Generating constructive disruption
Shuman, Eric

DOI:
10.33612/diss.223708238

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2022

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):

Copyright
Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the “Taverne” license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment.

Take-down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): http://www.rug.nl/research/portal. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.
Chapter One
General Introduction
“... action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored [...] there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth, [...] that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.”

- Martin Luther King Junior, *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*

In the quote above, Martin Luther King Jr. argues that collective action by disadvantaged groups in society can create a “constructive tension” that can advance social change by pushing members of advantaged groups to accept and advance change despite their resistance to it. Little is known, however, about the psychology of such a constructive tension. What is this constructive tension described by King, and how can actions by the disadvantaged group generate it in the minds of the advantaged? Moreover, does such constructive tension actually motivate change among those in the advantaged group who have resisted change?

In this thesis, we delve into these scientifically and societally relevant questions by investigating whether and how collective action by (historically) disadvantaged groups in society can affect resistant members of advantaged groups in a way that advances social change towards greater equality. Specifically, we theoretically develop and empirically test the notion of *constructive disruption* (to be defined and explained in more detail later in this introductory chapter) across the chapters in this thesis and, as King describes the relevance of such an approach against the backdrop of communities that have resisted change, we also

---

1 Since this thesis is the result of close collaboration with my supervisors, I will use “we” instead of “I”.
2 We define collective action here as any action undertaken by a group member with the aim of improving the condition of the entire group (S. C. Wright et al., 1990).
develop and test a more detailed psychological understanding of the different ways in which
the advantaged may resist.

Answering these questions is critical because one of the most important contemporary
social problems is managing the relations between the diverse groups that make up modern
societies. Throughout history people have lived in groups in hierarchically structured
societies, where certain groups control more power and resources than others (Pratto et al.,
2006). For example, relations between men and women, white and black Americans, and the
heteronormative majority and the LGBTQ+ community, are all characterized by greater
resources, power, and privileges for one group at the expense of the other (Goren & Plaut,
2012; Pratto et al., 2006). In order to promote more sustainable and equal intergroup
relations, it is vital to understand how disadvantaged group members can act together toward
social change, but also how advantaged group members may overcome their resistance by
accepting such social change towards greater equality.

To this end, we need to learn more about what makes collective action “effective”
(e.g., what type of action influences the advantaged in what way). This is important because
recent decades have been characterized by the increasing occurrence and strength of
grassroots social movements and large-scale collective action by these historically
disadvantaged groups—including the Palestinian intifadas in Israel, Black Lives Matter,
movements for LGBTQ+ rights, #MeToo, and many others. While in some cases these
movements spurred large changes in public opinion among the advantaged group, in policy,
or both (e.g., the movement for LGBTQ+ rights), others appeared to have had little impact or
even provoked regressive backlash (e.g., the Second Intifada). Part of the explanation may lie
in the actions taken by the disadvantaged (e.g., violent or non-violent actions), but also in the
way these attempts at social change have been met with resistance by members of advantaged
groups (e.g., denial of disadvantage, defense of one’s status). Indeed, such resistance
sometimes simply stalls efforts at change and leaves the status quo in place, but at other times significant progress is made towards greater equality. Thus, with an eye to effectiveness of collective action, we also need to learn more about the different ways through which advantaged group members’ resist social change.

One reason for this dual gap in scientific knowledge may be that, despite the importance of understanding these complex social change dynamics that involve both the advantaged and disadvantaged groups, research in social psychology has mainly focused on understanding what motivates disadvantaged group members to engage in collective action (for reviews see Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021; van Zomeren, 2013; van Zomeren et al., 2008, 2012). This focus has been in some ways based on an assumption that collective action can and will lead to social change towards increased equality (Dixon et al., 2012). As a result, the questions of when and how collective action might lead to social change has remained largely unaddressed in the social psychological literature (Louis, 2009). This is why the core aim of this thesis is generating a better social-psychological understanding of the effectiveness of collective action as process of negotiating social change with the advantaged, with a particular emphasis on wanting to understand how collective action by disadvantaged groups affects members of historically advantaged groups who resist social change. As visualized in Figure 1.1, we ask when and how collective action by the disadvantaged can affect the advantaged group such that it can address their psychological resistance in ways that advance social change towards equality, and hence is “effective” in this regard.

To this end, we seek to answer this question in two main ways. The first is to develop and empirically examine the idea that constructive disruption (that is, generating, through collective action(s), the constructive tension that cannot be ignored, as captured in the epigraph) might be an effective strategy for a disadvantaged groups if they want to overcome the advantaged group’s resistance to social change and win key concessions on specific
issues that would advance their cause. Constructive disruption - both as a collective action tactic and a psychological process in the minds of the advantaged - is therefore key to Chapters 2 and 3. The second way is to develop a deeper understanding of the resistance of the advantaged group more generally and the psychological processes that underlie it through the notion of **advantaged group identity management**, which is key to Chapter 4. Together, we hope this leads to a better understanding of how collective action by the disadvantaged can address the advantaged group’s resistance to social change through generating constructive disruption.

**Figure 1.1.** Conceptual Model Guiding the Research Questions in this Thesis

In the remainder of this introduction chapter, we outline the broader theoretical analysis that led us to this particular focus, develop the core concepts and ideas further against the backdrop of relevant literature. Specifically, we answer the questions of (1) why we focus on studying the psychological effects of collective action on the advantaged group and (2) what we mean by its “effectiveness”, (3) offer the notion of constructive disruption as having such potential effectiveness, (4) offer a conceptualization and measure of the different
ways by which the advantaged may resist, and (5) preview how we empirically answered our research questions in the three empirical chapters to come.

**Why Study the Psychological Effects of Collective Action on the Advantaged Group?**

We focus in this thesis on the idea that social change is a process that involves both the disadvantaged group (who push for change via collective action) and the advantaged group (who react to action in ways that might help or hinder social change). In other words, we argue that it is critical to understand the importance of the advantaged group and their potential resistance to social change, just as it is key to understand the importance of how collective action by the disadvantaged can be effective at creating such change.

The advantaged group plays a key role in the process of social change towards greater equality (or the lack thereof), as they are often resistant to social change towards greater equality. We define the advantaged group as the group that benefits directly from the intergroup inequality in question (see Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Oberschall, 1973)\(^3\), which includes greater power and control over resources and decreased dependence on the other group (Bacharach & Lawler, 1981; Emerson, 1962; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Benefits for the advantaged group from intergroup inequality can be seen in real-world outcomes, e.g. increased economic security and opportunities to advance, (Jones et al., 2009; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), and decreased poverty rates, school attrition rates, prison sentences, and mortality rates (Feagin, 2006; Jackman, 2001; Smooha, 2009; Ulmer & Johnson, 2004). Beyond these material benefits, the advantaged group benefits psychologically from their position, as being a member of an advantaged group allows one to derive a positive social identity and positive self-esteem from one’s membership in a socially valued group.

---

\(^3\) For example, if black Americans are protesting racial inequality, the advantaged group would be white Americans, if women are protesting gender inequality the advantaged group would be men, etc. While there might be other groups that could be considered “advantaged” relative to the disadvantaged group, such neutral bystanders, we kept our focus limited in this proposal.
Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As a result of these benefits, advantaged group members are likely to be generally satisfied with the status quo and thus resistant to social change. This general group-based orientation towards social change is described in a number of theories of intergroup relations and thus has received broad empirical support, such as the group position model (Blumer, 1958; Bobo, 1988), social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), realistic group conflict theory (R. A. Levine & Campbell, 1972; Sherif, 1966), and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The current thesis builds on these approaches by focusing on how the advantaged respond to collective action by the disadvantaged (in Chapters 2-3), but also moves beyond them through specifying different ways of such resistance (in Chapter 4).

In fact, based on the assumption of resistance among the advantaged, social change towards equality can be viewed as a broader process of negotiation between the disadvantaged and the advantaged group (see Figure 1.1). Social change by its very nature implies a change in the relationship between the disadvantaged and advantaged groups in society, and thus must be to some extent negotiated between them. This may be the case especially when this implies that the advantaged give up some of the power and privileges they currently hold. While other groups (e.g., the disadvantaged, third party actors) can certainly play a role in advancing social change, unless there is at least some involvement from the advantaged, social change will likely remain stalled or could even go in other directions (e.g., entrenching hierarchy) rather than advancing equality between the two groups. For example, while collective action by black South Africans and pressure from international actors undeniably played a role in the end of apartheid, any account of this change would be incomplete without an understanding the role of white South Africans and how this action and pressure lead them to accept and end to their political dominance (Deegun, 2001).
Assumptions about resistance to social change are also present in theories of social protest and social movements. First, influential theories in political science and sociology of social movements, e.g., McAdam’s political process model (McAdam et al., 2001; McAdam & Boudet, 2012) and social movement impact theory (Amenta et al., 2010; Gamson, 1990) offer a role not only to the social movement’s resources, but also to the negotiation with authorities and other dominant actors in society through collective action. Second, influential theories of the psychology of collective action (e.g., social identity theory; see Ellemers, 1993; Wright et al., 1990) explicitly rely on the assumption that collective action is an identity management strategy through which the disadvantaged group socially “competes” for relative status with the outgroup. In either case, collective action by the disadvantaged group needs to be understood in relation to the advantaged group’s position in society, and in both cases the assumption is that the advantaged group prefers the status quo over social change, and hence can be understood as resistant.

Beyond the specific problem of the advantaged’s resistance, there are a number of other key reasons to believe that the involvement of the advantaged in social change is critical: First, the advantaged group by definition has access to more power and resources than the disadvantaged, and as a result is often more capable of effecting change (Bacharach & Lawler, 1981; Emerson, 1962; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Second, the advantaged are often the majority groups in society, and so their preferences are more likely to influence policy (at least in democratic societies). Third, winning support from advantaged group members can help ensure that change is sustainable over time, and that gains made by the disadvantaged do not trigger competition and opposition from the advantaged. All of this supports the focus in this thesis on the resistance to social change among the advantaged, and to understand the psychological effectiveness of disadvantaged group’s collective action in light of such resistance.
What Do We Mean By the “Effectiveness” of Collective Action?

Asking questions about when and how collective action is “effective” involves a number of interrelated sub-questions. This is because we argue that when studying the effectiveness of collective action, a tailored approach must be employed that considers (1) for whom is action effective, (2) on what outcomes does it have effects, and (3) what types of action are being considered? Without answering these questions, it is difficult to develop a theoretical rationale for why or why not action would be effective. Below we review the potential answers to these questions, explain our rationale for our focus, and show how that focus leads us towards the notion of constructive disruption. We note that this thesis offers a first step towards examining part of this tailored approach. Nevertheless, we refer to it because we think it offers a promising framework for examining the effectiveness of collective action focused on other groups, outcomes and tactics. Although we do not attempt to study all of these directions in the current thesis, this tailored approach serves as a more general roadmap that guided our thinking and explain how we developed our specific focus in this thesis.

For whom?

First, it is critical to consider for whom collective action is effective. While research may also consider the disadvantaged group or third parties as a focus, we focus specifically on the advantaged group. However, even this focus on the advantaged group does not answer this question sufficiently, as this group is not a monolithic entity. Indeed, advantaged group members differ in the extent to which they are resistant to social change (Knowles et al. 2014; Sidanius & Pratto 1999). For example, some advantaged group members are more supportive of equality as principle (Goren & Plaut, 2012) and can even directly support disadvantaged group members efforts to advance social change towards greater equality (van Zomeren et al., 2012). As a result, action may not be equally effective for all advantaged
group members (Saguy & Szekeres, 2018; Szekeres et al., 2020), and different outcomes may be more or less relevant for certain advantaged group members.

Indeed, in the context of collective action by the disadvantaged, we argue it is important to bear in mind advantaged group members’ initial support, or lack thereof, for the disadvantaged’s goals, as this is likely to affect how they might respond to the action (Saguy & Szekeres, 2018; Teixeira et al., 2020; Thomas & Louis, 2014). In this thesis we will focus on the more resistant advantaged group members, as this group often represents the majority of the advantaged group. This is based on the theoretical orientation that advantaged group members benefit from the current status quo, giving them a basic motivation to preserve the current hierarchy and thus making them resistant to social change (see review of this literature above, and also Jost & Hunyady, 2003; Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In addition, provocative findings from a nationally representative sample in the US showed that a majority of White Americans believed that anti-White bias was more prevalent than anti-Black bias (Norton & Sommers, 2011). While this is not a direct measure of resistance to social change, one can hardly expect white Americans to welcome changes to reduce the inequality faced by black Americans if they feel that they themselves are the ones facing unequal treatment. While this is only one example from one context, other data indicate that there are large amounts of resistance in other contexts as well (e.g. Israel, South Africa, Dixon et al., 2007; Harman, 2016). Given both the material and psychological benefits advantaged groups members received from their advantaged status, such majority resistance to social change towards equality is hardly surprising. However, this is precisely what makes understanding how collective action can be effective for these advantaged group members so important. If they often represent the majority of the advantaged group and by definition are those whose attitudes most need to be changed, then it is crucial to understand how or if collective action can be effective for them.
What outcome?

Second, it is important to specify what we mean by effective, i.e., effective on what outcome? The effectiveness of action could be evaluated on many different outcomes (e.g., improving attitudes towards the disadvantaged, recruiting the advantaged to support their protests, or advancing policies that would reduce intergroup inequality)\(^4\). These different outcomes may not always be affected in the same way or move in the same direction. For example, a large body of research has shown that improving attitudes towards disadvantaged group members does not necessarily lead to increased support for policies that would address inequality (for reviews, see Dixon et al., 2012, 2017). While these and other outcomes may all be important, it is critical that any conclusions regarding effectiveness stipulate what was affected.

So far the literature has considered three primary outcomes of collective action: prejudice or negative attitudes more broadly towards the disadvantaged group (Reny & Newman, 2021; Sawyer & Gampa, 2018), direct support for or willingness to join the action of the disadvantaged (Feinberg et al., 2020; Teixeira et al., 2020), or support for the main policy goals of the disadvantaged’s protest (Enos et al., 2019; Gould & Klor, 2010).\(^5\) Given our focus on resistant members of the advantaged group, we argue that prejudice and direct support are less likely to be positively affected by collective action. On the one hand, we suggest that collective action is simply unlikely to be effective in reducing prejudice or

\(^{4}\) Indeed, when researchers asked collective action participants what their goals were, they received a long list of goals (Hornsey et al., 2006), including influencing key decision makers, influencing third parties, building an oppositional movement, and expressing values. As such, one way to select the relevant outcome would be based on the stated goal of the activists involved in the specific action. However, we have decided not to follow this approach because it makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the link between collective action and social change for two main reasons. First, as activists’ goals may differ considerably within and between movements it would limit the generalizability of conclusions. Second, it would assume that the goals selected by activists are relevant to social change, which may not necessarily be the case. As result, we have focused on the psychological effects collective action on outcomes that have been theoretically identified to be relevant to social change independent of whether this was the goal of the disadvantaged.

\(^{5}\) Work in political science has also considered effects on media framing (see Wasow, 2020) or on attitudes among very specific elite groups (e.g. business owners, politicians, e.g. Wouters & Walgrave, 2017), however, since our focus was on the advantaged group more broadly, we do not focus on these outcomes.
improving attitudes towards the disadvantaged, especially among those who are resistant. Research has shown that reducing prejudice relies often on positive contact with the relevant outgroup or other interventions focused on social harmony and commonality (Dixon et al., 2012; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), whereas social protests are fundamentally an expression of social conflict that emphasize the differences (namely inequalities that exist) between the two groups (Tausch et al., 2015). This is why some argue that prejudice reduction and collective action rely on fundamentally different psychological processes (Dixon et al., 2012). Thus, we may not expect protests to be very effective in prejudice reduction, regardless of advantaged group members’ initial levels of resistance.

On the other hand, collective action may sometimes be able to increase direct support and mobilize members of the advantaged in support of the disadvantaged’s cause. However, we suggest that this is primarily relevant for advantaged group members who are already sympathetic to the advantaged group. Direct support of a movement or participation in it usually reflects a deep identification with and commitment to its cause (Louis et al., 2019; Saab et al., 2015; Selvanathan et al., 2020; van Zomeren et al., 2011), and thus it is unlikely that advantaged group members would move from resistance to such committed support simply in response to the disadvantaged’s protests. Rather the development of such sympathy for and identification with the disadvantaged that would make advantaged group members willing to support or join their movement, is likely the product of longer slower processes of attitude change (see Selvanathan et al., 2018). Finally, even among the disadvantaged only a small minority are willing to act (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987), thus this outcome would likely only be relevant to a very small minority of the advantaged group.

While these two goals may not be relevant for resistant advantaged group members, we suggest that collective action can still meaningfully advance social change by increasing this group’s support for the policy goals of the disadvantaged. Indeed, reviews of research in
political science and sociology suggest that the success or failure of collective action in achieving its policy goals often depends on the extent to which an action is able to generate public support for policy change (Burstein, 2003; Burstein & Linton, 2002). And while resistant advantaged group members may not become active supporters of the disadvantaged cause, past research has shown that they can nonetheless come to support the policy demands made by the movement (Enos et al., 2019; Gould & Klor, 2010; Lowery et al., 2012). For example, Chow et al. (2013) found that a sense of threat to the current status-quo could motivate even strong supporters of hierarchy to support the disadvantaged’s policy goals.

Therefore, we focus on whether collective action can change public opinion among the advantaged to generate support for the key policy goals of the disadvantaged. We draw from the logic of disruptive action (Piven, 2008; Sharp, 1994, 2013) to suggest that protests may still be effective on this outcome, despite their inability to reduce prejudice or mobilize large numbers of advantaged group members. Namely, sociological perspectives (Piven, 2008; Sharp, 1994, 2013) on large scale mass protests argue that they derive their power from the ability to disrupt normally cooperative relations and the broader social order. Such disruption can thus incentivize even those who may not agree with the movement goals to make specific policy concessions. As such, a key consequence for those who are more resistant to social change may be their support for specific policies. This logic of disruptive action incentivizing change among the advantaged also harkens back to the constructive tension described by Martin Luther King.

What type of collective action?

Now that we have clarified our focus on increasing support for the disadvantaged’s policy goals among resistant advantaged group members, the key question becomes what type of collective action would be most likely to produce the kind of disruption needed. Indeed, there are many different forms of collective action and protest tactics that have been
used by various disadvantaged groups (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009; Zlobina & Gonzalez Vazquez, 2018), and it is likely that these different forms of action are not identical in their effectiveness in terms of increasing resistant advantaged group members’ support for specific policies.

So far in the social psychological literature, collective action is most often categorized along two dimensions: 1) whether or not the tactics used adhere to societal norms (normative vs. nonnormative action; Shuman, Cohen-Chen, Hirsch-Hoefler, & Halperin, 2016; Tausch et al., 2011; Wright et al., 1990) and 2) whether the action is nonviolent or violent (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Orazani & Leidner, 2019; Saab et al., 2016; Thomas & Louis, 2014). It should be noted that the norms used to categorize these types of action are those of the dominant social system, and they usually serve to maintain the smooth functioning of society, including its intergroup hierarchy (Jackman 1994; Piven, 2006). Thus, nonnormative action violates these norms and rules and goes beyond the “acceptable” or “legal” in order to disrupt cooperative relations that maintain hierarchy. While this distinction is sometimes used as a proxy for nonviolent versus violent action, these two aspects of action are not necessarily aligned. While in Western societies violent action is almost always considered nonnormative, there can still be nonviolent actions that are nonnormative as well. Most notably, the philosophy of civil disobedience practiced by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., specifically calls for actions that violate laws and norms, but in a nonviolent manner (M. L. King, 1991; Nojeim, 2004).

As such, we can differentiate at least three tactics produced by these two dimensions⁶. First, *normative nonviolent action* refers to any action that is within socially accepted and

---

⁶ Theoretically, a fourth type could be differentiated, namely normative violent action. However, as the normative use of violence is usually related to the use of force by the government or military, this tactic is less relevant to collective action of the disadvantaged. Thus, we and other researchers (Feinberg et al., 2020; Zlobina & Gonzalez Vazquez, 2018) have focused on the other three types of action.
legal norms of society and is also nonviolent, such as peaceful demonstrations, rallies, or petitions. Second, *nonnormative nonviolent action* refers to forms of action that are not societally normative but also not violent, such as strikes, sit-ins, blocking roads, etc. that violate norms or laws in order to disrupt usual cooperative relations. Third, *nonnormative violent action* refers to action that is violent such as riots or property destruction (hereafter *violent action*). In addition, movements can of course contain many protests some of which may use one tactic and others a different tactic. These movements with a mix of different tactics could also be considered additional “types”, although this has received relatively little research attention.

Indeed, the literature has focused primarily on the two extremes of this spectrum of different potential types of action, i.e., *normative nonviolent action vs. violent action*. However, we suggest that the challenges posed by resistant advantaged group members calls for greater focus on protests tactics that exist somewhere in the middle of this continuum (e.g., nonnormative nonviolent protests, or largely nonviolent movements that contain a small amount of violent protests). We argue that such protests in the middle of the spectrum may be most likely to produce the constructive tension described by Martin Luther King Jr. in the epigraph, which we term “constructive disruption”. We further develop this concept and explain why it is particularly relevant with an eye to resistant advantaged group members below.

**Understanding the Psychological Effectiveness of Collective Action Through Constructive Disruption**

The essence of generating constructive disruption is the idea that effective collective action needs to balance, in the minds of the advantaged, two perceptions of the action: As *disruptive* (which can create pressure on the advantaged to respond), and as involving *constructive intentions* (which can avoid retaliation or other forms of violent backlash). This
balance, which we refer to as constructive disruption (studied in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3), can make it more likely that those who are resistant to change will make concessions in terms of support for specific policies because such collective action may generate, in King’s terms, the psychological “crisis” and “tension” that makes it difficult to ignore, but also difficult to retaliate to, the action.

More specifically, we developed the notion of constructive disruption based on the idea that disadvantaged group members face a dual challenge when trying to motivate changes in policy from resistant advantaged group members: First, they must motivate advantaged group members to attend and respond to their protest in any way at all. As the advantaged group generally benefits from the current status quo, they have little to no incentives to make any changes, and so the easiest response may be to simply ignore the protests of the disadvantaged, if possible. And second, the disadvantaged protesters must try to ensure that if they do motivate a response, it is one that helps further their goals, and is not just aggressive repression of their protests or defense of the status quo.

In fact, as a result of the first challenge, action that is entirely normative and nonviolent may not be effective, as it may be too harmonious to motivate a response. This is consistent with the notion of the “velvet glove” (Jackman, 1996), which argues that harmony between groups can preserve hierarchy by making systems group-based oppression run smoothly. For example, while seminal work of Chenoweth and Stephans (2014) which analyzed the success of hundreds of social movements in the 20th century found that nonviolence tended to be more effective, a recent paper which reanalyzed this data demonstrated that for disadvantaged minority groups this advantage of nonviolence disappeared (Manekin & Mitts, 2021). This indicates that when the protesting group is disadvantaged it may be easier for the advantaged to ignore it rather than address their concerns. In other words, while normative nonviolent action still presents a challenge to the
current hierarchical system, by adhering to the norms and limits laid out by that system it may be reduced to a toothless ritual that the advantaged, especially those motivated to maintain the status quo, can easily ignore or dismiss.

Does this mean that the disadvantaged should turn to violence? While there is evidence that violence can sometimes be effective (Enos et al., 2019; Fording, 1997; Gould & Klor, 2010), we argue that it is unlikely to be generally effective. This is mainly because the second challenge the disadvantaged face is motivating a conciliatory response that advances their goals. Thus, while completely violent and nonnormative action may provoke a response from the advantaged, this response is likely to be aggressive and defensive. Violent action may be seen as an attempt to harm the advantaged group, or take over their power (Jonas & Fritsche, 2013; Sweetman, Leach, Spears, Pratto, & Saab, 2013). As a result, primarily violent action such as extremely violent riots or even terrorism can produce support for aggressive retaliatory action among the advantaged (Brym & Maoz-Shai, 2009; Fording, 1997). Such defensive reactions may be rooted in advantaged group members’ “fear of falling,” that is, fear of losing power or resources (Jetten, Mols, & Postmes, 2015, 2017). The advantaged group may fear that the protest will result in a regressive revolution, leading not to equality—but a new hierarchy with them as the disadvantaged (Sweetman et al., 2013).

Against this backdrop, we focus on forms of action that exist somewhere between these two extremes (e.g., largely nonviolent movements with small amounts of violence, nonviolent nonnormative action) which may be able to balance necessary elements from each extreme. The first element we see as being key to their success is perceived disruption. Drawing from sociological theories (Piven, 2008; Sharp, 1994, 2013), we argue that collective action draws its power to motivate advantaged group members to respond from generating perceived disruption. Theorists who advocate for the effectiveness of disruptive action argue that the ability to withdraw cooperation from the relationships that maintain and
sustain social hierarchy and the broader social order can incentivize powerful groups to make concessions. This is because the disruption produced can draw attention and focus the advantaged on the issues raised by the disadvantaged, as well as make them feel that something must be done in response to the protest in order to end the disruption.

But as our discussion of violent protest above indicates, disruption on its own may not be enough as it might also trigger defensive or aggressive responses. As a result, protests also need to contain a key second element, which is some feature that communicates that protesters have constructive intentions, defined as perceived intentions to improve the condition of both one’s group but lack of intentions to harm the outgroup, and willingness to conclude the action if its goals are achieved. This based on attribution theories which argue that how we respond to others’ behavior often depends on the attributions we make of the intentions behind that behavior (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967). Perceiving the disadvantaged’s intentions as constructive in these terms should help allay advantaged group members’ “fear of falling,” thus making them more willing to make concessions in response to the disruption caused by the protest.

This may be easier said than done, however. Actions that produce greater levels of perceived disruption are likely to be more nonnormative and perhaps more violent, making it less likely that the advantaged will perceive the protesters as having constructive intentions. However, actions that are completely normative and nonviolent, which should make it easier for the protesters to communicate constructive intentions, may not be disruptive enough to demand a response from the advantaged. As a result, generating this form of constructive disruption represents a difficult balancing act for the disadvantaged, as their protests need to be disruptive enough to generate pressure on the advantaged to respond, but still communicate constructive intentions. This inherent balancing act is in part what drove our focus on forms of action that were neither entirely normative and nonviolent nor
nonnormative and violent, for example nonviolent movements that contain small amounts of violence (studied in Chapter 2), and nonviolent nonnormative action (studied in Chapter 3).

**Understanding Resistance to Social Change Among the Advantaged Group**

The first two empirical chapters in this thesis focus on examining constructive disruption as a way through which collective action can be effective. However, during and after we conducted this research, we realized that a more complete understanding of this process would also require a deeper understanding of the psychological roots of the advantaged group’s resistance to social change. Specifically, we wanted to develop a more specific conceptualization and measure of the ways through which the advantaged may resist. This is precisely what we do in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Indeed, major theories of intergroup relations have generally assumed that advantaged group members will be resistant to social change towards equality because of the benefits the status quo affords them (see Jost & Hunyady, 2003; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Perhaps because of the assumed simplicity of this process (i.e., the advantaged simply seek to maintain the benefits they have), little research has delved deeply into how advantaged group members understand their advantaged position. Do they simply see themselves as benefiting from a hierarchy and thus seek to defend it? While holding the advantaged position in a hierarchy does confer psychological benefits through positive social comparison (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), such overt recognition that one benefits from a hierarchy simply based on group membership might also be psychologically threatening, especially if advantaged group members hold ideologies such as meritocracy or egalitarianism that run counter to stable group-based hierarchies (see Knowles, et al. 2014 for a review). As a result, how advantaged group members understand their advantaged position and their resistance to change may be more complex than previously understood.
Chapter One

This lack of a detailed understanding of advantaged group’s resistance to social change is also reflected methodologically. In the literature, there is no psychologically generic measure that can measure resistance to social change regarding a specific disadvantaged group. While SDO is likely the closest existing measure, it measures a general preference for hierarchy, not support for or resistance to social change in a specific intergroup context (e.g., between white and black Americans). This should correlate with resistance to social change with a given disadvantaged group, but it may not be sensitive to context specific issues and differences. Another potential measure would be group identification, as high identifiers should be most invested in protecting the group’s status. However, this measure also has conceptual issues as a measure of resistance for social change. For example, recent work has also shown that low identification with the advantaged group (in this case white identity) does not necessarily indicate openness to social change, and can be linked to colorblind ideologies that preserve the status quo by refusing to acknowledge existing inequalities and power differences (Chow & Knowles, 2016; Knowles et al., 2009).

Chapter 4 therefore aimed to develop a finer-grained conceptualization and measure of how advantaged group members can deal with their identity, which moves beyond the more general proxies we used in Chapters 2 and 3. Indeed, as resistance to social change among the advantaged group is fundamentally about preserving privileged status of the advantaged identity group, we felt a better understanding of how advantaged group members understand and manage their advantaged identity could give us better understanding of roots of that resistance. Chapter 4 thus aimed to expand a recently developed conceptualization of white identity management (see Knowles, et al., 2014) to advantaged groups more generally, and develop a new measure based that could be used in future research on the role of resistance among the advantaged to processes of social change. It specifically differentiates the strategies Deny, Distance, Defend and Dismantle as different identity management
strategies linked with different levels of resistance to social change. Below we describe how we tried to achieve these two aims (developing the notion of constructive disruption and developing a more fine-grained understanding of the advantaged’s resistance) by previewing the chapters in more detail.

**Overview of Chapters**

This thesis includes three empirical chapters examining the effects of collective action by the disadvantaged on the advantaged, and more deeply exploring the nature of advantaged group members’ resistance to social change towards equality. The thesis includes in total 13 empirical studies and makes use of the data of 230,499 participants. Chapter 2 made use of different existing real-life databases on social protest (focused on Black Lives Matter in the US) pertaining to the occurrence and co-occurrence of nonviolent and violent protests --- by proxy --- constructive disruption. This study used statistical methods for evaluating real world observational data (namely propensity score matching) to examine the effect of living in areas that experienced different types of protest. Chapter 3 zoomed in on the specific psychological process of constructive disruption through psychological experiments (across different contexts including race relations and gun control in the US, and Jewish-Arab relations and protests of the disabled community in Israel), and Chapter 4 examined in more detail the meaning and measurement of resistance among advantaged group members (in both US and Israel), validating a new scale to capture advantaged group identity processes. Together, and as will be discussed in the General Discussion (Chapter 5), this research revealed evidence for constructive disruption as a way toward effective collective action, and for the different ways by which the advantaged can manage their identity and hence resist differently. Below, we preview each chapter in turn.
Chapter 2: Does violence within a non-violent social movement help or hurt the movement? Evidence from the 2020 BlackLivesMatter Protests

Chapter 2 investigates the effects of a largely nonviolent movement that contained small amounts of violent protests, namely the mass BlackLivesMatter movement following the murder of George Floyd in 2020. It considers its effects on policy support (and prejudice) for advantaged group members more resistant to social change, thus also examining our claim that policy support is the more relevant outcome. We used real-world data (ACLED, 2020) about the location of all BlackLivesMatter protests during the summer of 2020 to identify US counties that featured no protests, only nonviolent protests, or both nonviolent and violent protests. We then combined this data with survey data (N = 494, Study 1), data from the Congressional Cooperative Election Study (N = 43,924, Study 2A), and data from Project Implicit (N = 180,480, Study 2B), in order to examine how exposure (i.e., living in a county with) different types of protest affected both support for the key policy goals of the movement and prejudice towards Black Americans. We found that the 2020 BLM protests had no impact on prejudice among either liberals or conservatives. However, a mix of nonviolent and violent protests increased support for BlackLivesMatter’s key policy goals among conservatives living in relatively liberal areas. As such, this research suggests that violent, disruptive actions within a broader non-violent movement may affect those likely to be resistant to the movement. We connect these findings to the notion of disruptive action, which explains why these effects do not materialize in reducing prejudice, but in generating support for important policy goals of the movement.

Chapter 3: Disrupting the System Constructively: Testing the Effectiveness of Nonnormative Nonviolent Collective Action

Chapters 3 moves beyond one large movement to zoom in psychological processes by carefully experimentally comparing three different types of actions and their effects on the
advantaged group, particularly on those more resistant, across different contexts. We specifically focused on the potential of *nonnormative nonviolent action* as a protest tactic to generate support for concessions among advantaged group members who are resistant to social change. We propose that this tactic, relative to normative nonviolent and to violent action, is particularly effective because it most directly reflects *constructive disruption*. We test these hypotheses across 4 contexts (total N = 3650). Studies 1–3 demonstrate that nonnormative nonviolent action (compared with inaction, normative nonviolent action, and violent action) is uniquely effective at increasing support for concessions to the disadvantaged among resistant advantaged group members (compared with advantaged group members more open to social change). Study 3 shows that constructive disruption mediates this effect. Study 4 shows that perceiving a real-world ongoing protest as constructively disruptive predicts support for the disadvantaged, whereas Study 5 examines these processes longitudinally over 2 months in the context of an ongoing social movement. Taken together, we show that nonnormative nonviolent action can be an effective tactic for generating support for concessions to the disadvantaged among those who are most resistant because it generates constructive disruption. The findings of Chapter 3 thus add to those of Chapter 2 by experimentally comparing different types of protest and thus allowing us to draw casual conclusions about the effect of specific protest tactics and investigate psychological mechanisms.

**Chapter 4: Defend, Deny, Distance, & Dismantle: A New Conceptualization and Measure of Advantaged Identity Management**

Chapter 4 aimed for a better understanding of the advantaged’s resistance. To this end, we build on existing theorizing about the racial context in the US to develop a theory and measure of advantaged group members’ resistance based on how they manage their advantaged identity. Specifically, we draw from recent research suggests that living in
modern societies characterized by social change and value systems (e.g., meritocracy, egalitarianism) at odds with group-based advantage poses challenges and threats for members of advantaged groups, who then deploy various strategies to cope with these threats (i.e., Defend, Deny, Distance, and Dismantle). Based on prior theoretical work (Knowles et al., 2014) we develop a new measure of strategies advantaged group members use to cope with these threats and manage their advantaged identity. Then across 5 studies (total \( N = 1949 \)), we examine this scale’s structure, validity, and cross-contextual differences between the US (white-black race relations) and Israel (Jewish-Arab relations).

**Chapter 5: General Discussion**

In this chapter, we review the empirical findings (Chapters 2-4) and discuss their theoretical and practical implications, as well as their limitations and directions for future research. We conclude that generating constructive disruption may be key to effective collective action (as narrowly defined in this thesis). This is because such action needs to produce a sense of disruption among the advantaged in order to motivate the advantaged to respond to the action but this must be accompanied by the perception of constructive intentions which helps make a conciliatory response more likely; and that collective action tactics that are nonviolent and nonnormative are most likely to generate this sense of constructive disruption. Further, we conclude that resistance among the advantaged is rooted in more than just general resistance, that is, in complex identity management processes which can take a number of different forms (i.e., Defend, Deny, Distance, and Dismantle). Finally, we highlight how our findings suggest the importance of using a tailored approach when it comes to the study of the effects of collective action, and how we can view social change as a negotiation process between the disadvantaged (generating constructive disruption) and advantaged (resisting in multiple ways to manage their identity) in society.