did their action contribute to your feelings of disempowerment?)

Was there much public support for the action? (Did that contribute to your feelings of disempowerment?)

Were there many people involved? (Did that contribute to your feelings of disempowerment?)

How much unity was there among people taking part? (Did that contribute to your feelings of disempowerment?)

Was there a great deal of support amongst people at the protest? (Did that contribute to your feelings of disempowerment?) Did you achieve what you wanted?

Were you successful? (Did that contribute to your feelings of disempowerment?)

Did you feel you made a difference by participating?

How did you feel in the hours and days afterwards?

Did the experience affect other areas of your life?

Did the experience discourage you from taking part in other actions?

Now can you tell me about another collective action at which you felt disempowered.

[Back to top]