**Relative Deprivation and Participation in the Civil Rights Movement**

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**Summary**

The purpose of the article is to define and evaluate the theory of relative deprivation regarding social political movements. The study begins by explaining that relative deprivation refers to the “actors” perception of discrepancy between value expectations and value capabilities. Specifically, the goods and conditions in life that one feels entitled to, and the goods and conditions one feels capable of getting and keeping. To begin to understand how relative deprivation played into the civil rights movement, the study hypothesized that African American participation could be tied to aspirational deprivation and progressive deprivation. Through this, it is argued that social movement participation stems from the conjunction of rising expectations with the perception of blocked opportunities.

**Methods**

To test the hypotheses, data were collected in the summer of 1964 through questionnaires administered to students enrolled in sociology classes at Florida A & M University, an all-Black college. The central point of reference utilized was Cantril’s Self-Anchoring Striving Scale (SASS), which is a technique of operationalizing various patterns of deprivation based on a ten-rung scale. Respondents were requested to define the worst and best life conditions possible for themselves. From this, aspirational deprivation was measured by subtracting the rung used for present placement of life conditions by ten. Additionally, progressive deprivation was measured by subtracting the rung number used for location self-placement five years in past by ten, which in turn would measure past progress and rising expectations.

**Results**

Findings from the study indicated that the perception of aspirational deprivation of a group appeared to be more important than perception of aspirational deprivation of self in similar protest activities. The results found there is little probability that progressive deprivation could be used to explain protest participation. However, it may be the case that progressive deprivation is linked to violent phases of social movements. The study identified that people do not participate in social movements because of discontent unless hope is also present. Further, participants in the civil rights movement obtained their motivation to protest through discontent from group deprivation and derived their hope from the experience of relative success in their own lives.

**Implications**

The study supports that relative deprivation is a broad concept that can be defined to include many different patterns of perceived deprivation. Social movements change goals, tactics, and population support over time, which additionally alters perceptions of deprivation. Through this, varying types of relative deprivation can be associated with different stages of protests. The study contends that future research in social movements is necessary when considering the evolutions of movements, types of participation, and alternative patterns of relative deprivation.

Geschwender, B. N, & Geschwender, J. A. (1973). Relative deprivation and participation in the Civil Rights Movement. *Social Science Quarterly, 54*(2), 403-411.