

DISCUSSION 10

No article attached

As you have gathered in the previous weeks, social psychological insight is relevant to many fields. Some branches of social psychology are specifically focused on application. In this discussion, we will consider practical applications beyond the scope of previous material.

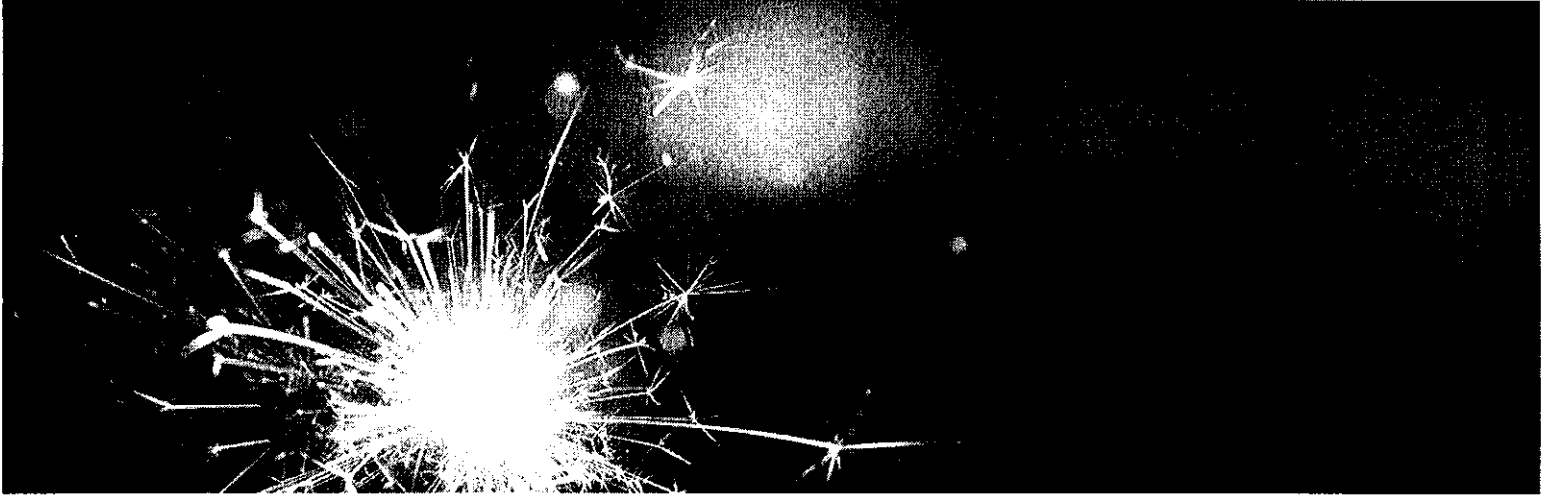
To inform your thinking on this topic, begin by perusing [The Stanford SPARQ Solutions Catalog](#) (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.. Consider the recommended readings to gain additional insight regarding systematic application of social psychology to various fields.

Then, select an applied branch of social psychology: psychology and law/forensic psychology, military psychology, health psychology, environmental psychology, etc. Locate a peer-reviewed, empirical article (i.e., an article that describes a research study, not merely a theoretical review) written from your chosen field. Summarize the theoretical background of the issue at hand and describe research methods used to investigate this phenomenon. Explain the social variables that contribute to the thoughts, feelings, or actions under review. Generate potential applications for the insight gleaned from the article you reviewed, and interpret application of social psychological insight to specific careers in this field.

Your initial post should be 500-1000 words in length and must contain a minimum of one scholarly, peer-reviewed reference, in addition to required course resources as applicable. Additional credible references are encouraged.

Bridging research and practice to sparq change

Stanford SPARQ is a “do tank” that partners with industry leaders to tackle disparities and inspire culture change using insights from behavioral science. We work in criminal justice, economic mobility, education, and health.



FEATURED

Jennifer Eberhardt's new book - *Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do*

From one of the world's leading experts on unconscious racial bias, SPARQ Co-Director Jennifer Eberhardt, *Biased* is a personal examination of one of the central controversies and culturally powerful issues of our time, and its influence on contemporary race relations and criminal justice.

You don't have to be racist to be biased. Unconscious bias can be at work without our realizing it, and even when we genuinely wish to treat all people equally, ingrained stereotypes can infect our visual perception, attention, memory, and behavior. This has an impact on education, employment, housing, and criminal justice. In *Biased*, with a perspective that is at once scientific, investigative, and informed by personal experience, Eberhardt offers us insights into the dilemma and a path forward. Learn more about *Biased*.

"This book helps us to scientifically view how racial bias works in our own minds and throughout society. We could not ask for a better guide to understand this reality than Jennifer Eberhardt. Her research reveals critical information that can help leaders better understand how biases can impact our judgment and how we are perceived by the communities we are sworn to serve."

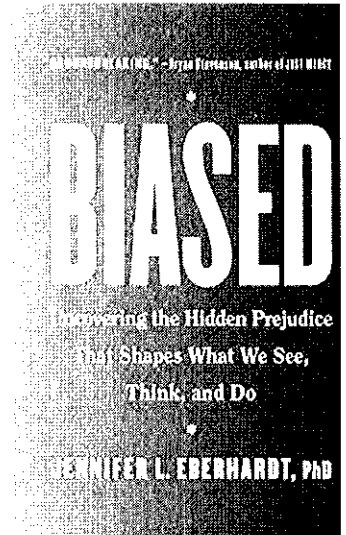
—Kamala Harris, United States Senator from California

"This is not someone who is just doing work in the ivory tower of a university. This is someone who is really out in the trenches working with police departments and the criminal justice system."

—Chris Magnus, Chief of Police, Tucson, Arizona

"The hope for progress is greatly increased by Jennifer Eberhardt's groundbreaking new book on implicit bias. Biased presents the science of bias with rare insight and accessibility, but it is also a work with the power and craft to make us see why overcoming racial bias is so critical."

—Bryan Stevenson, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Just Mercy*



PowerPoint Presentation:

Thus far, we have considered the major themes of social psychology: social thinking, social relations, and social influence. In this interactive assignment, we will integrate knowledge from all three areas to provide a comprehensive analysis of a social movement, issue, event, or idea.

To inform your thinking on this topic, begin by reading "The Self System in Reciprocal Determinism" (Bandura, 1978) and "Social Action" (Synder & Omoto, 2007), and peruse The Stanford SPARQ [Solutions Catalog](#) (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.. In addition, review "Ten Simple Rules for Making Good Oral Presentations" (Bourne, 2007) and "Ten Simple Rules for a Good Poster Presentation" (Erren & Bourne, 2007).

Then, identify a current or historical social movement (e.g., the Tea Party, Black Lives Matter, the Reformation, etc.), issue (e.g., gay marriage, school choice, abortion, slavery, etc.), event (e.g., the 2016 Presidential election, the Rwandan genocide, the Bubonic Plague, etc.), or idea (e.g., democracy, the nuclear family, peace, etc.). Create a multimedia presentation (e.g., a video, poster, etc.) that depicts the selected topic in enough detail that classmates, even with no prior knowledge, will gain a basic understanding. (For additional guidance, review a guide for creating [Presentations](#) (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site., available through the Ashford Writing Center.). Your presentation should apply psychological insight from at least two of the three areas covered thus far in the course (social thinking, social relations, and/or social influence) to analyze relevant social factors. In your presentation, interpret social psychological theory and research, including the concept of reciprocal determinism in relation to this social movement, issue, event, or idea. Describe research methods used to investigate relevant phenomena and summarize actual or hypothetical applications of social psychological insight. Employ knowledge from social psychology to identify specific careers or disciplines that might be especially well suited to addressing the underlying issues in your example. Be sure to maintain an objective stance. (In other words, if you select a social issue, avoid sharing your opinion regarding the "right" or "wrong" view. Your classmates should not be able to determine your personal views based on what you post.)

You must include a both a multimedia component (e.g., link to or embedded PowerPoint, [screencast](#), [video recording](#), etc.) and a transcript or other written component that fully explains the audio or visual elements. Please utilize APA style to format your transcript or other written component. Upload the completed assignment (including both the multimedia component and the written component) into Waypoint. Next week, you will share your presentation with your classmates in a discussion forum.

Utilize a minimum of five credible scholarly sources to inform your thinking on the topic, in addition to required course resources as applicable. Additional credible references are encouraged.

Note to Students: This assignment requires that you produce a visual presentation, supply a spoken audio narrative, and to listen the audio narrative of others. Note you are also asked to provide a transcript of your presentation. If you have a documented

disability accommodation that might interfere with your ability to complete this assignment, you may contact your instructor to develop a comparable alternative assignment. If you have other issues that you feel may be a barrier to your ability to complete this course or this assignment please contact the Office of Access and Wellness at: access@ashford.edu.

CHAPTER 41

Social Action

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In many ways, working alone and working together, people take action that benefits society. Not all these efforts are necessarily motivated by an explicit desire to benefit society, certainly, but the combined effects of individual action can have a profound effect on society. For example, people may practice the habits of recycling and conserving energy, as well as use mass transit, in order to preserve and conserve natural resources or even to save a few dollars or to avoid the stress of driving at rush hour. They may serve as volunteers and provide services to other people who have difficulty caring for themselves. They may participate in programs in schools and in the workplace that provide opportunities for community service. Or, in an effort to spend more time with their children and be a positive influence in their lives, they may coach little league sports teams or serve as the leader or chaperone of youth groups. They may join neighborhood groups and organizations and, where none exist to meet the needs of their communities, take the initiative to found them and assume leadership roles in them. They may vote and work on political campaigns, and even run for office themselves, in order to elect political leaders who will work on behalf of causes they value. They may engage in lobbying and advocacy efforts to arouse the passions and efforts of other people or to work for the passage of legislation of concern to them. They may join and be active in social movements that are dedicated to causes of concern to them, such as improving the living conditions of disadvantaged groups in society, protecting and expanding human rights, and working for peace at home and abroad.

These activities are all instances of individuals seeking to address problems of society by engaging in what is often referred to as civic engagement, citizenship behaviors, or (more generically) *social action*. It has often been suggested that one way to solve many of the problems confronting society is to promote such forms of social action, that is, to encourage people to act in ways that will benefit not only themselves as individuals but also the larger communities and the society of which they are members (e.g., Omoto, 2005a; Omoto & Snyder, 2002; Snyder & Omoto, 2001; Van Vugt & Snyder, 2002). Social action by individuals and groups can and does take many forms. Some social action is explicitly political, such as involving oneself in the political process by voting or working for an election campaign, but many forms of participation are not necessarily politically motivated or guided, such as volunteering one's time to help others in need, looking out for one's neighbors to deter crime, conserving natural resources, and becoming active in community groups or organizations.

SOCIAL ACTION AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

More generally, many social commentators have emphasized the importance of social action as a form of "citizenship" and "citizen participation" involving individuals taking action in response to societal problems (e.g., Boyte & Kari, 1996) and in generating "social capital"—bonds of trust among citizens that are built through participation in the affairs of their larger communities

(Coleman, 1990; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 1993, 1995, 2000). In fact, there is a substantial body of research that examines such citizenship behaviors and the ways in which the coordinated activities of individuals can serve the common good (e.g., Kymlicka & Norman, 1994; Putnam, 1993, 1995; Van Vugt, Snyder, Tyler, & Biel, 2000; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

The role of social action and citizen participation in solving societal problems is an enduring fixture of American society and is widely endorsed, regardless of political leaning (e.g., Chambré, 1989). Those on the political right (in the United States, and elsewhere) may promote civic participation as a means to save government money, to enhance local control over important issues, and to avoid what they see as potentially oppressive government-imposed solutions to local problems. And, those on the political left may advocate for grassroots organizing, and encourage individuals and groups to cooperate in order to effect positive community change, including community growth and empowerment driven by citizen participation. Although they may not agree on which problems are pressing or on the best solutions to adopt, there appears to be agreement in valuing and encouraging involvement of individuals in taking action to solve social problems. As one indication of how much a part of the shared ideology of the U.S. social action is, one need only note that every President from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush, over a period of close to a half century, in accepting the nomination of his party or in his inaugural address to the nation, has stressed the importance of citizen involvement and doing good works. (See also the historical account of de Tocqueville, 1835/1969, who stressed how deep the roots run in North America for interest in and commitment to public and shared service as well as efforts to join together and work with others without regard to political differences.)

Our concern in this chapter is with understanding the nature of social action—to articulate principles that can aid in understanding how and why individuals take action on behalf of others and that benefit society. The phenomenon of social action is intriguing for a variety of reasons. From a practical standpoint, social action involves real people taking real actions in the service of real causes, often doing so over extended periods of time and at considerable personal cost and sacrifice. Moreover, the outcomes of social action have real consequences for the well-being of individuals and the effective functioning of society. From a theoretical standpoint, they represent compelling instances of motivated and goal-directed activities, ones that capture the bridging of individual and collective action in pursuit of ends that benefit not only those taking action but also society at large. In fact, as we discuss in greater depth later in this chapter, considerations of social action simultaneously span and link several levels of analysis, and, accordingly, research on these topics holds the promise of helping to develop broader and more comprehensive understandings of many phenomena of interest to all stripes of psychologists as well as sociologists, economists, historians, anthropologists, and political scientists.

In this chapter, we seek an understanding of the principles that account for and govern social action. Our analysis proceeds sequentially and on two fronts, seeking descriptive principles and explanatory principles. The quest for *descriptive principles* seeks answers to the general question of what social action is, including the tasks of discovering basic organizing principles that reveal the characteristic features of social action, that tell us what can profitably be included in the category of social action and what might be excluded from that category. The search for *explanatory principles* seeks answers to the general questions of what causes and what accounts for social action and involves a search for the causal determinants of social action and the purposes served by social action.

DESCRIPTIVE PRINCIPLES: WHAT SOCIAL ACTION IS

To pursue the goal of explicating descriptive principles of social action, let us articulate, by building on the examples with which we began this chapter, an organizing framework of characteristic features that cross-cut various forms of social action. In so doing, we seek to specify what is to be included in the category of social action and what is to be excluded from that category (as well as some phenomena that test the limits of what is and what is not social action). Moreover, understanding the nature of social action may inform the search for an understanding of the processes that generate and account for social action; that is, knowing what social action is may help explain what causes social action. We hasten to point out that ours is an initial attempt to provide organizing principles for this realm and not an exhaustive list of defining and mutually exclusive characteristics. In other words, we have a more modest goal of trying to offer a set of principles that can help to map the terrain of social action—a taxometric tool, so to speak, that can be used to link and distinguish different forms of social action.

An Individual Phenomenon, but Also a Social Phenomenon

To begin with, we propose as our first descriptive principle that social action is both an individual phenomenon and a social phenomenon. The phenomena of social action are *individual* phenomena in that they involve the actions of individuals, reflecting their individual concerns, their personal values, their own motives, and their particular goals. These phenomena are *social* as well, and they are social in several different ways. First, they are social in that they are engaged in not only by individuals but also by collections of people, and often by people who band together to perform these activities in groups, organizations, and communities (for a related discussion of the “levels” at which helping and prosocial behavior can occur, see Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005). Second, they are also social in that they are done on behalf of other people, who are the beneficiaries of social action, and often for the betterment of society at large.

That is, they are actions that are generally intended to serve a social good. Thus, social action involves activities that have social and societal impact, impact that is arguably most evident when considered collectively, as the combined consequences of individual actions. Furthermore, and building on this idea that social action is, at one and the same time, both an individual and a collective phenomenon, social action represents a connection between the individual and the social, a way for individuals to join their interests with the interests of other people, to bond with their communities, and to become engaged with society at large. That is, and as we shall see, considerations of social action provide a template for understanding the linkages between and among individuals, the groups to which they belong, the communities of which they are members, and with the larger society—and for bridging individual, group, and societal perspectives on the human condition.

Socially Valued, but Not Socially Mandated

Next, we note that many forms of social action have in common that, at least in North America, they are socially valued but they are not socially mandated. Indeed, surveys of public opinion in the United States consistently reveal widespread support for the ideals of helping others and getting involved in the affairs of one's community to make society a better place for all. For example, in the case of volunteerism as a form of social action, national surveys reveal that, by margins of over 3 to 1, Americans agree that "people should volunteer some of their time to help other people and thereby make the world a better place" and that "nonprofit organizations generally play a major role in their communities" (Independent Sector, 1988, 1999). The history and value of social action, of course, varies by culture and by country (e.g., Curtis, Grabb, & Baer, 1992; Levine, Norenzayan, & Philbrick, 2001), but our general point here is that many social action activities are culturally and socially valued, and especially when they are seen to contribute to a common good.

However, as much as social action is valued, there are no laws that mandate participation in such activities, no rules or commandments that dictate that one must be a volunteer or that one must join a community organization or that one must participate in a social movement or even (in the United States, at least) that one must vote. Rather, when people become involved in social action—whether it is when they volunteer, when they join community organizations, when they join social movements, or when they vote—they do so as because they choose to do so and because they want to do so. That is, involvement in social action, when it occurs, is a volitional or chosen action, undertaken without the requirement or the obligation to become involved. To the list of defining characteristics of social action, then, we add "activity that is seen as socially valued," but to the list of characteristics that help us to exclude certain behaviors from the category of social action we add "activity in response to requirements or coercion."

Reactive Impetus, Proactive Action

As much as social action occurs without obligation and with volition, the fact of the matter is that the impetus for social action typically is "reactive," because it occurs in response to a perceived need to change something or solve a problem. Thus, individuals who are concerned about threats to the environment may respond to those threats by forming an environmental action group to work to protect and preserve the quality of the environment. Similarly, those who are concerned about the lack of child-care services in their neighborhood may be moved to organize a network of volunteers to provide the needed services. And, in response to low wages and bad working conditions, workers may form unions to change their situations. In each case, the impetus for action, and the formation of vehicles for taking action, is provided by the perception of problems that need to be solved. Furthermore, the veridicality of the perception and, even how widely held the perception is, are much less important than the simple fact that one or more individuals think that something needs to be done.

However, whereas the precipitating conditions for social action may be reactive, when individuals mobilize themselves to take action, the actions they take are "proactive" in the sense that individuals must take the initiative to get involved, make the time and invest the effort to work toward their goals, and overcome obstacles to participation (including, at times, the skeptical reactions of friends and family who doubt whether their actions will really make a difference). Thus, for example, a social movement may come about because of a need for change, but then people who wish to participate in this social movement must figure out when, where, and how to act. As such, their actions take on a proactive character.

Moreover, at times, social action can and does occur in the context of institutional structures or mandates. For example, voting occurs in the context of clearly defined social structures that dictate when, where, and how it will occur. Other times, social action occurs outside formal structural contexts. For instance, many forms of volunteering are informal, as when neighbors help each other out and devise structures for their involvement, including "town hall" meetings, phone trees, and neighborhood block watch associations. Nevertheless, whether it occurs in the context of formal structures or not, social action can be construed as simultaneously reactive and proactive. And, in fact, it can be speculated that there may be important consequences for encouraging social action participation as well as the effects of social action activities to the extent that these activities are construed as relatively reactive versus proactive in nature.

Individual Actions, Aggregated Consequences

Although people may engage in social action as individuals, the impact of social action becomes particularly evident in the aggregation of the actions of individuals and the aggregated consequences of individuals' actions.

Thus, another descriptive principle of social action is that, commonly, it involves individual actions and aggregated consequences. For example, in voting, it is the aggregated actions of individual voters that decide elections. Similarly, in human rights movements, it is the aggregated actions of individual participants that change society. And, in volunteerism, it is the aggregated actions of individual volunteers that help to solve societal problems, such as when tutors who teach children, one by one, to read contribute to solving the problem of illiteracy.

That social action involves individual actions and aggregated consequences serves to underscore, yet again, the principle that social action is, at one and the same time, both an individual phenomenon, involving the actions of individual social actors, and a collective phenomenon, involving the aggregated consequences of the actions of many individuals working alone or in coordinated fashion.

Multiple Pathways, Common Goals

In many forms of social action, the same outcome can come from different means. These multiple pathways to common goals can be illustrated in the case of participation in a social movement (e.g., Klandermans, 1997), say an environmental action movement. Here, someone participating in such a movement who wants to take action to protect the environment and conserve resources could engage in recycling, could turn down the thermostat, could join an environmental action group, and could recruit their friends and neighbors to engage in these activities. All these actions are different means toward the shared end of protecting the environment, conserving and preserving resources, and enhancing general sustainability (e.g., Oskamp, 2000). Stated another way, these actions reflect the descriptive principle of multiple pathways to a common goal.

Similarly, in many forms of social action, there is often a certain, if even implicit, "substitutability," both on the part of those who engage in social action and on the part of those who benefit from it. For example, in the case of volunteerism as a form of social action, a volunteer Big Brother/Big Sister could shift from working with one child to another without his or her status as a volunteer changing. Similarly, as the recipient of the services of a Big Brother/Big Sister program, a child could shift from one volunteer to another but still be a beneficiary of social action. To some extent, this substitutability is related to, and may even derive from, the fact that many forms of social action are focused on helping "categories" of people rather than specific individuals, and on meeting broad needs and serving general causes. That is, even though social action may be carried out in the context of specific individuals delivering services to specific recipients, it is generally conceptualized by those who engage in social action, and by society at large, in terms of helping categories of people (e.g., helping "the needy" rather than helping the specific recipients of help) or furthering broad social causes (e.g., the Green movement).

Consequences at Several Levels, Direct and Indirect Effects

Just as there are numerous routes to the goals of social action, so too are there diverse consequences and outcomes of social action. In keeping with the view of social action as both an individual and a collective phenomenon, these consequences and outcomes can be viewed as spanning a continuum that runs from the individual through the collective. Thus, when it comes to the outcomes of pursuing agendas for social action, many of these outcomes will be at the level of the individual (such as the increases to self-esteem, affirmation of values, and new skills that may accrue to those who engage in social action). Other outcomes will be of a more interpersonal nature (such as the new people one meets, the new friends one makes, and the new patterns of socializing that will develop). And, other outcomes will affect one's relationships (such as changes in patterns of social support, impact of participation on one's existing relationships). Still other outcomes will affect groups, organizations, and society (such as when organizations and movements meet their goals through the service of their members, or nations becoming "kinder and gentler" through the good works of their citizens).

As well, the consequences of social action range in terms of their directness and their concreteness. Some consequences are specific and concrete whereas others are diffuse and abstract. For example, in the case of volunteerism, there are the direct benefits to volunteers of becoming involved (e.g., increased self-esteem, meeting people, and making friends) and the direct benefits to the recipients of volunteer service (e.g., the companionship provided by volunteers to homebound elderly persons and the tutoring provided by volunteers to children who cannot yet read).

At the same time, there are growing indications of indirect benefits, not necessarily foreseen or sought by volunteers, but not necessarily unwelcome either. Thus, among the consequences of volunteerism (and other forms of social action) are better health and psychological functioning, and even a longer life (e.g., Berkman & Glass, 2000; Brown, House, Brown, & Smith, 2004; Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, & Smith, 2003; House, 2001; House, Robbins, & Metzner, 1982; Kawachi & Berkman, 2000; Musik, Herzog, & House, 1999; Piliavin, 2003, 2004a, 2004b; Schwartz, Meisenhelder, Ma, & Reed, 2003; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). On the other hand, there may also be unforeseen and negative consequences of volunteer work, such as when volunteers feel embarrassed, stigmatized, or otherwise uncomfortable when their acts of volunteerism, and especially the causes and people that their efforts support, become known to their broader social networks (e.g., Ratner & Miller, 2001; Smith, Omoto, & Snyder, 2001b).

Dimensions of Variability across Forms of Social Action

In the context of the shared features of social action, there are some important dimensions of variability—ways

in which not all forms of social action are created alike. Thus, involvement in social action may vary in how extended over time it is. For example, voting takes but a few moments of one's time, but serving in political office extends for the length of one's run for office and, if elected, one's term of office. Nevertheless, even social actions that, individually, take little time, such as recycling, may become repeated actions, occurring with regularity and predictability and acquiring the status of habits that may even become integrated into one's identity (e.g., Callero, Howard, & Piliavin, 1987; Grube & Piliavin, 2000). Giving blood and helping to build houses for homeless or impoverished individuals are other examples of repeated actions that require relatively more time. Moreover, many forms of helping, such as participating in immediate disaster relief, may be limited in time, but other forms, such as volunteering on an ongoing basis, may extend over considerable periods of time, with many volunteers serving for periods of years and even decades. In short, an important distinction here is between *episodic* versus *sustained* activities (e.g., see Wilson, 2000).

Social action also varies in the degree of institutional support and structure surrounding it. For example, social action can occur in the context of *formal* organizations (such as the Red Cross or the Salvation Army) that recruit volunteers and clients, and that engage in selection, training, placement, and monitoring of service. Or, it can occur in relatively more *informal* settings, such as when neighbors take the initiative to help others on their blocks who need assistance (e.g., reciprocal baby-sitting arrangements, or helping elderly neighbors by mowing their lawns or cleaning their gutters). This dimension of "formalness" or degree of "institutionalization" has consequences for estimating the prevalence of social action activities, to be sure, but it also may have implications for why people might be attracted to certain social action activities as well as how, and how easily, they are carried out. Related to our substitutability point discussed earlier (the principle of "multiple pathways, common goals"), we offer the conjecture that social actions that occur within formal organizations may have a higher degree of substitutability associated with them than actions that take place in more informal contexts.

When formal organizational structures for social action exist, furthermore, they may vary in whether they are *local* in reach (e.g., a neighborhood block watch), *national* in focus (e.g., the Sierra Club), or even *international* in scope (e.g., Amnesty International). Thus, there is variability in the extent to which social action efforts are embedded in or organized around structures, with these structures themselves differing in degree of breadth. In many cases, formal structures for social action are linked in umbrella networks across multiple levels. For example, many local animal protection organizations are part of regional affiliations as well as tied to a national organization, the Humane Society of the United States. Moreover, the activities and efforts at the multiple levels are often coordinated (e.g., national campaigns that have local events), a fact that helps to underscore our point about the impact of social action being most acutely observed

with aggregation (the principle of "individual actions, aggregated consequences").

What Is Not Social Action?

Taken together, our set of characteristic features of social action and the dimensions of variability that we have presented also give some indication of what we believe should be *excluded* from the category of social action. First, actions that occur under obligation, whether legal or moral or contractual, such as helping members of one's own family or one's spouse, would not qualify as social action because they occur with obligations stemming from familial and marital bonds. Similarly, the payment of taxes, although of benefit to society and a benefit that is most apparent in the aggregation of the inputs of many taxpayers, would not qualify as social action because it occurs with the legal obligation to pay taxes and the threat of penalties and sanctions for evading payment. More generally, actions performed under institutional pressure and in response to obligations to comply, and those that have sanctions for noncompliance, would not qualify as social action.

In addition, we wish to make clear that social action is not simply synonymous with behavior that is good for everyone. Some activities that can be characterized by our descriptive principles, for example, may benefit some individuals while disadvantaging or harming others. This state of affairs is especially evident in intergroup contexts or in situations of direct competition between social groups. In fact, many social actions, including social movements and services, develop and flourish in settings that are characterized by competition between movements or groups. Individuals may engage in social action activities intended to support one group, but those activities may simultaneously have negative effects on other (often opposing) groups.

Returning to our principle of "socially valued, but not socially mandated," therefore, we add the *caveat* that "socially valued" is determined within a specific group, societal, or cultural context. For example, social action on behalf of gay rights or the right of women to terminate a pregnancy may not be universally accepted and admired. In fact, depending on one's political leanings and one's religious or moral values, such activities may be construed as actions that work to the detriment of another group or against one's sense of the greater good. As another example, consider Ku Klux Klan activities and rallies. These activities may not be generally endorsed by the majority of Americans, yet they can be characterized by many of the descriptive principles that we have discussed. What is good for one social movement or cause may not be good for everyone or for all social actors. Thus, the simple point is that social action cannot be characterized or defined simply by its effects—all social action is not necessarily good for all people.

Similarly, although many examples of social action are also prosocial behaviors (e.g., Batson, 1998; Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroeder, & Penner, 2006), we do not wish to imply that helping and prosocial behaviors are the same

things as social action. While it is true that many forms of helping behavior share characteristics of social action, our descriptive principles can be applied, as noted previously, to many “unhelpful” behaviors as well. In addition, many instances of helping occur in direct response to an appeal for help or out of an obligation to provide aid and cannot logically be aggregated across actions or actors. These helping behaviors may be *ad hoc*, informal, and personally directed, and they include examples such as providing a ride to an elderly neighbor, fixing a meal for a coworker who has just had a baby, or making a one-time donation to a charitable cause in memory of a deceased family member or friend. These are all prosocial actions, to be sure, and they are interesting and important phenomena. However, they do not possess many of the characteristics of social action that we have explicated, rendering a full treatment of them outside the scope of this chapter. Thus, we view prosocial behavior and social action as only partially overlapping sets, and for the sake of conceptual clarity, we use the descriptive principles we have outlined to determine when prosocial behavior can also be considered a form of social action.

Finally, there are cases that test the boundaries of what constitutes social action. For example, service learning and mandatory volunteer programs in schools and corporations (that require people to volunteer or do other forms of community service) and “incentived” volunteerism (such as elder volunteer programs that pay limited stipends to volunteers) build institutional structures around what would otherwise be voluntary actions and create curious mixtures of voluntary and nonvoluntary social action. In these programs, incentives (e.g., course credit and stipends) are generally small and may be just enough to get individuals to engage in social action. In addition, individuals may retain choice about the causes and organizations with which to volunteer and donate their time. Thus, the *act* of volunteering or providing assistance may be dictated by an external agent or barely sufficient justification (e.g., Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959), but the social actor him- or herself has a fair degree of choice about where, when, and how to engage. And, for many programs, social action (e.g., volunteering) is but one option that individuals have for meeting requirements. (For further discussion of service learning and mandatory volunteerism programs, see, for example, Bringle & Duffy, 1998; Stukas, Clary, & Snyder, 1999; Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 1999; Tschirhart, Mesch, Perry, Miller, & Lee, 2001.)

Thus, in some cases it may be meaningful to talk about activities as forms of social action that are characterized by the principles that we have outlined earlier. In other instances, the “fit” to our descriptive principles of social action may be less good. We do not include further discussion of “hybrid” variants of social action in this chapter (such as service learning). However, we note that they share several of the characteristic features of social action that we have described. In addition, they are topics worthy of research, for both practical reasons revolving around program implementation and improvement, and also to more fully build the body of scientific information

on social action and related phenomena. At this time, however, we are not yet ready to fully apply our principles of social action to these intriguing and important behaviors.

Summary

At the outset, we suggested that our first goal for this chapter was to offer a set of descriptive principles that could be used to characterize social action. Having reviewed several principles, we emphasize again that this is neither an exhaustive nor necessarily a prioritized list of principles. That is, we leave open the possibility that our list of principles may need to be modified, most likely, we believe, needing to be expanded rather than reduced, in order to better capture and characterize the many diverse forms of social action. And, in the absence of compelling evidence, we are currently reluctant to claim that any principle or characteristic is more important than any other in defining or understanding social action. We have offered our descriptive set of principles in hopes of providing a conceptual framework for approaching the study of social action, and to bring some (even tentative) order to a dizzying array of social behaviors that sometimes have been studied together and sometimes been considered apart. As we suggested, our goal has been a modest one—simply to provide some guideposts and roadmaps for traversing the topography of social action.

To summarize, then, we have articulated a set of descriptive principles of social action. These principles include characteristic features of social action as well as dimensions of variability across forms of social action. Together, these principles help to organize the wide range of behaviors that can be considered forms of social action, and they also offer guides for determining which phenomena are to be included and which are to be excluded from the category of social action. Moreover, these descriptive principles serve to define what various forms of social action have in common, as well as some of the ways in which they differ from each other. They also aid in determining the degree of “prototypicality” of the different forms of social action, with some forms (such as volunteerism) matching the prototype of social action better than others (such as service learning). And, as we shall see, these descriptive principles point the way toward a consideration of the explanatory principles of social action that help to account for why social action occurs and may determine the forms that it takes.

EXPLANATORY PRINCIPLES: WHY SOCIAL ACTION OCCURS

Clearly, social action occurs. It occurs at the level of individual behaviors such as recycling, energy conservation, blood donation, voting, charitable giving, and volunteering. And, it occurs at the level of collective actions such as participating in neighborhood groups, community organizations, self-help groups, political campaigns, and social movements. But, *why* does it occur? What leads peo-

ple to engage in social action, and what keeps them involved in social action? It is to these questions that we now turn, as we seek to articulate a set of explanatory principles of social action.

Many of the characteristic features of social action suggest that it involves individuals and groups actively setting and pursuing agendas for action. Specifically, that various forms of social action occur without obligation, that individuals seek out opportunities to engage in social action, that they persist in these activities over extended periods of time, often incurring personal costs at the same time as they do social good, and that social action may involve multiple routes to the same ends, all are suggestive that social action is a purposeful phenomenon in which individuals set and pursue agendas that take them along a behavioral course in which they do social good and contribute to society. And, of course, many of these efforts are coordinated, with the full impact of them felt only as a result of aggregation across individuals.

In this sense, then, the descriptive principles of social action provide a springboard for consideration of the causal or explanatory principles of social action, which help to account for why social action occurs and the forms that it takes. That is, the analysis of descriptive principles of social action suggests that attempts to understand the causes of social action should pay careful attention to considerations of motivation as individuals seek to find ways to take action on behalf of the social good of society. Accordingly, it is with the matter of motivation that we begin our consideration of the explanatory principles of social action.

The Role of Motivation

Across diverse literatures on numerous forms of social action, investigators have adopted a *motivational* perspective, focusing theoretically and empirically on the role of motivations in “disposing” people to take action, in channeling them into particular forms of action, in guiding them through the course of their involvement, and in sustaining their efforts over time. To some extent, this emphasis on motivation reflects the fact that many of the characteristic features of social action appear to be describing and defining *motivated* forms of action—chosen activities that are entered into freely and without obligation, continuing over extended periods of time and even in the face of substantial personal costs, and in which there are multiple routes to reaching the same end of contributing to the social good. In this spirit, researchers have searched for personally based motivations that move people to seek out forms of social action, that lead them to initiate involvement in social action, and that guide and sustain their actions over time.

Volunteerism

One form of social action in which the role of motivation is clearly evident is volunteerism. Every year, in countries around the world, millions upon millions of individuals

volunteer their time and efforts to directly help others (Curtis et al., 1992). In the United States alone, it is estimated that 44% of adults volunteer (Independent Sector, 2002); they volunteer for such activities as providing one-to-one companionship to the lonely, tutoring to the illiterate, counseling to the troubled, and health care to the sick. Other volunteers invest their time and effort in political campaigns, advocacy efforts, and other causes, the goals of which are not so much the direct delivery of help and assistance to others but, rather, the improvement of the conditions of life of entire groups. Accordingly, volunteerism represents a noteworthy example of social action. Volunteers contribute their time and effort with the purposes of solving problems faced by their communities, of alleviating the suffering of others, and of generally bettering the human condition. And, indeed, volunteers play critical roles in ameliorating such problems as hunger and poverty, illiteracy, and alcohol and drug abuse, as well as in advancing the agendas of various social movements and political causes such as environmental action and human rights movements (see Wilson, 2000, for a review of research on volunteerism).

Research on volunteerism has examined the motivations that dispose and sustain involvement in this form of social action (e.g., Clary & Orenstein, 1991; Clary et al., 1998; Davis, Hall, & Meyer, 2003; Davis et al., 1999; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998; Piliavin, 2005; Simon, Stuermer, & Steffens, 2000). Much of this research has been guided by *functionalist* theorizing that emphasizes the purposes served by action and the role of such purposes in initiating, guiding, and sustaining action (e.g., Snyder, 1993; Snyder & Cantor, 1998). In the case of volunteerism, a functional analysis concerns the needs being met, the motives being fulfilled, and the functions being served by engaging in volunteer service (Clary & Snyder, 1991; Omoto & Snyder, 1990; Snyder, Clary, & Stukas, 2000; Snyder & Omoto, 2000).

A central tenet of functionalist theorizing is that different people can and do engage in the very same behaviors to serve quite different psychological functions. According to this logic, acts of volunteerism that are quite similar on the surface may reflect markedly different underlying motivations; that is, they may be serving distinctly different psychological functions. Thus, for example, several individuals may all engage in the same form of volunteerism, say working in a shelter for individuals who are homeless, but do so in the service of quite different motives, with one person doing so to make friends, another to boost a fragile sense of self-worth, and yet another to acquire skills relevant to a career in social services. In accord with this functional principle, research has revealed a diversity of motivations that bring people to volunteerism and that sustain their involvement in volunteerism, including affirming values, enhancing self-esteem, making friends, acquiring skills, and community concern.

Several inventories having been developed to assess motivations for volunteerism, some seeking to measure motivations of generic relevance to volunteerism and

some seeking to measure motivations for specific forms of volunteerism (e.g., Clary et al., 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Ouellette, Cassel, Maslanka, & Wong, 1995; Reeder, Davison, Gibson, & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Schondel, Shields, & Orel, 1992). Nevertheless, strong family resemblances exist in the sets of motivations identified in these diverse programs of research, and across diverse ages of the volunteer populations studied (e.g., Okun, Barr, & Herzog, 1998; Omoto, Snyder, & Martino, 2000). As well, the inventories of motivations identified in studies of volunteers have been successfully “translated” to tap the motivations for other forms of social action, such as involvement in community leadership programs (e.g., Bono, Snyder, & Duehr, 2005) and involvement in the political process (e.g., Miller, 2004).

Although there is some variability in the precise numbers of motivations identified for volunteerism, there is a set of recurring motivations. Specifically, it is common for volunteers to express motivations related to personal *values*, including humanitarian concern about others or other personal guiding values, convictions, and beliefs. Another important type of motivation revolves around *community concern*, or the desire to support and assist a specific community of people, whether or not the volunteer considers him- or herself to be a member of that community. Some people volunteer for reasons that are relatively more self-focused. For example, motivations have been identified that include volunteering for *career* reasons, either to bolster career and networking opportunities or to obtain career relevant experiences, and volunteering to gain greater *understanding* or knowledge about a problem, cause, or set of people. Other motivations for volunteerism include *personal development* concerns (e.g., developing skills and testing oneself), ego or *esteem enhancement* (e.g., to feel better about oneself or bring stability to one’s life), and *social* concerns (e.g., a desire to build one’s social network and to meet new people and make new friends). People may seek out opportunities to volunteer for one or more of these motivations (e.g., Kiviniemi, Snyder, & Omoto, 2002), but the simple point is that they engage in their work in an effort to meet personal and specific needs. These personal needs or motivations differ across persons, but they can also differ within the same individual over time or life circumstances.

A second central tenet of functionalist theorizing in the context of volunteerism is that these motivations are related to more general agendas for action, and that these motivations guide and direct the unfolding course of people’s pursuit of these agendas. In fact, in support of this functional principle, research has documented how the motivations that bring people to engage in volunteerism foreshadow and get played out over the entire life history of their service as volunteers, predicting their experiences as volunteers and the outcomes of their volunteer service, including their contributions to the well-being of others and the benefits, costs, and other personal outcomes that accrue to volunteers themselves (e.g., Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). When it comes to initiating involvement in

volunteerism, people are particularly likely to become involved when circumstances suggest that engaging in social action can and will serve their own motivations. Thus, in studies of persuasive messages to recruit volunteers, the messages that have been found to be particularly effective are those that target specific motivations of individual recipients—in other words, messages that are fine-tuned to individually based needs and motives (e.g., Clary et al., 1998; Omoto, Snyder, & Smith, 1999; Smith, Omoto, & Snyder, 2001a). Volunteers also gravitate toward tasks with benefits that match their personally relevant motives (e.g., Houle, Sagarin, & Kaplan, 2005).

Moreover, once in volunteer service, matching between motivations, expectations, and experiences is predictive of greater satisfaction and lesser burnout (e.g., Crain, Omoto, & Snyder, 1998; Omoto et al., 2000). Similarly, when it comes time to decide whether to continue to be involved in volunteering, volunteers are particularly likely to do so in circumstances in which their own motivations are being fulfilled (e.g., Clary et al., 1998; O’Brien, Crain, Omoto, & Snyder, 2000; Williamson, Snyder, & Omoto, 2000). This principle of the “matching” of motivations and experiences and the facilitating effects of such matches on events related to the initiation and sustaining of social action have been observed in other social action contexts as well, including studies of the determinants of voting behavior (e.g., Burgess, Haney, Snyder, Sullivan, & Transue, 2000; Lavine & Snyder, 1996). The functional theoretical perspective guiding research on volunteer motivations and the motivations identified in related research guided by it serve as reminders that volunteers act both on behalf of *others* (e.g., volunteering to alleviate the problems of homelessness, poverty, etc.) and on behalf of *themselves* (e.g., volunteering to make friends, acquire new skills, and affirm personal values). This joining of concern for others and self is, of course, highly congruent with the nature of social action as individual action taken on behalf of larger societal concerns (i.e., the descriptive principle of “an individual phenomenon, but also a social phenomenon”) and the bridging of individual and collective concerns that is characteristic of social action.

Civic and Political Participation

An emphasis on the role of motivations for social action, and on the importance of recognizing a diversity of motives that may be differentially important across individuals who engage in social action, is also evident in research on the motivations for civic engagement and political participation. Thus, in their attempts to understand individuals who had become active in civic and political causes, Verba and colleagues (1995) identified four categories of benefits that people may seek from civic participation: selective *material benefits* (e.g., furthering one’s own career), selective *social gratifications* (e.g., being with other people), selective *civic gratification* (e.g., making the community or nation a better place), and *collective outcomes* (e.g., influencing government policy). These benefits clearly span a continuum from outcomes of relatively

specific benefit to individual activists to outcomes that benefit larger collectives of individuals in communities, states, and nations.

Based on interviews with political activists, Teske (1997) has also identified a diversity of motives that may underlie political participation, including the affirmation of one's principles, the good feelings derived from doing the right thing, growth and development as a person, increased self-esteem, and gaining community. Finally, adopting an explicitly functional approach to motivation, Miller (2004) has examined the role of several motives (including value expressive, social, ego defensive, self-interest, and collective interest) in predicting political participation.

Social Movements

The role of motivation has also been central to understanding participation in social movements. It is well known and documented that members of certain social groups (ethnic minorities, women, gays and lesbians, etc.) are often targets of prejudice and discrimination, have limited economic and employment opportunities, and do not enjoy full access to education and health care. Sometimes, attempts to change these disadvantaged conditions take on a collective form, as when people decide that the only way to change these disadvantageous conditions is to join together with other members of their group to take collective action for the good of the group. The activities of social movements can include public discussions, lobbying, petition drives, boycotts, protests, and civil disobedience. The list of social movements is a long one, with movements dedicated to issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, peace, the environment, labor, nuclear power, to name but a few, attracting legions of participants around the globe.

Motivational issues have been a central concern in attempts to understand why people participate in social movements and engage in collective action (Klandermans, 1997; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; Simon et al., 1998, 2000; Stryker, Owens, & White, 2000; Tropp & Brown, 2004). Thus, in his theory of social movements, Klandermans (1997) has proposed three classes of motivation for social movement participation, each originating from different types of expected costs and benefits of participation. The *collective motive* involves the shared benefits that the social movement seeks (e.g., equal rights and higher wages). The *normative motive* involves the expected reactions of significant others to one's participation in a social movement (e.g., approval or disapproval, praise or criticism). And, the *reward motive* involves the individual and personal costs and benefits of participation (e.g., time taken away from work or new friends made in the movement). The role of these three motives has been documented in a variety of social movements, including (among others) the labor and peace movements in the Netherlands (Klandermans, 1984, 1997; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987); for related studies of social movements, see also Simon and colleagues (1998); Stuermer (2000); Stuermer and Simon (2004b); Stuermer, Simon, Loewy, and Joerger (2003).

Organizational Citizenship

The role of motives for participation has also been examined in another domain of social action, namely, organizational citizenship behavior. It has been suggested that for firms and organizations to operate successfully and to encourage employee satisfaction and camaraderie, workers must do more than the formally specified technical aspects of their jobs; toward those ends, it has been suggested that workers engage in prosocial behaviors directed at helping others and the organization itself, phenomena referred to as organizational citizenship behaviors (Borman & Penner, 2001; Brief & Weiss, 2002; Cropanzano & Byrne, 2000; Katz, 1964; Organ, 1988). Most conceptualizations of organizational citizenship behaviors have drawn distinctions between prosocial behaviors that are directed at helping specific individuals or groups within the organization and prosocial behaviors directed at the organization itself (e.g., Organ & Ryan, 1995; Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983). And, a variety of personality, attitudinal, and motivational variables have been linked to organizational citizenship behaviors (for reviews, see Borman, Penner, Allen, & Motowidlo, 2001; Motowidlo, Borman, & Schmitt, 1997; Organ & Ryan, 1995).

Of particular relevance to our current concerns with motives and social action, Penner, Midili, and Kegelmeyer (1997) have conceptualized organizational citizenship as proactive behaviors, consciously chosen by individuals and engaged in to meet their needs and to satisfy their motives. Drawing from functionalist theorizing proposed and developed in the context of volunteerism, Penner and colleagues have suggested that the same acts of organizational citizenship could reflect different motives for different individuals. Guided by and in support of this theorizing, Rioux and Penner (2001) have identified and developed measures of a set of motives for organizational citizenship behaviors—specifically *prosocial values*, *organizational concern*, and *impression management*. Moreover, they have found that prosocial values motives were most strongly predictive of organizational citizenship directed at individuals, whereas organizational concern motives were most strongly associated with organizational citizenship behaviors directed at the organization (see also Finkelstein & Penner, 2004). For additional perspectives on the motivational bases of organizational citizenship behaviors, see Bolino (1999) and Folger (1993).

Summary

Thus, in four domains of social action—volunteerism, civic and political participation, social movements, and organizational citizenship—we have seen the important role that motives play in disposing people to become involved. In each domain, we have seen that there is a diversity of motives potentially in play. Moreover, it appears that the sets of motivations, although they may involve some degree of specificity for particular forms of social action, include some recurring themes and interrelated themes. Specifically, there is clear emphasis on the

importance of recognizing a diversity of potential motivations, as well as the necessity of identifying which motive or motives are particularly salient for which individuals at any given time in promoting and sustaining social action.

The importance of motivations is evident across many of the unfolding stages of participation in social action, as motivations set the stage for and foreshadow the expectations that people form in anticipation of getting involved in social action, their choices to get involved, the experiences that they have while participating, their satisfaction with their participation, and their ultimate decisions to continue their involvement over time or to terminate their participation. That is, motivations set the stage for the agendas for action that individuals pursue in the context of social action.

The Role of Identity

Not only are motivations implicated in social action, so too are there indications of an important role for identity and identification concerns in understanding social action. That is, for some people and under some circumstances, involvement in social action appears to derive from, as well as become a part of, one's identity, part of that which defines who one is, both as a matter of *individual identity* and as a matter of *social identity*. It is, so to speak, not just that one "does" social action but that one "is" a social actor. Identity concerns are thus another explanatory principle of social action.

Individual Identity

In the case of individual identity, roles and habits have been implicated in the initiation and persistence of social action. Consider the case of blood donation as a form of social action. In their attempts to explain why people become blood donors and especially why some people become regular and habitual blood donors, Piliavin and Callero (1991; Callero, 1985; Callero et al., 1987; Charng, Piliavin, & Callero, 1988; Piliavin, 1989) have noted that for some blood donors, there develops over time a "role person merger" in which what one does as a blood donor becomes a defining part of who one is as a person. This identity as a blood donor is thought to be important in sustaining blood donation over time (see Piliavin, Grube, & Callero, 2002, for further discussion of roles and social action).

Extending this perspective, the role of individual role identity in other forms of social action have also been examined, including the giving of time as a volunteer and the giving of money as a volunteer (e.g., Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Lee, Piliavin, & Call, 1999; Martino, Snyder, & Omoto, 1998), organizational citizenship behavior (e.g., Finkelstein & Penner, 2004; Krueger, 2004), and whistle blowing and other activities of "principled organizational dissent" (Piliavin et al., 2002). In each case, involvement in social action seems to be not just a behavior but also an identity. By extension, and more generally, taking on the identity as a participant in social action may be important for sustaining involvement in social action activities.

Social Identity

At the level of social identity, students of social movements have considered the role of collective identification in motivating and sustaining social movement participation. Across a variety of social movements, *collective identification* with a social movement and the groups that benefit from social movement activities have been found to constitute one pathway to social movement participation, including predicting who becomes involved, extensiveness of involvement, and persistence in social movement activities (e.g., Simon et al., 1998, 2000; Stuermer & Kampmeier, 2003; Stuermer & Simon, 2004b; Stuermer et al., 2003). Moreover, collective identification predicts social movement participation independently of another pathway to involvement made up of considerations of the rewards and punishments, costs, and benefits associated with social movement participation. For a review of theory on the dual-pathway model of social movement participation and evidence in support of it coming from investigations of a variety of social movements (including those of gay people, old people, and fat people), see Stuermer, 2000, and Stuermer and Simon, 2004a.

In a related vein, there have been examinations of the role that social identity plays as the "social glue" that builds group loyalty and that holds groups together, such that group members develop extremely positive impressions of their groups and stay invested in them even when they could obtain better outcomes by leaving the group (e.g., Van Vugt & Hart, 2004). This state of affairs is one that would facilitate social action within groups, with individual group members translating their social identities as group members into working loyally on behalf of the group and the betterment of its members. In fact, research suggests that those who identify most strongly with their social groups are likely to invest more of their personal resources in the group, work harder for the group, and show greater self-restraint in consuming the group's resources (e.g., Barreto & Ellemers, 2000, 2002; De Cremer & Van Vugt, 1999; Kramer & Brewer, 1984).

Considerations of Self and Considerations of Others

A recurring theme across diverse domains of social action, and captured in another of our explanatory principles, is that considerations of *self* and considerations of *others* are invoked and implicated in the initiation and maintenance of social action.

Volunteerism

In research on the motivations that underlie volunteerism as a form of social action, for example, it has been suggested (e.g., Omoto & Snyder, 1995) that much of the variability in motivations for volunteering is captured in a two-category classification system in which motivations are grouped into those that focus on *others* who are the beneficiaries of volunteerism (e.g., values and community concern motivations) and those that focus on

the *self* and the benefits that accrue to the self from volunteering (e.g., career advancement and esteem enhancement). As well, the distribution of motives for volunteerism into relatively self-serving and relatively other-oriented has been discussed by Bierhoff (2002) and Chambré (1987), and the variation in the balancing of these motives across nations has been examined by Van de Vliert, Huang, and Levine (2004). In a related vein, Miller (1994) has proposed that the moral foundations of caring and helping may vary across cultures, especially with respect to the extent that caring and helping reflect personal and individual considerations versus the extent to which these prosocial actions reflect interpersonal and social obligations.

Social Movements

Similarly, in theory and research on social movement participation (e.g., Stuermer & Simon, 2004a), the multiple pathways to involvement that have been identified tend to group into those that focus on the individual actor (e.g., calculations of personal rewards and costs of joining and participating in a social movement) and those that focus on others (e.g., identification with a larger group that will benefit from the actions of the movement). In fact, research suggests that these different pathways, one focused on the self and one on others, have independent predictive value in accounting for participation in social movements (for a review, see Stuermer & Simon, 2004a).

Social Dilemmas

A similar distinction between a focus on the self and a focus on others is found in theory and research on social dilemmas and their resolution. Specifically, this work has attempted to understand in the context of social dilemmas when and why individuals focus more heavily on the collective concerns of all members of a community or a society and when and why they focus more on their own individual concerns. The focus on collective concerns is a prosocial orientation that tends to lead to greater involvement in collective actions for the common good, whereas the focus on individual concerns seems to be an orientation that tends to inhibit social action on behalf of the greater good, instead leading people to emphasize more selfish considerations of personal gain. In fact, research on social dilemmas, including studies of energy conservation and the use of public transportation (e.g., De Cremer & Van Vugt, 1999; Van Lange, Van Vugt, & De Cremer, 2000; Van Lange, Van Vugt, Meertens, & Rutter, 1998; Van Vugt, Meertens, & Van Lange, 1995), suggests that the resolution of social dilemmas in ways that involve acting on behalf of a collective good stems from prosocial orientations that involve beliefs, feelings, and motivations in which concern for others figures prominently. (For a review of this work on social dilemmas, see Van Lange, 2000.) At the same time, some of the theoretical and empirical literature on social dilemmas also argues that prosocial action is undertaken in the service of selfish concerns about personal gain, both at an

individual level (as a manifestation of a form of "Machiavellian intelligence," e.g., Orbell, Morikawa, Hartwig, Hanley, & Allen, 2004) and as a result of evolutionary pressures and concerns (as a manifestation of a "selfish gene" [e.g., Dawkins, 1976], and the evolution of cooperation [e.g., Axelrod, 1984], and reciprocal altruism [e.g., Trivers, 1971]; see also Van Vugt & Van Lange, 2006).

Leadership

Finally, a related distinction between a focus on the self and a focus on others can be found in studies of leadership, specifically the sources of motivations that leaders can use to promote social action. For example, Tyler (2002) has proposed two sources of motivations that leaders can use to promote cooperation in groups: rewards/punishments and attitudes/values. In the case of the former, rewards/punishments can be interpreted as reflecting extrinsic considerations and focus on the other people who have the ability to dispense rewards and punishments. For attitudes/values, meanwhile, the focus is on relatively more intrinsic and self-considerations, including the influence of attributes of the self who holds the guiding attitudes and values. Furthermore, it is suggested that leaders who appeal to attitudes and values (as internal motivations coming from the self) rather than using promises of rewards and threats of punishments will ultimately be more effective in gaining voluntary followers and cooperation within groups (Tyler, 2002; see also Tyler & Blader, 2000). This work is relevant to social action in that leaders can encourage and influence group members to behave cooperatively, generally benefiting the group as a whole and aiding in finding effective solutions to social dilemma problems. In fact, Tyler and his colleagues have examined internal motivations for cooperative behavior and how authorities can gain support and deference from group members through the use of fair procedures (i.e., procedural justice). These procedures convey and foster respect and pride and also inspire identification with the community on the part of group members. Consequently, group members are more likely to accept the decisions of authorities and to show restraint when faced with social dilemmas involving conflicts between individual- and group-serving actions (e.g., Tyler, 2000; Tyler & Degoe, 1995).

Implications for Initiation and Maintenance of Social Action

The importance of recognizing that considerations of self and considerations of others are both involved in social action is underscored by the fact that these considerations may be differentially involved in the initiation and the maintenance of social action. Across diverse domains of social action, there are indications that the factors that are important in accounting for the initiation of social action are not necessarily the same as the factors that are important in accounting for the maintenance of social action. For example, consider the case of volunteerism. Although considerations of values and related other-oriented motivations figure prominently in the motiva-

tions reported by new volunteers, such motivations have relatively little predictive power in accounting for the ultimate duration of service as a volunteer. By contrast, although self-oriented motivations such as esteem enhancement are relatively rarer among the motivations that volunteers claim to have brought them to volunteer in the first place, such motivations have relatively greater predictive power in forecasting just how long volunteers will remain active in service to others (Omoto & Snyder, 1995; but see Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). More generally, it may be that when it comes to understanding the initiation of social action, other-oriented considerations may be important, but when it comes to understanding the maintenance of social action over sustained periods of time, the critically important factors are related to self-oriented considerations (see Snyder, Omoto, & Smith, in press, for further discussion of this point). This contention is speculative at this point; it remains for future research to more fully explore differences between the factors that are crucial to the initiation versus the maintenance of social action, and especially how these factors might be differentially focused on the self or on others.

Implications for the Locus of the Impetus for Social Action

It also should be noted that in drawing the distinction between a focus on the self and a focus on others, it is not a question of where the motivations are located. That is, it is not that the motivations for social action are thought to vary between those that reside within the self and those that reside within others. In all cases, the motivations that lead to social action are properties of the individual social actors and are thought to reside within them; however, what varies is the focus of attention to be on the actor or on others, who often are the targets of the action. Thus, the humanitarian concerns and sense of societal obligation that lead people to try to improve the welfare of others through social action and the desires for social recognition and career advancement that also can motivate social action both reside within the individual actor; however, what varies is whether the driving force behind social action is the quest for benefits to the self or benefits to others through social action.

Implications for the Selfish/Selfless Nature of Social Action

Finally, we point out that there is some conceptual overlap between this social action explanatory principle of considerations of self and considerations of others and distinctions that have been made between “egoism and altruism” or “selfish and selfless” motivations in the literature on helping and prosocial behavior (e.g., Batson, 1991, 1998). To be sure, there does seem to be something selfish and egoistic about social action that is prompted by the quest for benefits to the actor him- or herself; similarly, social action that is undertaken to generate benefits to others and to society at large does seem to have a rather selfless and altruistic quality to it. How-

ever, even social action that is motivated by desires for benefits to the self delivers benefits to others and to society at large and is, in that sense, prosocial and altruistic in its consequences. And, social action that is undertaken out of concern for others and for society at large does deliver benefits to the individual actor as a member of society.

Nevertheless, individual actors faced with decisions about whether or not to get involved in social action may face tensions and trade-offs between potential benefits to self and potential benefits to others. In fact, research on social movements suggests that individuals may calculate the rewards and punishments, costs, and benefits associated with joining a social movement (e.g., Klandermans, 1984, 1997); among the benefits and costs to be weighed are the benefits of the social movement to society should the movement succeed and the costs to the self of the time and energy taken away from other personal pursuits by involvement in the social movement. As well, research on volunteerism indicates that, at the same time as volunteers clearly deliver services of benefit to others, they often experience personal costs, including, at times, being made to feel embarrassed, uncomfortable, or otherwise stigmatized as a result of their volunteer service (e.g., Snyder, Omoto, & Crain, 1999). Furthermore, for a general cost-benefit approach to understanding involvement in volunteer organizations, see Chinman and Wandersman, 1999, and Chinman, Wandersman, and Goodman, 2005.

The Role of Personal Connections to Other People

Theory and research on diverse forms of social action, conducted from diverse conceptual orientations, point to an important role of connections to other people—whether direct and behavioral or indirect and symbolic—in understanding social action. For, connections to other people are involved in prompting people to become involved in social action and in sustaining their continued involvement in social action, and particularly social action that directly benefits others. Although connections to others can take many forms, we focus on research on empathy and common group memberships, two of the more extensively researched forms of connections to other people, as exemplars of this explanatory principle of social action.

Empathy

The connections between individuals that facilitate social action may be feelings of empathy and bonds of identification. That is, to the extent that individuals feel empathy and identify with other people, they become more likely to engage in various forms of social action that potentially benefit those with whom they empathize and those with whom they identify. The important role of empathy has been revealed in studies of prosocial action involving one-to-one helping and volunteerism.

Researchers in personality, social, and developmental psychology have provided evidence for the role of empathy—an emotional reaction including feelings of

compassion, concern, and tenderness—in spurring individuals to help people in need. For example, to the extent that an individual feels empathy for another person, he or she will be more likely to offer help (e.g., Batson, 1998; Dovidio, Allen, & Schroeder, 1990; Schroeder, Dovidio, Sibicky, Mathews, & Allen, 1988), even in situations in which helping is relatively demanding and may not bring direct benefits to the helper.

Moreover, people who have a general tendency to react to the plight of other people with feelings of empathy (i.e., people who are high in *dispositional* empathy) are particularly likely to help others (Davis, 1983, 1996; Davis et al., 1999; Penner, Fritzsche, Craiger, & Freifeld, 1995). More specifically, people who are generally disposed to feel empathy are also more likely to feel empathy for a specific person in need, which, in turn, fosters helping and related forms of social action (Carlo, Eisenberg, Troyer, Switzer, & Speer, 1991; Davis et al., 2003; Eisenberg et al., 1989).

The role of empathic connections with other people in promoting and sustaining involvement in social action has been examined in the specific context of volunteerism, where Davis has traced the role of empathy over the course of volunteering (for a review, see Davis, 2005). In his work, he has shown that individual differences in empathy are related to initial decisions to volunteer and to the subjective experiences of volunteers during their service (e.g., Davis et al., 1999), although less so to sustaining their involvement over time (e.g., Davis et al., 2003).

Common Group Membership

While empathic connections seem to facilitate the provision of help, and perhaps other forms of social action, it also seems to be the case that the effects of empathic connections with others may depend on whether those others are members of one's own ingroup or whether they are members of an outgroup. Thus, for example, in research on volunteerism, it has been demonstrated, in both field and laboratory studies, that *empathy* is a critical ingredient in accounting for volunteering to help ingroup members whereas another type of connection, *liking*, is a critical ingredient in accounting for volunteering to help outgroup members (e.g., Stuermer & Siem, 2005; Stuermer, Snyder, Kropp, & Siem, 2005; Stuermer, Snyder, & Omoto, 2005).

More generally, there are growing indications that quite different motivations are involved in helping ingroup and outgroup members. For example, although people typically help ingroup members because of their identification with the common ingroup and a concern for their collective welfare (e.g., Simon et al., 2000), outgroup helping often reflects self-serving considerations, including the desire to appear unprejudiced or to avoid feeling guilty (Dutton & Lake, 1973; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977).

Although not necessarily conducted in social action contexts, other research similarly suggests that people may have different reasons for helping ingroup and outgroup members, and especially when group member-

ships are made salient by contextual cues, structural differences, or histories of asymmetrical intergroup relations. For example, changing group conceptualizations or boundaries so that former outgroup members are now viewed as members of one's ingroup leads to increases in helping those members (Dovidio et al., 1997). The provision of help to others might also be a means for asserting group dominance or an attempt to renegotiate the power structure between groups (e.g., Nadler, 2002). Additional research is needed to carefully examine both of these intriguing possibilities. For now, our point is that there is suggestive evidence that group memberships and conceptualizations of ingroups and outgroups may play important roles in determining when, why, and on whose behalf social action is enacted.

Other Personal Connections

Finally, there is considerable support from research derived from a social exchange perspective for the principle that connections to others facilitate social action. Illustrative of the findings in this domain, it has been frequently demonstrated that increases in the social action tendency to cooperate are promoted by stronger ties between the parties to the exchange (e.g., Granovetter, 1973; Macy & Skvoretz, 1998; Orbell, van de Kragt, & Dawes, 1988).

The Role of Community

In addition to the importance of personal connections with other people, there are growing indications, across diverse forms of social action, that a sense of *connection with a larger community*, including a psychological sense of community (e.g., McMillan, 1996; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sarason, 1974), can facilitate social action. This explanatory principle has been revealed in studies on the resolution of social dilemmas, volunteerism, and civic participation.

Social Dilemmas

For example, it has been demonstrated that fostering a community orientation can promote the resolution of social dilemmas associated with, among other things, the use of public transportation and energy conservation (e.g., De Cremer & Van Vugt, 1999; Ostrom, 1990; Schlager, 2002; Van Vugt, 2002; Van Vugt & Samuelson, 1999), thereby averting the "tragedy of the commons" first described by Hardin (1968). Similarly, Tyler (2000; Tyler & Blader, 2000) has observed that promoting identification with and commitment to community can promote collective solutions to social dilemmas and compliance with authorities in regulating social dilemmas.

Volunteerism

Similarly, research on the processes of volunteerism has yielded recurring indications that connection to community can draw people into volunteerism and sustain their involvement over time. In reciprocal fashion, moreover,

involvement in volunteerism seems to strengthen and build connections to community. Specifically, community concern and the influences of other community members figure prominently in the motivations of new volunteers (Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Stuermer & Kampmeier, 2003). Moreover, over the course of their service, volunteers become increasingly connected with their surrounding communities, including the communities defined by the volunteers, staff, and clients associated with their volunteer service organizations (Omoto & Snyder, 2002). And, their effectiveness as volunteers is enhanced by a sense of connection to a relevant community (Omoto & Snyder, 2002).

Reversing the causal order, volunteering also appears to build and foster a sense of community. For example, as a consequence of their work, volunteers are increasingly surrounded by a community of people who are somehow connected to their volunteer service, including people they have recruited to be volunteers (Omoto & Snyder, 2002). In addition, volunteering can and does contribute to the creation of bonds of social capital (e.g., Stukas, Daly, & Cowling, 2005), and it even has been considered a central indicator or measure of social capital itself (Putnam, 2000). Research also suggests that as connections to a community of shared concerns increase, participation in the community, including in forms of social action other than volunteerism (such as giving to charitable causes, attending fund-raising events, and engaging in social activism), also increases (Malsch, 2005; Omoto & Malsch, 2005; Omoto & Snyder, 2002).

Civic Participation

Furthermore, beyond social dilemmas and volunteerism, cross-sectional research has demonstrated positive associations between sense of community and civic participation. Thus, for example, individuals who report a stronger psychological sense of community are more likely to be registered voters and to be active in their neighborhoods (Brodsky, O'Campo, & Aronson, 1999), to engage in neighboring behaviors such as lending their neighbors food or tools (Kingston, Mitchell, Forin, & Stevenson, 1999), and to participate in community organizations (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Perkins & Long, 2002; Wandersman, 1980; Wandersman, Florin, Friedmann, & Mier, 1987) and political activities (Davidson & Cotter, 1989). Moreover, bonds of connection within communities and the social capital associated with them have been implicated in the provision of public goods (Anderson, Mellor, & Milyo, 2004), the reduction of crime within communities (Saegert, Winkel, & Swartz, 2002), and the promotion of the health of community members (Kawachi, Kennedy, Lochner, & Prothrow-Stith, 1997). Finally, residential stability has been implicated in identification with one's community, which in turn manifests itself in diverse forms of helping behaviors, procommunity involvement, collective efficacy, and social action (Kang & Kwak, 2003; Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; Oishi et al., 2005; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

Thus, there is substantial evidence that connections to a community promote social action, often for the benefit

of the community, as well as broader involvement in society. However, we also note that there are hints of an association between individualism and broad indicators of social capital. Thus, in the United States, the states with higher levels of social capital, as indexed by greater amounts of civic engagement and political participation, are also the most individualistic; similarly, there is a positive association between individualism and social capital across different countries (Allik & Realo, 2004). These associations may suggest that as much as bonds of connection with community may promote social action, the apparent liberation from social bonds that may come with individualistic cultural views may also make people dependent on being or staying involved with society (as suggested over a century ago by Durkheim, 1893/1984; see also Sarason, 1974). For further discussion of, and evidence for, cross-cultural variation in social capital and bonds of trust and reciprocity, see Buchan, Croson, and Dawes (2002); Fukuyama (1995); and Yamagishi and Yamagishi (1994).

As reviewed in this section, then, connections to communities (and often psychological communities rather than geographically defined ones; Omoto & Malsch, 2005; Omoto & Snyder, 2002) are related to diverse forms of social action. In fact, it appears likely that there is a cyclical process at work here, one in which connections to community lead individuals to engage in social action that, in turn, further builds community connections and social capital. As a result of this self-perpetuating and accretionary process, social action becomes more likely and sense of community is increased. More generally, it may be that social action begets social action *via* a mechanism or principle of community such that one of the more significant consequences of social action is the creation and perpetuation of a culture of service, participation, and involvement.

Summary

To summarize, we have described a set of explanatory principles of social action that provide explanations for why social action occurs and that give some indications for why social action takes the forms it does. Specifically, we began by examining research from diverse domains that illustrates motivational approaches to social action, and while motivational concerns were central in each of these domains, there was not perfect agreement on the specific motivations most critical for understanding and predicting social action. Next, we discussed how individual and social identities seem to be related to the initiation, persistence, and some of the effects of social action activities. Another explanatory principle that we identified, and one for which there is precedent for and links to other literature, is the relative importance of considerations of the self relative to considerations of others. Finally, we described two types of connections that appear to be important for social action, namely, personal connections to specific others (including empathy and common group memberships) and connections to broader, more diffuse communities. To the extent that connections are salient or strong—whether they are cog-

nitive, emotional, or behavioral connections—social action, and especially helping, appears likely to result.

AN INTEGRATIVE MODEL OF SOCIAL ACTION

Thus, at this point, we have accomplished our goals of providing both descriptive and explanatory principles of social action. Our set of descriptive principles are useful for characterizing and comparing different forms of social action, as well for identifying their dimensions of variability and indicating what is to be included in and what is to be excluded from the category of social action. Meanwhile, our set of explanatory principles helps us to understand how and why social action occurs, including the factors that provide the impetus for social action, that guide the forms it takes, and that influence how it unfolds over time. To conclude this chapter, then, we now offer a heuristic model of social action, a model that we believe will be useful for organizing and perhaps guiding future work on these important and wide-ranging topics. As with our principles, we see this model as a starting point, as an initial attempt to bring order to a diverse set of topics and principles. The ultimate utility of this model can and will be determined in future theoretical and empirical work.

In reflecting on the principles we have identified for characterizing and understanding social action, it is noteworthy and impressive that these principles recur across research in diverse domains, conducted by researchers working in different countries, coming from a multiplicity of disciplines, and guided by a range of theoretical predilections and perspectives. But, perhaps these recurring themes are no accident. The principles may recur because they may reflect the operations of a common, integrative heuristic model for theory, research, and application on social action. In this model of social action, which builds on and extends earlier models of volunteerism as one form of social action (e.g., Omoto & Snyder, 1995, 2002; Snyder et al., in press), social action is conceptualized as a process that unfolds over time and that can be viewed from multiple levels of analysis. As such, there is both a “horizontal” and a “vertical” organization to this heuristic model of social action.

Horizontal and Vertical Organization of the Model

With respect to the *horizontal* organization or structure of the model, one of the key features of social action is that it unfolds over time. That is, there are the *antecedents* of social action, which specify those factors that bring people to social action, including the personal motivations that dispose people to get involved and the social circumstances that call for and prompt action. Then, there is the social action itself (which may itself involve sustained, ongoing, recurring action) and the *experiences* of those involved in social action, including the perceived and actual costs and benefits that accrue to social actors involved in social actions. Finally, there are the *consequences* of social action for those who take social action, for those who are affected by it, and for society at large.

This horizontal structure defines the unfolding history of social action, taking us through three successive stages in the processes of social action, allowing us to see what leads to social action, what happens during social action, and what results from social action.

With respect to the *vertical* organization or structure of the model of social action, there are various levels of analysis that run from the individual to the cultural, such that at each stage of the processes of social action, it is possible to articulate principles of social action from the perspective of the individuals involved in social action, the interpersonal relationships of which they are a part, the groups and organizations to which they belong, and the larger community, societal, and cultural contexts in which social action takes place.

In conceptualizing social action, therefore, we find it useful to view it from the vantage point of multiple levels of analysis. At an *individual* level, the model calls attention to the activities and psychological processes of individual actors and the recipients or targets of social action. At an *interpersonal* level, many forms of social action occur in the context of or because of people’s interpersonal relationships. At a *group* level, many forms of social action are enacted by groups and collectives, take place in the context of community-based organizations and institutions, or are carried out for the purpose of addressing the conditions of members of groups and institutions. Finally, at a broader *societal* level, the model considers the linkages between individuals and their societies as well as cultural dynamics associated with the emergence and evolution of traditions of social action and community involvement.

Putting the horizontal and vertical structures of the model together results in a “matrix,” depicted in Figure 41.1. The columns of this matrix represent stages of the process of social action and the rows reflect the different levels of analysis or perspectives that can be brought to bear on understanding social action.

Thus, with respect to the first (antecedents) stage of the process of social action, which addresses the question of what brings people to social action, diverse features of persons (e.g., their motivations and reasons for participation, their helping dispositions or personalities, and their identities as social actors) are the focus and the search is for relevant traits, motives, and characteristics that dispose people to take social action. In addition, interpersonal relationships and social networks, as well as groups and formal organizations, can and do play important roles in recruiting people to participate in social action. Moreover, differing cultural orientations may set the stage for determining how certain forms of social action will be construed, including whether causes will be judged “worthy” of action. In fact, these cultural orientations are likely to influence whether solving a particular societal problem is seen as a matter of personal choice and individual responsibility or whether it is construed as one of normative obligation and collective concern.

Similarly, with respect to the second (experiences) stage of the process of social action, which focuses on the question of what happens during social action, there is value in regarding social action in terms of the pursuit of

Level of Analysis	Stages of Social Action		
	Antecedents	Experiences	Consequences
Individual			
Interpersonal			
Group			
Societal			

FIGURE 41.1. A heuristic model of social action.

agendas. Thus, not only do individuals have and pursue goals, but agendas for social action can also be seen at other and multiple levels of analysis, including those pursued by and affecting targets of social action, the separate and shared group memberships of social actors and targets, the organizations that support social action, and the larger community and society.

And, finally, at the third (consequences) stage of the process of social action, which is concerned with the question of what results from social action, social action can and does have outcomes and consequences for those who engage in it, as well as consequences for other people, including relationship partners, groups, organizations, communities, and the larger society. Consideration of these consequences, in fact, brings us back to where we started in our analysis, that is, to the realization that social action involves people working alone and working together, often in attempts to benefit themselves and society.

Generativity of the Model

This model, it should be emphasized, is not a theory of social action per se but a broad framework for identifying conceptual issues for empirical investigation. And, by virtue of its deliberate generality, it is applicable to many (if not most) forms of social action. Moreover, we view it as a generative model; that is, it provides a way of asking questions about *moderators* and *qualifiers* of the principles of social action and it can point the way toward identifying unstudied and understudied questions that have the potential to generate *extensions* of scientific understanding of social action.

Many of the moderators, qualifiers, and extensions can be identified in the various "rows" of the model and may operate to change the unfolding processes of social action. Briefly, and to give a feel for how this model may help to organize and generate knowledge of social action, let us consider some representative examples of moderators at the different levels of analysis. First, at the level of individual social actors, differences in personality (e.g., Davis et al., 1999), interpersonal orientation (e.g.,

Lavine & Snyder, 1996), and age (e.g., Boling, 2005; Okun & Schultz, 2003; Omoto et al., 2000) appear to moderate the processes of social action. At the levels of interpersonal relationships and group memberships, there are indications that ingroup versus outgroup status importantly moderates the resolution of social dilemmas (e.g., Dawes & Messick, 2000), the giving of aid to a person in need (e.g., Levine, Prosser, Evans, & Reicher, 2005), and the processes of volunteerism (e.g., Stuermer, Snyder, & Omoto, 2005). Finally, at the broader level of societies and cultures, there are growing indications of important differences between societies and cultures in the construal of helping, social participation, and civic engagement; these differences, moreover, may moderate the forms that social action takes across cultures (e.g., Allik & Realo, 2004; Buchan et al., 2002; Miller, 1994; Van de Vliert et al., 2004).

Taken together, then, the moderators identified in the rows of the model may involve features of the persons who engage in social action (including individual differences in personality, attitudes, values, and motivations), features of the social circumstances and environments in which these persons function (including their memberships in relationships, groups, and organizations), and the features of their surrounding communities that either promote or impede social action (including their culturally based conceptions of the nature of involvement and participation in society).

In addition to the moderators that can be defined and situated in the "rows" of our heuristic model of social action, there are also moderators that can be identified across the model's "columns." These moderators can be thought of as specifying differences in the ways that constructs defined with respect to the rows of the matrix operate in social action. One such illustrative moderator is the distinction between the initiation and the maintenance of social action and the findings from research on various forms of social action that the factors that dispose people to become involved in social action in the first place may be quite different from the factors that sustain involvement in social action over time (e.g., Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Moving across the columns, ad-

ditional moderators or qualifiers emerge, including intriguing (and as yet untested) possibilities about the ways in which societal consequences of social action produce changed social and cultural environments for future social action—in short, the ways by which social actors and their coordinated social actions change society.

Finally, over and above the ways that the heuristic model of social action helps to organize the existing research on social action and to make clearer the operation of the different principles of social action that we have identified in this chapter, an additional benefit of our proposed model is its generativity in uncovering topics for future research. That is, the “cells” of the model (defined by the conjoint vertical and horizontal structures) that are relatively “underpopulated” in terms of theoretical statements and research findings would seem to be excellent candidates for future theoretical inquiry and empirical investigation. The body of work on social action, in all of its diverse forms, can only benefit and grow from such attention.

Challenges and Prospects

Our heuristic model of social action also serves to underscore some of the challenges posed by the study of social action (see also Omoto, 2005b). For example, to the extent that investigators seek to understand social action *in vivo*, they may find themselves chronically “behind the curve,” only able to identify and study instances of social action (e.g., the emergence of social movements in response to problems in society and the formation of grassroots community organizations to deliver needed volunteer services) *after* they have already occurred. In such circumstances, investigators may find themselves shut out of the early stages of the processes of social action, unable, for example, to study the features of individual social actors *before* they become involved in social action.

Moreover, because involvement in social action may extend over long periods, practical constraints associated with following research participants over time may make it difficult to follow the unfolding dynamics of social action to their natural conclusions. Accordingly, the research literature on social action may be more likely to include studies of short-term rather than long-term social action. Nevertheless, studies of long-term social action may be well worth the effort, especially because they are likely critical in establishing a relatively complete and comprehensive understanding of these important phenomena.

In addition, a focus on studying instances of social action as they actually occur may lead to an overrepresentation of studies of successful instances of social action, as ones that fail to meet their goals may not stay in existence long enough to capture the attention of researchers. Yet, a full understanding of social action will surely need to come to grips with the differences between those instances of social action that succeed and those that fail, as challenging as it may be to identify and investigate instances of failed social action.

CONCLUSION

Reflecting on social action, we cannot help but be struck by the recurring themes and principles, both descriptive and explanatory, that emerge from investigations of diverse domains of social action and their ability to be encompassed in a broad and integrative model. The study of social action simultaneously brings into sharp relief, and also connects, research on a wide range of topics, from volunteerism to social movements to political participation to social dilemmas. In addition, and particularly striking, are the bridges that theoretical and empirical work on social action builds between the psychology of *individuals*, their concerns for the *interpersonal relationships* of which they are part and the *groups* to which they belong, and their participation in their larger *societies*.

As such, the study of social action provides new perspectives on the linkages between individuals and society, highlighting the mutual interplay and influence of individuals and the larger society and opening the door for theoretical, as well as practical, advances across a broad spectrum of social scientific domains. In the end, though, it is through their involvement in social action that individuals contribute to the functioning of society, and the changes wrought in society by social action affect the lives of its individual members.

Moreover, in the study of social action, researchers can engage in diverse forms of “action research” (e.g., Chein, Cook, & Harding, 1948; Lewin, 1946, 1947; Sanford, 1970). They can intertwine basic and applied research foci and methodologies in the interests both of theoretical advance and of solving pressing social problems. In addition, they can engage real people in real contexts who are seeking real solutions to the real challenges they face. Thus, just as social action connects individuals and society, the study of social action holds vast potential for connecting psychological science, social policy, and public good. This end is exciting, indeed, and, certainly worthy of vigorous pursuit.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The preparation of this chapter has been supported by grants from the National Institute of Mental Health to Mark Snyder and to Allen M. Omoto.

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Record: 1

Title: The self system in reciprocal determinism.

Authors: Bandura, Albert. Stanford U

Source: American Psychologist, Vol 33(4), Apr, 1978. pp. 344-358.

NLM Title Abbreviation: Am Psychol

Publisher: US : American Psychological Association

ISSN: 0003-066X (Print)
1935-990X (Electronic)

Language: English

Keywords: self system in reciprocal determinism

Abstract: Notes that explanations of human behavior have generally favored unidirectional causal models emphasizing either environmental or internal determinants of behavior. In social learning theory, causal processes are conceptualized in terms of reciprocal determinism. Viewed from this perspective, psychological functioning involves a continuous reciprocal interaction between behavioral, cognitive, and environmental influences. The major controversies between unidirectional and reciprocal models of human behavior center on the issue of self influences. A self system within the framework of social learning theory comprises cognitive structures and subfunctions for perceiving, evaluating, and regulating behavior, not a psychic agent that controls action. The influential role of the self system in reciprocal determinism is documented through a reciprocal analysis of self-regulatory processes. Reciprocal determinism is proposed as a basic analytic principle for analyzing psychosocial phenomena at the level of intrapersonal development, interpersonal transactions, and interactive functioning of organizational and social systems. (62 ref) (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2016 APA, all rights reserved)

Document Type: Journal Article

Subjects: *Interpersonal Interaction; *Reciprocity; *Self-Control; *Self-Reinforcement; *Social Learning

PsycINFO Classification: Social Psychology (3000)

Population: Human

Format Covered: Print

Publication Type: Journal; Peer Reviewed Journal

Release Date: 20060329

Copyright: American Psychological Association. 1978

Digital Object Identifier: <http://dx.doi.org.proxy-library.ashford.edu/10.1037/0003-066X.33.4.344>

PsycARTICLES Identifier: amp-33-4-344

Accession Number: 1979-08427-001

Number of Citations in Source: 64

Database: PsycARTICLES