

Emotional Pathway to Activism: Emotional Intimacy with Social Minorities and Engagement in Activism in South Korea

SEJUNG YOON | CHUNG-ANG UNIVERSITY

JUN HYEONG LEE | CHUNG-ANG UNIVERSITY

CHAN S. SUH | CHUNG-ANG UNIVERSITY

Expanding on the increasing attention on the role of emotions, we investigate how emotional intimacy with social groups influences an individual's propensity to engage in social movement activism. Specifically, we examine the possibility that individuals who exhibit empathy toward members of social minorities are more likely to become actively involved in socio-political causes rather than adopting an apathetic stance. Using national survey data from the 2020 Korea Social Integration Survey (KSIS), our findings obtained from ordered logistic regression models suggest that individual level of emotional intimacy with social minority groups is positively and significantly associated with their participation in activism. Additionally, our analysis shows that the positive relationship between intimacy toward social minorities and activism becomes even more pronounced when individuals actively interact with others through association membership. This study suggests that being sensitive to minority members within civil society serves as a basis for active participation in social movements.

Keywords: *emotional intimacy, political activism, movement participation, associational membership*

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INTRODUCTION

Social movements have become a pervasive aspect of civil society in modern democracies (Dalton 2008; Meyer and Tarrow 1998). In this era of what can be termed a “social movement society,” these movements have evolved into a regular feature of the political landscape. This development has opened up various avenues of activism, such as protests, boycotts, petitions, and signature campaigns, offering diverse constituencies the opportunity to voice their shared concerns and grievances collectively (Jenkins, Wallace, and Fullerton 2008; Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Rucht and Neidhardt 2002). Despite the widespread prevalence of social movements in contemporary societies, a noticeable divide exists between people willing to engage in activism and those who do not. Traditional literature has primarily focused on the costs and benefits associated with such engagement (Olson 1965; Tilly 1978) or the recognition of collective interests (Marx and Engels 1978; Wright 1995) as the factors driving political participation. More recently, empirical studies have identified factors such as biographical availability to participate (McAdam 1986; Schussman and Soule 2005), ideological stance and commitment (Oberschall 1995; Wahlström, Peterson, and Wennerhag 2018), as well as the influence of one’s social networks (Della Porta 1988; Diani and McAdam 2003; Gould 1995), as key determinants of their propensity to participate in activism.

An essential yet insufficiently explored domain within the realm of understanding the decision-making process behind individual engagement in activism pertains to the significance of relatively stable and positive emotions among the general public. While the scholarly discourse has increasingly acknowledged the pivotal role of emotions in understanding activism, particularly following the “emotional turn” of the 1990s (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; also see Jasper 2011), the primary focus has gravitated toward individuals actively engaged in social movement organizations and those who partake in forms of activism characterized by high risk and high cost (Jasper 1998, 2011; McAdam 1999; Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013). Negative emotions such as anger and hatred directed at the target of the movement, along with fears stemming from harsh repression, have been identified as triggers prompting immediate participation in protests (Della Porta and Giugni 2013; Goodwin 1997; Jasper 1998; Jasper and Poulsen 1995; Valentino et al. 2011). Additionally, positive emotions like a sense of solidarity among movement participants and a shared optimism for the movement’s success have purportedly played a key

role in motivating individuals to engage in activism (Jasper 1998, 2011). Nevertheless, empirical investigations on emotional influences on the predisposition of ordinary individuals to engage in a diverse spectrum of activism remain comparatively under-addressed, as opposed to the prevalent focus on movement activists and participants.

In examining the role of emotions in determining an individual's engagement in activism, our study makes a twofold contribution to the existing body of literature. First, we focus on the emotional intimacy experienced by individuals toward social groups within societies. In general, positive emotions such as affection, empathy, appreciation, and respect toward others can arguably influence individuals to maintain social relationships, encourage collaborative endeavors, and cultivate a sense of responsibility toward their communities (Ahmed 2004; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; Harris 2015; Marcus 2000; Nussbaum 2013). In the social movement literature, specific concepts such as "moral activists" (McAdam 1999), "zealots" (Tilly 1978), and "conscience adherents" (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Wahlström, Peterson, and Wennerhag 2018) have been employed to identify participants engaged in movements whose participation cannot be solely rationalized by considerations of material interests.

Drawing from this body of research, we argue that emotional intimacy toward social groups in general, and toward social minorities in particular, holds paramount importance in identifying those predisposed to engaging in activism in contrast to others. To expound further, our argument rests on the premise that cultivating emotional proximity with social minorities may lead individuals to develop a sense of empathy toward minority members, consequently driving their active participation in social and political matters related to the violation of minority rights rather than remaining apathetic. In other words, emotional intimacy toward others has the potential to foster a sense of empathy aligned with the goal of social movements.

Secondly, and in a related vein, our study systematically examines the impact of intimacy on social minorities using quantitative methods. While previous studies have predominately relied on qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and participant observation in studying the role of emotions, we contend that quantitative methods offer a comprehensive means to systematically examine the propensity of ordinary citizens toward activism. Therefore, by subjecting large- N survey data to statistical analyses, we empirically examine whether individuals with high levels of emotional intimacy with social groups in general and with social minorities in particular exhibit a heightened propensity to engage in various types of

activism.

We further explore the possibility that high levels of emotional intimacy might more effectively manifest as participation in activism, particularly when individuals maintain stronger social ties through their memberships in civic associations. The scholarly discourse on social capital argues that engaging in social interactions with others in communities serves as a fundamental basis for fostering interpersonal trust, involvement in civic associations, and subsequently cultivating an increased awareness and interest in civic and political matters (Putnam 2000; Suh, Chang, and Lim 2012; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Moreover, prior research on social movements has placed significant emphasis on the importance of preexisting social ties in mobilizing individuals to participate in activism (Diani, 2003; Gould 1995; Lim 2008; Suh 2021). By integrating the insights derived from research on social capital and our nuanced investigation into the emotional underpinnings of activism, we investigate whether the effect of individuals' emotional connection to social minorities, in terms of shaping their predisposition toward activism, is heightened when they have extensive social interactions with fellow community members through memberships in civic associations.

We test our hypotheses employing data from the 2020 Korea Social Integration Survey (KSIS 2020), a comprehensive nationwide survey involving 8,336 respondents in South Korea. The South Korean context provides a unique opportunity to study the emotional and empathetic underpinnings of activism. First, South Korea stands out as a notable case of successfully establishing and sustaining a democratic system following the third wave of democratization (Chang 2015; Huntington 1993). Since its transition to democracy in 1987, South Korea has consistently demonstrated a peaceful transfer of power within its democratic regime. Furthermore, the country's civil society has evolved through a prolonged history of vibrant social movements, attaining a high level of autonomy from government influence. A notable illustration of this autonomy was witnessed in the massive protests against a corruption scandal by the Park Geun-hye government, culminating in the incumbent president's impeachment in 2017. Civil society in South Korea has also undergone a noteworthy expansion since the democratization process, characterized by a variety of issues and the proliferation of civic associations (Shin 2021; Shin and Chang 2011). Capitalizing on its robust democratic structure and dynamic civil society, South Korea emerges as a prime exemplar for investigating the rationale underlying ordinary citizens' decisions to either engage in or refrain from

engaging in activism.

We employ ordered logistic regression models as our analytical framework to examine the effect of emotional intimacy toward social groups on political activism. Our findings suggest a positive and statistically significant association between an individual's level of emotional intimacy with social minority groups and their propensity to engage in various types of activism, such as signing petitions and participating in protests and boycotts. Furthermore, the positive relationship between emotional intimacy with social minorities and participation in activism becomes particularly pronounced when individuals are deeply connected to their communities via affiliations with civic associations. These empirical insights imply that sensitivity to minority members in societies serves as a foundational catalyst for active participation in political issues. The implications of our findings, with regard to understanding the emotional foundation underlying participation in social movements, are further discussed in the concluding section.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS

The Place of Emotions in Social Movements

What prompts people to engage in activism? Rational choice theories have pointed to the surplus of benefits over costs as the material motive underlying participation in politics (Olson 1965; also see Tilly 1978). From a more structural perspective, the Marxist approach has suggested that it is one's realization of collective interests, or class consciousness, which leads workers to engage in the political struggle between social classes (Marx and Engels 1978; Wright 1995). In other words, participation in activism ensues once they rupture from the dominant ideology and recognize their genuine class interests (Gramsci 2000).

In addition to these materialist approaches, recent literature on protest participation has underscored the importance of preexisting social ties in mobilizing individuals to participate in activism (Diani 2003; Gould 1995; Suh 2014). Digital and social media have also been identified as pivotal conduits through which individuals are mobilized to participate in social movements (Earl and Kimport 2011; Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Suh, Vasi, and Chang 2017). On a microlevel, empirical studies have concentrated on the absence of personal constraints at certain life stages, or biographical

availability, as a driver for participation in movements (McAdam 1986; Schussman and Soule 2005). Additionally, an individual's ideological stance and unwavering commitment have been highlighted as significant factors that enable activists to transcend their personal interests to initiate broader societal changes (Oberschall, 1995; Wahlström, Peterson, and Wennerhag 2018).

In contrast to previous scholarly inquiries, which predominantly centered on the material, relational, and individual underpinnings of activism, comparatively less scholarly attention has been directed toward understanding the emotional foundation that influences an individual's decision to engage in activism. It was after the "emotional turn" in the 1990s (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; Jasper 1998, 2011; also see Hochschild 1983) that emotions began to be recognized as a pivotal driving force for participation in social movements (Klandermans 1984, 1997). Empirical studies have focused on the motivational dynamics that drive the emergence of movements (De Volo 2006; Kleres and Wettergren 2017; Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013).

Among the array of emotions, reactive emotions such as anger and fear have been studied as triggers for political participation. Notably, negative emotions such as anger directed toward the target of the movement, alongside fear stemming from state repression, have been identified as triggers prompting individuals to engage in social movements (Suh, Vasi, and Chang 2017; Valentino et al. 2011). More recently, as the escalation of political polarization and the fragmentation of communities emerged as pressing concerns in contemporary societies, empirical studies began to shift their focus toward investigating hatred and antagonism as the driving forces behind engagement in polarized conflicts spanning political parties and social groups (Collins 2012; Groenendyk and Banks 2014).

In addition, affective emotions have been identified as a fundamental catalyst for participation in activism. As evident through the existence of "moral activists" (McAdam 1999) or "zealots" (Tilly 1978), the motive driving participation in high-risk activism transcends mere material interests and is rooted in enduring sentiments such as a sense of belonging and an affiliation with a particular social group (Fernandez and McAdam 1988; McAdam 1986). Positive emotions, such as a sense of solidarity within the given group and collective hope for the movement's success, have been instrumental in motivating individuals to engage in activism (Jasper 1998, 2011).

Particularly notable is the work of Wahlström and colleagues (2018), which delves into the motivation of individuals referred to by McCarthy and

Zald (1977) as “conscience adherents”—those who engage in social movements despite the absence of direct personal benefits from the movement’s success. Focusing on the motivation behind engaging in queer parades, their study suggests that individuals with minority identities are more inclined to empathize with sexual minorities subjected to discrimination. Even when they are heterosexual and gender-conforming individuals, their own experiences of discrimination assist them to emphasize the struggles of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) individuals. Consequently, for individuals who have encountered discriminatory experiences, affective emotions can more readily serve as a foundation for activism.

Emotional Intimacy and Associational Membership

Just as one’s material interests and social relationships serve as conduits for participation in activism, emotions too can play a pivotal role in this regard. While previous studies have increasingly examined the constructive role of reactive or affective emotions in shaping the emergence of social movements (Jasper and Poulsen 1995), empirical research is yet to systematically examine how emotional intimacy with others serves as the empathic foundation of activism. Emotional intimacy, a type of affective emotion, denotes the profound sense of connection one experiences toward others (Forstie 2017; Frank, Clough, and Seidman 2013). Our research explores the possibility that individuals with high levels of emotional intimacy toward social groups exhibit greater empathy toward these groups, thereby heightening their propensity for engaging in activism when these groups are involved.

This might particularly hold true when the social group at risk has endured prolonged and systematic discrimination and marginalization. When individuals experience a profound sense of closeness and affinity towards social minorities, they are more likely to empathize with the challenges and hardships these minorities encounter. This empathy, in turn, can metamorphose into emotional impetus, propelling active and enthusiastic engagement with issues pertaining to these minority groups rather than adopting an apathetic stance (Santos 2020). Furthermore, social movement activism is often linked to the infringement of rights experienced by social minority groups. Considering the agenda of modern and contemporary social movements—ranging from civil rights and women’s movements to global justice and anti-corruption movements—activism inherently requires collective advocacy for the rights of specific social

minority groups facing risks. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1-1: Individuals with high levels of emotional intimacy toward social groups are more likely to participate in activism than others.

Hypothesis 1-2: Individuals with high levels of emotional intimacy toward social minority groups are more likely to participate in activism than others.

In addition, an individual's level of emotional intimacy with others may be augmented through positive social interactions with them. In the context of social groups, the cultivation of emotional intimacy can be facilitated by repeated and sustained interactions with members belonging to a particular minority group, potentially reducing the stereotypes associated with the group. For instance, in the case of immigrants, active social interaction with diverse immigrants within one's community can effectively erode ethnic stereotypes, subsequently contributing to the diminishing of anti-immigrant sentiment (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Powers and Ellison 1995).

While individuals tend to experience intimacy with similar people (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001), local communities present a conducive milieu for interacting with individuals from diverse socio-demographic backgrounds. Particularly, people can foster and nurture social connections, including those with social minorities, through their involvement in civic and local associations. As expounded by the literature on social capital, social interaction with others in communities can translate into higher levels of interpersonal trust and foster a burgeoning interest in and engagement with civic and political matters (Lin 2001; Putnam 2000; Suh, Chang, and Lim 2012; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). To put it differently, emotional intimacy is nurtured through sustained interactions with others facilitated by co-membership in associations, subsequently serving as a foundation for activism on behalf of others.

Hence, we aim to investigate the potential correlation between individuals who experience emotional proximity toward social groups and their increased engagement in social and political issues, particularly when they simultaneously maintain associational membership. Given the divide between social minorities and non-minorities, we anticipate, specifically, that the positive effect of emotional intimacy toward social minorities will be amplified among those who are actively engaged in civic associations. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The positive relationship between possessing high levels of emotional intimacy toward social minority groups and participating in activism is enhanced among individuals who are participants in civic associations.

DATA AND METHODS

Data and Variables

The data we use in this study, the 2020 Korea Social Integration Survey (KSIS), is a nationally representative survey administered by the Korea Institute of Public Administration, a government-sponsored research institute. While the KSIS has been compiled since 2013, it is worth noting that the 2020 survey is the first to incorporate responses pertaining to respondents' levels of emotional intimacy toward various social groups. The 2020 KSIS consists of a stratified random sample of 8,336 respondents, and the questionnaire is comprehensive enough to include items on the respondents' engagement in civic and political matters, online/offline communication with others, levels of social and institutional trust, their self-efficacy and subjective well-being, and other relevant socio-demographic particulars.

The 2020 KSIS dataset presents a unique opportunity to examine the relationship between emotional intimacy toward social groups and the propensity for social and political activism. As the first survey to gather data on respondents' level of emotional intimacy toward social groups, this data entails a series of questions designed to gauge respondents' emotions toward different groups of people, ranging from feeling distant from others to feeling a warm and intimate connection with others. Respondents' emotions are measured on a temperature scale ranging from zero to 100 degrees Celsius, with the survey items formulated on a five-point ordinal scale (e.g., 0°C, 25°C, 50°C, 75°C, 100°C). These questions encompass attitudes towards ten different social groups, including: (1) people holding contrasting political opinions, (2) the elderly, (3) the youth, (4) people with disabilities, (5) people of the opposite gender, (6) homosexuals, (7) people adhering to different religious beliefs, (8) people you meet for the first time, (9) North Korean defectors, and (10) foreign residents. Using these ten items, we generate a single index measuring the level of an individual's emotional intimacy toward social groups (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$).

Our analysis tests the hypothesis that respondents who are emotionally proximate to social minorities are more likely to engage in activism. Our assumption behind this expectation is that activism predominantly revolves around advocating for the social and political rights of social minority groups rather than those of majority groups. From the list of ten social groups, we identify the following four social minority groups: people with disabilities, homosexuals, North Korean defectors, and foreign residents. Individuals with disabilities and homosexuals are evidently categorized as social minorities, distinct from those without disabilities and heterosexuals within the context of South Korea. Furthermore, given South Korea's ethnic and cultural homogeneity, North Korean defectors and foreign residents are also identified as social minorities. It is pertinent to note that political conservatives primarily spearhead activism in support of North Korean defectors, while political progressives in South Korea primarily champion activism for foreign and immigrant populations. By including both of these groups as minorities, our research design somewhat offsets the progressive bias inherent in political activism.

On the other hand, the other six groups do not inherently constitute minorities in the South Korean context. While both the elderly and the youth can encounter marginalization within specific social contexts, they are not typically classified as minorities constrained by limited civil or political rights. Furthermore, individuals with differing political opinions or religious beliefs are not treated as minorities, particularly considering the absence of a single majority ideological or religious group in South Korea. Similarly, strangers encountered for the first time indisputably do not fall under the category of social minorities. Lastly, we have primarily treated individuals of the opposite sex as non-minorities; however, there exists the possibility that they may indeed be social minorities (i.e., females) if the respondent's biologically assigned sex is male. In light of this, we reanalyze the data using this alternative framework that is more sensitive to the respondents' sex and present the findings in the results section.¹

The dependent variable in this study is an individual's propensity to participate in activism. Given our interest in discerning respondents' engagement in activism across various forms, we include six items inquiring about their engagement. These items include participating in protests or

1 Unfortunately, due to limitations in data, we are unable to control for whether the respondent is a social minority such as a person with a disability, homosexual, North Korean defector, or a foreign resident.

demonstrations, submitting petitions, participating in signature campaigns (including online), joining boycotts, voicing opinions to the government or the press, and lodging grievances with politicians or civil servants. Each questionnaire mandates respondents to indicate whether they have participated in any of these activities, measured on a four-point scale: 1 signifies “have never done,” 2 corresponds to “have not done but have intention to do in the future,” 3 indicates “have done previously but not in the past year,” and 4 corresponds to “have done in the past year.” These six ordinal variables are combined into a single activism propensity index (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.91$). Moreover, we conduct separate analyses for each activism variable, but the outcomes do not reveal any significant patterns beyond those observed in the main model presented in the results section.

In addition to examining the relationship between respondents’ level of emotional intimacy toward social groups and their propensity to engage in activism, we explore whether the association between the two is moderated by the respondents’ degree of social ties to the community. Our rationale lies in the notion that individuals who enjoy close ties to their local communities are more likely to seamlessly translate their emotional intimacy toward social groups into various forms of activism. To test this, we introduce a variable measuring an individual’s membership status within communities. In the survey, nine items inquired about respondents’ affiliation with specific associations, each rated on a five-point scale. From these responses, we derive nine binary variables, wherein a value of 1 denotes active membership and 0 indicates otherwise. Combining these nine binary variables, we generate a community membership index (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.78$).

For a rigorous test of our hypotheses, we add six control variables that are closely associated with an individual’s propensity for activism. First, we assume that the individual’s perception of political efficacy is pivotal to their decision and inclination toward participating in various forms of activism (Feldman and Hart 2016; Velasquez and LaRose 2015). To control for political self-efficacy, we combine two items asking whether “someone like me is unable to affect what the government is doing” and “the government does not care about the opinion of someone like me.” Second, we include the respondent’s levels of interpersonal and political trust into our analysis. This is due to the known positive linkage between one’s trust in both others in general and trust in governments and an individual’s proclivity for engaging in political matters (Suh, Lim, and Chang 2012). Also, as prior studies have noted, one’s social connection to others is associated with a stronger motivation to participate in activism (Saunders 2007). Therefore, we control

for one's interpersonal networks by employing a variable encompassing the number of daily interactions the respondent engages in. Moreover, we introduce a variable to measure the respondent's ideological orientation, quantified on a scale where 0 represents a highly conservative stance and 4 signifies very progressive. By adding this variable, we control for an individual's progressive ideologies, which are often strongly associated with active engagement in activism. Furthermore, alongside ideological orientation, we incorporate a binary variable inquiring whether the respondent supports a particular political party. Given that the survey lacks a specific item for determining the supported political party, this variable is employed as a proxy to control for the individual's interest in politics, while the ideology variable controls the respondent's actual political stance.

Lastly, five socio-demographic characteristics are controlled for in our models. In this nationwide survey, the respondent's age is categorized into generational groups, with ages between 20 and 29 being denoted as 1 and those aged 60 and above as 5. A binary variable indicates the respondent's biologically assigned sex at birth, with females assigned a value of 1. Similarly,

TABLE 1
WEIGHTED MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF VARIABLES ($N = 8,336$)

	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Engagement in activism	4.60	5.25	0	18
Emotional intimacy toward social groups	17.68	4.81	0	40
Emotional intimacy toward minorities	6.08	2.31	0	16
Emotional intimacy toward non-Minorities	11.60	3.10	0	24
Associational membership	1.27	1.67	0	9
Political efficacy	3.27	1.67	0	8
Generalized social trust	2.50	.57	1	4
Political trust	2.44	.69	1	4
Interpersonal networks	3.04	1.09	1	7
Progressive ideology	2.00	.85	0	4
Political party support	.32	.47	0	1
Age group	3.27	1.45	1	5
Sex (Female = 1)	.50	.50	0	1
Region (Capital area = 1)	.50	.50	0	1
Education	.83	.89	0	2
Family income	4.38	1.61	1	6

the residential area of the respondent is a binary variable, with a value of 1 assigned to those living in Seoul and the nearby province of Gyeonggi and city of Incheon. Furthermore, the respondent's education level and family income are incorporated into all our models. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics of the main dependent, independent, and control variables.

Analytic Strategy

The dependent variable in this study, the political activism index, is a summation of six ordinal variables on activism of various sorts. Given the sequential nature of this variable, it deviates from the normal distribution assumption. Thus, to explore the link between emotional intimacy with social groups and engagement in activism, we employ ordered logistic regression models.

In our analyses, we employ odd ratios to facilitate the interpretation of the effect of independent variables on engagement in activism (Long and Freese 2006). In addition, the analyses are weighted using the weight variable provided by the national survey data. Consequently, the results generated from the sample data analyses can be considered representative at a national level. Our study involves a sequence of four nested regression models to investigate the association between emotional intimacy toward social groups and an individual's engagement in activism of any sort. After distinguishing the effects of intimacy on social minorities and non-minorities, we further examine how the respondent's number of memberships moderates this intimacy-activism relationship.

RESULTS

We test our hypotheses regarding the influence and mechanism of emotional intimacy toward social groups on the decision to participate in activism to the test using four regression models. The findings presented in Table 2 indicate that emotional intimacy matters in explaining the decision to engage in activism, even after controlling for an individual's level of political efficacy, social and political trust, interpersonal networks, ideological orientation, support for political parties, and other socio-demographic characteristics.

Our results in Model 1 shows that, in general, emotional proximity to social groups is positively and significantly associated with participation in activism. One level increase in the level of emotional intimacy toward social

groups is related to a 1.03-times increase in an individual's likelihood to engage in activism, even after controlling for various social, political, and demographic characteristics ($p < 0.001$). Furthermore, a one-unit increase in the number of memberships held by the respondents in civic and local associations is significantly associated with a 25% increase in the dependent variable ($p < 0.001$).

Moving to Model 2, we distinguish between feeling intimacy toward social minority groups and non-minority groups and the results clearly suggest that emotional proximity to minority groups holds significance. A one-unit increase in an individual's level of intimacy toward minority groups—such as homosexuals, people with disabilities, foreign residents, and North Korean defectors—corresponds to a noteworthy 9% increase in one's engagement across various forms of activism, demonstrating a strong statistical significance ($p < 0.001$). These findings offer robust support for our primary hypothesis that emotions toward social minorities play a pivotal role in influencing participation in activism. On the other hand, the level of intimacy toward social non-minority groups exhibits no significant relationship with an individual's propensity to participate in activism.

In Models 3 and 4, we test our second hypothesis to examine whether the number of an individual's memberships in associations moderates the relationship between emotional intimacy and participation in activism. Our findings reveal that, once again, it is exclusively the effect of emotional intimacy toward social minorities that is amplified by an individual's membership in civic and local associations. As Model 3 suggests, emotional intimacy toward social minorities exhibits a positive and statistically significant effect on an individual's propensity to participate in activism in the absence of associational membership. However, an increase in the number of memberships also correlates with an increase in one's engagement in activism. On the other hand, Model 4 shows that emotional proximity to non-minorities does not have a statistically significant effect on an individual's propensity to participate in activism of any sort.

As part of the robustness check, we employed an alternative approach in constructing our primary independent variable of emotional intimacy towards groups. Specifically, we designated individuals of the opposite sex as non-minorities for female respondents, and as minorities for male respondents. The findings obtained from this alternative measure reveal no substantial shifts in the qualitative nature of the results. Emotional intimacy toward social minorities continues to exert a positive and statistically significant effect (odds ratio = 1.02, $p < 0.05$), while intimacy toward non-

TABLE 2
ORDERED LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS EXPLAINING ENGAGEMENT IN ACTIVISM

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Emotional intimacy toward social groups	1.03*** (.01)			
Emotional intimacy toward minorities		1.09*** (.01)	1.06*** (.02)	1.08*** (.01)
× Associational membership			1.02* (.01)	
Emotional intimacy toward non-minorities		.99 (.01)	.99 (.01)	.98 (.01)
× Associational membership				1.01 (.00)
Associational membership	1.25*** (.02)	1.25*** (.02)	1.13* (.01)	1.15* (.07)
Political efficacy	1.15*** (.02)	1.15*** (.02)	1.15*** (.02)	1.16*** (.02)
Generalized social trust	1.09* (.05)	1.08 (.05)	1.10* (.05)	1.09* (.05)
Political trust	.98 (.03)	.99 (.03)	.82*** (.03)	.82*** (.03)
Interpersonal networks	1.02 (.02)	1.03 (.02)	1.03 (.02)	1.03 (.02)
Progressive ideology	1.00 (.03)	.99 (.03)	1.02 (.03)	1.01 (.03)
Political party support	1.36*** (.07)	1.36*** (.07)	1.39*** (.07)	1.39*** (.07)
Age group	.83*** (.02)	.83*** (.02)	.83*** (.02)	.83*** (.02)
Sex (Female = 1)	.87** (.04)	.87** (.04)	.89* (.04)	.89* (.04)
Region (Capital area = 1)	1.67*** (.08)	1.62*** (.08)	1.68*** (.08)	1.68*** (.08)
Education	1.01 (.03)	1.02 (.03)	1.02 (.03)	1.02 (.03)
Family income	1.06*** (.02)	1.06*** (.02)	1.06*** (.02)	1.06*** (.02)
Wald χ^2	846.37	904.85	933.44	921.55
No. of Observations	8,336	8,336	8,336	8,336

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$ (two-tailed); Standard errors in parentheses.

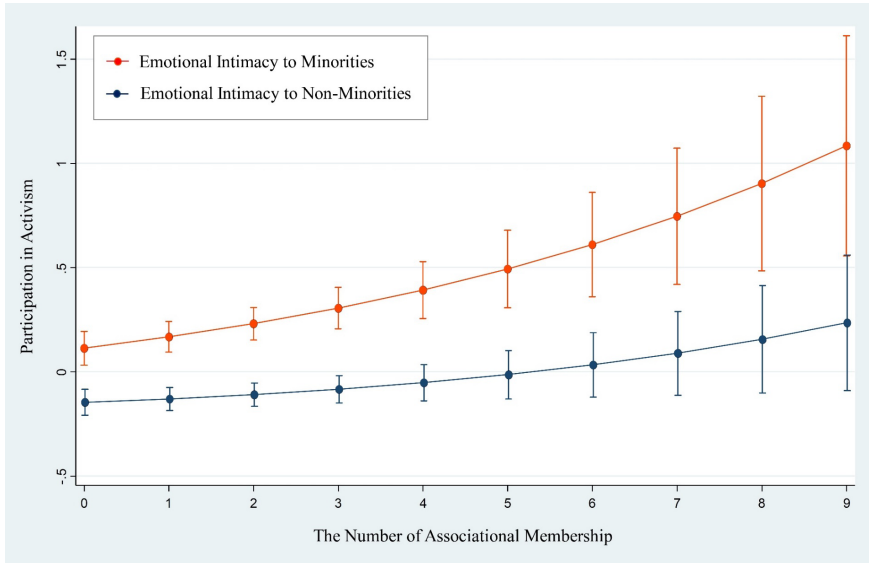


FIG. 1.—MARGINAL EFFECT OF EMOTIONAL INTIMACY TOWARD SOCIAL GROUPS ON ACTIVISM PARTICIPATION BY ASSOCIATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

minorities remains devoid of a significant influence on engagement in activism.

Regarding the control variables, it is noteworthy that individuals' level of political efficacy and support for a political party—serving as a proxy of political interest—are consistently and positively associated with their likelihood of participating in activism. Among socio-demographic characteristics, being older and being female are negatively related to engagement in activism, while living in or around Seoul and having a high family income display a positive association with our dependent variable.

Figure 1 illustrates the marginal effect of the interaction term between emotional intimacy toward social minorities or non-minorities on the one hand and the number of associational memberships on the other. These figures are generated from the outcomes derived from Models 3 and 4.

The figure shows that, concerning emotions toward social minorities, the relationship between intimacy and engagement in activism is positive and statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, even when the individual does not hold any membership in civic or local associations. Furthermore, this positive relationship becomes more pronounced as the number of memberships increases. Conversely, the relationship between emotional

intimacy toward non-minorities and participation turns out to be rather negative and significant when one holds zero to three associational memberships. Only when an individual maintains four or more memberships does the relationship cease to become statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

In conclusion, our findings suggest that an individual's level of emotional intimacy toward social groups is positively and significantly associated with engagement in activism, encompassing activities like signing petitions, participating in protests and boycotts, and more. Upon distinguishing between emotional intimacy toward social minorities and non-minorities, we also reveal a differential effect between the two categories. Specifically, emotional intimacy toward minorities manifests as a positive influence on political activism, while intimacy toward non-minorities is not significantly related to participation in activism. Finally, we also find that the positive association between emotional intimacy toward social minorities and engagement in activism becomes notably amplified when individuals actively interact with others through associational memberships.

CONCLUSION

Social movements, when successful, spread rapidly. In social movement research, the predominant focus has been directed toward elucidating how these movements spread through the networks and organizations of activists and participants (Della Porta 1988; Diani and McAdam 2003; McAdam 1988). In addition to examining the relational mechanism underpinning diffusion, scholars have also identified emotions such as anger and antagonism, as well as hope and solidarity, as catalysts driving the swift spread of movements. While investigating these dynamics holds significance, it is also crucial to understand the demographics of individuals who are predisposed to engage in these movements before they begin to spread. In our research, we used comprehensive survey data to examine the emotional underpinnings of movements within the context of South Korea—a country recognized as an emerging social movement society in a maturing democracy. Our study underscores that individuals who exhibit high emotional intimacy with social minorities are more likely to engage in activism across diverse forms. For those who maintain strong affiliations with civic and local communities through membership, this relationship between emotional intimacy and activism becomes even more pronounced.

This study carries both theoretical and practical implications that contribute to our understanding of social movements in contemporary societies. From a theoretical standpoint, our findings identify an emotional pathway through which individuals cultivate empathy toward others and subsequently engage in activism. Existing literature has highlighted the role of individuals' ideological commitment in fostering empathy towards others and consequently driving them to participate in movements. In addition to this rational approach, we suggest that emotional intimacy with members of social minorities constitutes a pivotal backdrop against which people make the decision to engage in activism. To put it differently, it is the sensitivity toward minority members within civil society that forms the bedrock for active engagement in social movements.

Moreover, our study unravels the significance of social connections in shaping an individual's participation in activism. Prior studies have shown how interpersonal networks often translate into an individual's decision to cooperate with others, engage in community activities, and participate in protests (Lim 2008; Lin 2001; Putnam 2000; Suh, Lim, and Chang 2012; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). In tandem with these findings, our research underscores that social connections indirectly contribute to engagement in activism. For individuals who are active members of local and civic associations, their emotional intimacy toward minority groups tends to more effectively translate into direct political action than for those who lack such affiliations.

From a practical perspective, our findings offer valuable insights that can enhance the progression of the "social movement society" (Meyer and Tarrow 1998) within consolidating democracies. For citizens to actively partake in political and social matters through various forms of activism such as petitions, joining protests, campaigns, and boycotts, as well as voicing their opinions to the government, it becomes imperative for them to experience emotional proximity with social minority groups, which are often marginalized and subject to discrimination within society. To foster civic virtues within contemporary societies, it becomes crucial to facilitate interactions between individuals and members of minority groups, thereby narrowing down the emotional distance through educational initiatives and awareness campaigns.

Notwithstanding these implications, our research does have certain limitations. First, due to data constraints, we were unable to delve into the specific goals and objectives behind individuals' engagement in activism. While we assume that social and political activism in contemporary societies

frequently revolves around the rights of social minority groups—as evidenced by movements advocating for racial and ethnic minorities, women, sexual minorities, and people with disabilities—future studies could potentially explore the link between emotional intimacy with social minority groups and the nature of activism or social movements. This exploration could be facilitated by detailed information pertaining to these movements.

Furthermore, our findings underscore the role of active membership in local and civic associations in moderating the effect of emotion-driven activism. However, we were unable to examine the characteristics of these associations once again due to data limitations. If a comprehensive dataset were to offer detailed insights into civic associations at the community level, similar to the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey (Putnam 2000) and other similar surveys, it would enable us to discern how local associations contribute to fostering activism among people with empathetic inclinations toward social minorities. Moreover, it would facilitate an exploration into whether civil society associations aid in fostering connections between local residents and minority members.

Lastly, future studies employing longitudinal survey data could effectively unravel the causal mechanisms that link emotional distance from social minorities to one's engagement in activism. Despite these limitations, this study opens avenues for investigating the emotional foundation of activism among individuals who may not necessarily be activists aligned with specific movements. As our study implies, emotional intimacy with minorities, as well as empathy toward their disadvantaged situation, stand as indispensable prerequisites for social movement societies to sustain active engagement in civil and political matters.

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Sejung Yoon is an M.A. graduate in the Department of Sociology at Chung-Ang University (CAU) in South Korea. Her research interests include social movements and political sociology. [E-mail: sally5513@naver.com]

Jun Hyeong Lee is an M.A. graduate in the Department of Sociology at Chung-Ang University (CAU) in South Korea. His academic interests lie in contentious politics and social movements. [E-mail: junpal5@cau.ac.kr]

Chan S. Suh is associate professor of sociology at Chung-Ang University (CAU). His research interests include social movements, social networks, and human rights. His work has been published in the *American Journal of Sociology*, *Social Forces*, *Mobilization*, *Human Rights Quarterly*, *Social Science Research*, *Politics & Society*, *Small Business Economics*, and others. [E-mail: sociochan@cau.ac.kr]