Self-Worth of Social-Political Activists: Theoretical Framework and Systematic Review

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Abstract. Activists are dedicated individuals who endeavor to create a substantial and significant influence on pivotal social issues. Their endeavors are propelled by a multitude of diverse factors, including aspects such as social identity, perceptions of fairness, efficacy, and other relevant considerations. These factors lead them to engage in a process of internalization within the collective group they are part of, shaping their sense of self-worth. However, the motivation to achieve self-worth is not always the predominant focus in existing study. Therefore, this study aimed to explained the context of activists' self-worth through the framework of the Quest for Significance (QFS) theory, employing a systematic literature review method. The systematic literature review follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic and Meta-analysis (PRISMA) protocol, utilizing keywords such as "political activism," "personal significance," "fulfilling life activism," "meaningful activist," and "activist experience." The platforms searched include Google Scholar, Springer Nature, Taylor & Francis, and Sage Journal. During the screening stage, journals that met the criteria related to social-political activism and the activation processes of the QFS (significance gain and significance loss) were carefully selected. The study identified key theme concerning the self-worth of activists, such as the role of activism as a coping mechanism, the positive outcomes of activism, the impact of relationships on activist, and challenges inherent in activism.

Keywords: activists, literature review, quest for significance, self-worth

Keberhargaan Diri Aktivis Sosial-Politik: Kerangka Teoretis dan Tinjauan Sistematis

Abstrak. Aktivis berjuang untuk menjadi sesuatu yang berarti demi suatu nilai yang penting. Aktivis memiliki alasan dirinya ikut terlibat dalam aktivisme seperti faktor identitas sosial, persepsi keadilan, efikasi dll. Aktivis juga mengalami proses internalisasi kelompok kolektif tempat perjuangannya yang menentukan keberhargaan dirinya. Namun motivasi meraih keberhargaan diri tidak menjadi motivasi *mainstream* dalam beberapa penelitian. Penulis bertujuan untuk menjelaskan konteks keberhargaan diri aktivis melalui kerangka teori Quest for Significance (QFS) melalui metode tinjauan literatur dengan menggunakan protokol dari Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic and Meta-analysis (PRISMA) dengan kata kunci *"political activism", "personal significance", "fulfilling life activism", "meaningful activist", activist experience"* melalui Google Scholar, Springer Nature, Taylor & Francis, dan Sage Journal. Penulis lalu melakukan tahap *screening* sesuai dengan syarat yang berkaitan dengan aktivisme sosial-politik dan proses aktivasi QFS, yaitu *significance gain* dan *significance loss*. Penulis menemukan tema-tema yang berhubungan dengan keberhargaan diri aktivis yaitu aktivisme sebagai mekanisme coping, dampak positif aktivisme, hubungan dengan orang lain dan tantangan dari aktivisme.

Kata Kunci: aktivis, keberhargaan diri, *quest for significance,* tinjauan literatur

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In the process of democracy, protests serve as a lawful means for expressing aspirations and demanding redress for greviance overlooked by decision-makers. Protests and demonstrations are fundamental components of social movements, playing crucial role in galvanizing societal action. Social movements are a mechanism through which societies rally to mobilize the masses in the pursuit of essential rights, respect, and justice (Hanna et al., 2016). Political social movements can influence decision-makers to amend regulations towards greater justice. A prime example is the anti-apartheid movement led by Nelson Mandela, which effectively transformed South Africa's racially segregated system, ushering in an era of multi-racial democracy (Britannica, 2023). Similarly, Indonesia's history bears withness to the impact of student activist demonstrations in 1998, a movement that played a vital role in toppling the enhanced New Order government and paving way for a new era of reform (Welianto, 2020).

Early study into collective actions was based on the perspective that activists participating in protests were driven by irrational impulses, stemming from feelings of frustration, oppression, and injustice due to their perceived lack (Millward & Takhar, 2019; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2017). As time progressed, a more nuanced understanding of activist participation in collective actions began to emerge. This encompasses additional factors beyond emotional triggers. Among these factors are instrumental considerations, which involve the cost-benefit analysis, aligned with the expectancy-value theory, guiding engagement in such actions (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). The perspective emphasizes that activists are rational actors capable of orchestrating movements, harnessing resources, and calculating the probability of success (Jenkins, 1983). In addition to this cost-benefit approach, individuals engaging in these movements are intrinsically driven by commitment to their collective identity. This motivation stems from identity-related aspects as well as the expression of one's life perspective intertwined with cultural influences, meanings, narratives, emotions, and moral considerations, commonly referred to as ideological motives (Roggeband & Klandermans, 2017). However, beyond the factors mentioned in the existing body of literature, another significant motivational force that comes into focus was self-worth.

The development of literature in activism has yet to fully recognized self-worth as a primary motivation. However, certain studiesindicated that self-worth can be a significant factor influencing activism. Activists experience a sense of self-worth through feelings of empowerment, the ability to effect change, and personal pride stemming from involvement in a meaningful struggle (Drury & Reicher, 2009; Jasko et al., 2019). They perceive their activism as a source of self-worth, facilitated by participation in social and

political events, as well as identification with groups that encompass emotions, opinions, or expressions of strongly held values (Mcguire et al., 2010). This stems from the fact that activists aren't solely focused on making a meaningful impact, but they also aspire to be embed with meaning within history, culture, and society at large (Stetsenko, 2012). The usefulness derived from impactful experiences is intertwined with the desire to be infused with deeper significance and meaning, achieved through active participation in activism (Elad-Strenger, 2016). According to this study, there exist a need for a variable that can explain why activists join social movements driven by their inherent sense of self-worth. To delve into the concept of self-worth within the concept of activism, a literature review method was employed. The investigation is grounded in the Quest for Significance (QFS) theory, positing that this conceptual framework can effectively elucidate the factors underpinning the self-worth of activists.

The QFS encompasses a fundamental yearning to embody meaning, receive recognition, instigate change, or attain a valued identity (Dugas et al., 2016). It encapsulates an individual's drive to achieve self-worth through various means, such as the pursuit of acceptance from others (belonging), the drive for accomplishments, the pursuit of status, participation in a larger entity, and the quest for life's purpose (Kruglanski et al., 2014; Kruglanski et al., 2022). The activation of self-worth involves a dual process, where negative experiences, such as failure, discrimination, and self-deprecation, serves as triggers for its loss (significance loss) (Kruglanski et al., 2009). These experiences often propel individual to seek restoration of their diminished self-worth by adopting roles within a group (Kruglanski et al., 2022). Additionally, the activation can manifest as the pursuit for self-worth (significance gain) through a committed engagement in values, pleasures, and interests, realized by active involvement in a group (Kruglanski et al., 2009). Both these mode of activation lead to a shift toward collectivism, where individuals align their focus with the group aims, ideology, and values (Dugas et al., 2016). This shift emerges because the group offers valuable purposes, like-minded members, recognition for individuals, and pride in being part of a larger group (Kruglanski et al., 2022), thereby fulfilling an inherent need.

Method

This study employed a literature review method in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) protocol developed by Moher et al. (2009). The purpose was to elucidate the themes of self-worth within activism, using the QFS theory as a guiding framework. The search for relevant journals was conducted through databases such as Google Scholar, Springer Nature, Taylor and Francis, and Sage Journal.

. Search terms including "political activism," "personal significance," "fulfilling life activism," "meaningful activist," and "activist experience" were employed, with emphasis on titles and keywords. The selection process was performed based on specific inclusion criteria, namely: 1) The study focused on the internalization process of socio-political activism within groups; 2) The utilization of quantitative or qualitative analysis; 3) Publications were within the range of 2000-2023; 4) Journals were indexed in Scimago.jr; 5) The study aligned with the framework of QFS theory. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria established were: 1) The study did not revolve specifically around the internalization process of activists within groups; 2) Journals that were primarily conceptual frameworks, methodological discussions, review articles, and books; 3) The study exhibited a misalignment with the foundation tenets of the QFS theory.
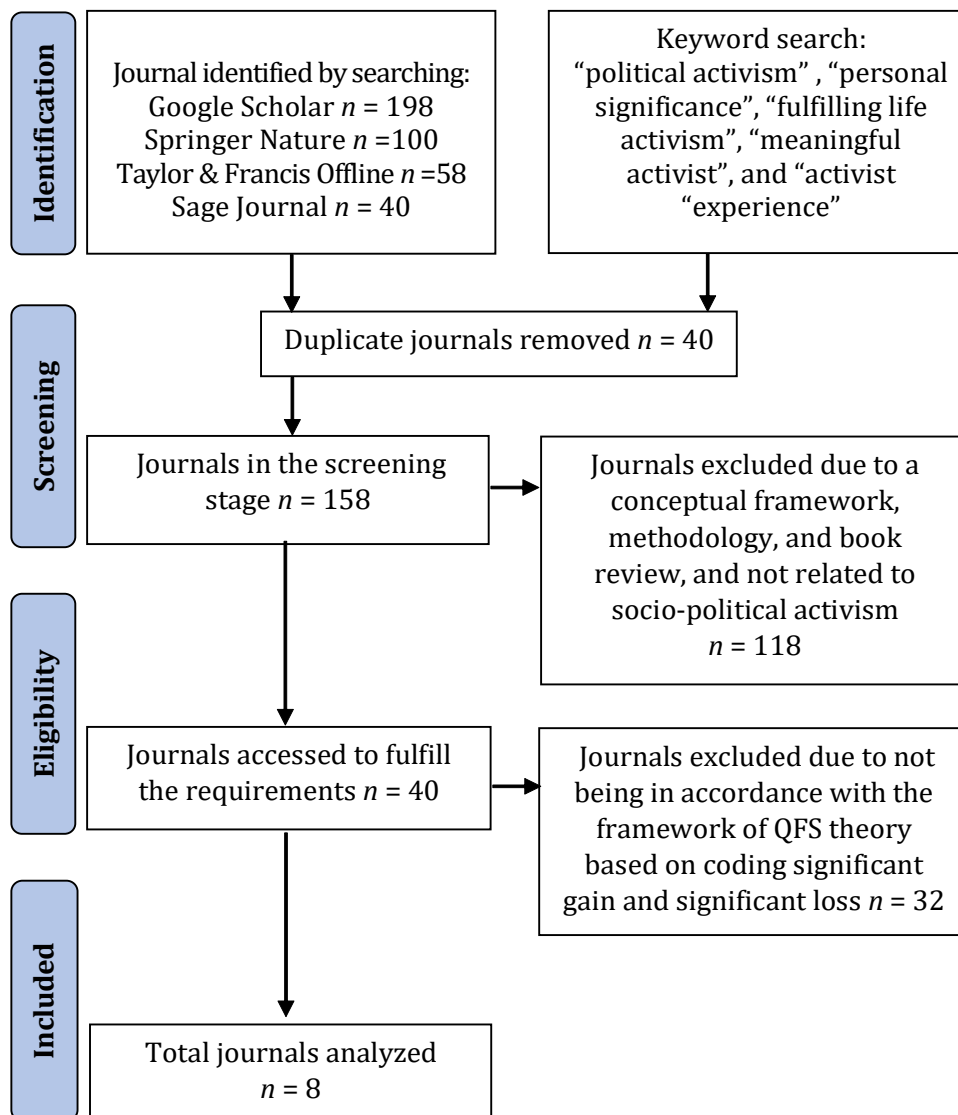
Literature search stage

During the initial stage of the search, a total of 198 journal results were retrieved, comprising various types of sources such as articles, books, conference papers, book reviews, literature reviews, and other forms.

This study specifically included journals listed on schimagojr.com and publications between 2000 and 2023. Following the removal of 40 duplicate entries, the subsequent screening stage was initiated. During this stage, journals that fell within the realm of conceptual frameworks, methodological discussions, and book reviews were excluded from consideration, while only retaining those related to the psychological processes of socio-political activism.

Journals congruent with the framework of QFS theory were selectively incorporated. Following the methodology by How et al. (2021), the content was analyzed collaboratively by 2 authors. The objective was to ascertain the topics of each journal. Additionally, a coding process was applied to categorize journals based on the QFS theory framework, encompassing the activation of significance loss and gain. Out of the initial total, 32 journals did not align with this framework, while 8 were obtained for corresponding. Finally, relevant details such as authors names, participants, methods, topics, study designs, and results were documented in an MS Excel spreadsheet.

Figure 1

Systematic Literature Review Stage

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Identification │ ┌─────────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────────┐
               │ │ Journal identified by    │   │     Keyword search:     │
               │ │ searching:               │   │ "political activism" ,  │
               │ │ Google Scholar n = 198   │   │ "personal               │
               │ │ Springer Nature n =100   │   │ significance", "fulfilling life │
               │ │ Taylor & Francis Offline │   │ activism", "meaningful  │
               │ │ n =58                    │   │ activist", and "activist│
               │ │ Sage Journal n = 40      │   │ "experience"            │
               │ └─────────────────────────┘   └─────────────────────────┘
                              │                             │
                              ▼                             ▼
Screening      │       ┌────────────────────────────────────────┐
               │       │  Duplicate journals removed n = 40       │
               │       └────────────────────────────────────────┘
                              │
                              ▼
               │ ┌─────────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────────┐
               │ │ Journals in the screening│──▶│ Journals excluded due to a │
               │ │ stage n = 158            │   │ conceptual framework,   │
               │ └─────────────────────────┘   │ methodology, and book   │
                              │                 │ review, and not related to │
                              │                 │ socio-political activism│
Eligibility    │              │                 │ n = 118                 │
               │              ▼                 └─────────────────────────┘
               │ ┌─────────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────────┐
               │ │ Journals accessed to     │──▶│ Journals excluded due to not │
               │ │ fulfill the requirements │   │ being in accordance with the │
               │ │ n = 40                   │   │ framework of QFS theory │
               │ └─────────────────────────┘   │ based on coding significant │
                              │                 │ gain and significant loss n = 32 │
Included       │              ▼                 └─────────────────────────┘
               │ ┌─────────────────────────┐
               │ │  Total journals analyzed │
               │ │  n = 8                   │
               │ └─────────────────────────┘
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Results

The final outcome of the systematic review showed a total of 8 journals that aligned with the theme of activists' self-worth through the mechanisms of significance loss and gain. These journals include:

Table 1

Literature Review Results

Author	Participant	Topic	Study Design	Key Results
(Hope et al., 2018)	Black/African, Latin/Hispanist multiracial students. Total participants = 504, 75% female, 25% male. Age range = -.	Mental health, Black and Latin political activists.	Correlational Study	Political activism among Latin students reduced stress and depression related to discrimination. Meanwhile, for black students, it increased stress and anxiety due to micro-aggression exposure.
(Bratman et al., 2016)	Environmental activist students and faculty staff. Total participants = 4 people, 75% female, 25% male.	Environmental activism, Climate change, Climate crisis campaign framing because of fossil fuels.	Auto-ethnography	This study produced three themes, namely 1. An environmental justice framework that contains justice issues, 2. Radicalization of attachment to the environment through framing processes and personal awareness, 3. Campaign strategies inside and outside the campus.
(Negrón-Gonzales, 2013))	DREAM Act campaign activists. Total participants = 50. Gender= -. Age range = 16-28.	Immigrants, Migrant activists.	Ethnography	This study showed that immigrants who do not have citizenship documents navigate emotions of fear and shame by building a community. The community strives to fight for the rights of immigrants who do not have permanent documents. Immigrants also feel like "outsiders" who are isolated in society.
(Mitra & Buzzanell, 2017)	Sustainability business professional workers. Total participants = 45, 49% female, 51% male. Age range = -.	Sustainability worker career, the meaningfulness of the work, and the challenges.	Grounded theory	Sustainability workers add meaning of their work through three things, namely the work process, the impact, and the possible career position. They create personal meaning through the dynamics encountered during the work process. The impact of their work also provides concrete solutions and results in society. Additionally, sustainability workers also give negative and positive evaluations of what they have performed.

Author	Participant	Topic	Study Design	Key Results
(Klar & Kasser, 2009)	Campus activists. Total participants in Study 1= 341, Study 2= 718, and Study 3 = 296. Study 1 = 62% female, 38% male; Study 2 = 32.67% female, 67.24% male; Study 3 = -. Age range = 19 - 44.	Activists' happiness	Correlational Study	Study 1: activism measures are positively related to well-being (from the Hedonic and Eudaimonic traditions). Study 2: activism is associated with high well-being and welfare. Study 3: low activist engagement leads to high vitality.
(Fox & Quinn, 2012)	Social activists. Total participants = 7. Age range = -. Gender = -	Social activists fighting for the rights of the elderly. Meaning of social activists.	Phenomenology	This study produced 4 themes, namely work engagement, activist identity, the decision to become an activist, and perspectives on the elderly. Work engagement occurs because activists feel their function is related to something they like. Activist identity is also related to their personal identity which shapes beliefs and behavior. The decision to become an activist is also affected by the experience and influence of the surrounding people. The participants decide to take part in the protest action because they are concerned about the issue that the elderly needed to be given certain rights.
(Müllenmeister et al., 2022)	Social activists. Total participants = 6, 50% female, 50% male. Age range = 19 - 44.	The tension between the personal lives of activists and activism.	Phenomenology	Activists get self-worth when they are with other people who support the same thing and can perform activities together. Activism can also interfere with personal life. This is because activists feel responsible for the obligations of their role. However, activism can also cross boundaries, disrupting the personal relationships with family or friends. Activism is not limited by time hence activists should perform their work on the weekends when necessary.

Author	Participant	Topic	Study Design	Key Results
(Strauss Swanson & Szymanski, 2020)	Women's movement activists. Total participants = 16, 81.25% female, 12.5% genderqueer, 6.25% male. Age range = 20 - 73.	Women's movement activists who have experienced sexual harassment. Experience, meaningfulness, and empowerment.	Case study	The thematic analysis presented four themes, namely 1. being able to speak and gain power, 2. helping others to heal, 3. connecting with other people, and 4. challenges for sexual harassment. 1. Activists get a chance to gain their strength back by speaking out about experiences of sexual harassment. Through speaking out, they get rid of shame and self-blame by expressing themselves. 2. Activists who help others are part of the healing process because they feel needed by survivors. 3. Connecting with other people through a large community can validate and appreciate each individual to be involved in the movement. Participants feel appreciated for their work on the movement and solidarity among survivors. 4. The challenges for women's movement activists are that they can feel triggered by experiences of sexual harassment. Activists can experience burnout when it comes to organizational dynamics and people who perceive the movement negatively.

Discussion

The results showed that the motivation behind the quest for self-worth had specific themes within the activism literature. The acquisition of self-worth revolves around the activation of significance loss and gain.

Activation of significant loss involved negative experiences that prompt activists to reclaim their lost value. Meanwhile, activation of significance gain occured through the benefits obtained within the groups. The analysis uncovers 4 themes related to activists' self-

worth, and they include activism as a coping mechanism, positive impacts of activism, relationships with others, and challenges of activism.

Activism as a coping mechanism

Activism can serve as a coping mechanism to alleviate the psychological consequences of unpleasant personal experiences, trauma, and feelings of powerlessness towards negative events. Hope et al. (2018) stated that Latin minorities employ political activism as a means of neutralizing depression arising from racial discrimination. Furthermore, Strauss Swanson and Szymanski (2020) reported that women activists who have experienced sexual harassment empower themselves within collective groups by raising their voices for justice on behalf of the victims. Negrón-Gonzales (2013) also asserted that immigrant students, grappling with the burden of being undocumented, integrate into campus communities to surmount the shame and trepidation linked to their legal status. Activism becomes a productive effort aimed at alleviating suffering, empowering activists, and fostering a belief of their capacity to effect meaningful change.

Positive impacts of activism

Klar and Kasser (2009) stated that identifying as an activist and engaging in political activities are associated with well-being and life satisfaction. Other studies also indicated that activism is linked to positive

impacts in life, such as the development of abilities in confident public speaking (Strauss Swanson & Szymanski, 2020). Additionally, activists can earn respected status in society due to their meaningful activities and spiritually-driven life goals (Fox & Quinn, 2012). Activism fosters a fulfilling and meaningful life by enabling individuals to assist others, possess collective strength, and serve as a means of self-expression (Strauss Swanson & Szymanski, 2020). Mitra and Buzzanell (2017) highlighted that through the challenges faced, activists can develop abilities and acquire skills that expand their roles. Satisfaction is obtained through the impact of their work and appreciation for their contributions.

Relationships with others (belonging)

The connections formed among fellow members motivate collective actions by creating a supportive network and a space for shared experiences (Müllenmeister et al., 2022; Strauss Swanson & Szymanski, 2020). Relationships with others also provide personal validation and appreciation for the work of fellow movement members (Strauss Swanson & Szymanski, 2020). Mitra and Buzzanell (2017) asserted that activists can expand their careers by fostering meaningful connections within their community. According to Negrón-Gonzales (2013), immigrant students isolated from society due to negative stigma discover a

sense of belonging in the community of fellow minorities.

Challenges of activism

Activists face challenges and issues throughout their engagement within groups. Strauss Swanson and Szymanski (2020) stated that women activists can be triggered by traumatic memories due to direct involvement in handling cases of sexual harassment. Furthermore, black students experience higher levels of stress in activism as they are exposed to racial discrimination issues while organizing. Environmental activists, particularly those shouldering substantial organizational responsibilities, are obliged to participate extensively in environmental actions, thereby disrupting their personal obligations. As activism takes precedence, some activists aiming to cultivate and lead organizations gradually distanced from family and close friends, sacrificing personal relationships to dedicate more time to their pursuits (Müllenmeister et al, 2022). Finally, the challenges faced by activists can negatively impact personal lives. However, these challenges can also add to the dynamics of activism which has its own meaning for activist struggles.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analyzed literature showed that activism was associated with coping mechanism, relationships with others, the creation of positive meaning, and various challenges. The coping mechanism arises from past negative experiences, leading activists to employ activism as a healing process. The positive impacts felt also enhanced the performance of activists, as these affected them personally and improve their life quality. Additionally, relationship with colleagues aid in fulfilling the need to share, appreciate, and support each other, thereby forming a network of mutual assistance. The framework of QFS theory was related to the themes in activism study, suggesting potential for possible extension.

Suggestion

Activism presented its own set of challenges when the work sphere of activists begins to interfere with personal relationships or even trigger traumatic experiences. These challenges added dynamics for activists and potentially yielded negative impacts. Therefore, further study is needed to delve into the more meaningful dynamics through the lens of demanding and challenging work. Studies on activism also needs to incorporate variables of self-worth associated with a coping mechanism, positive impacts, and relationships with others as underlying motivations. However, this investigation is limited because it does not encompass broader and more detailed themes. Subsequent study is recommended to examine activism through the use of meta-analysis systems and empirical studies. This aimed explore the themes already uncovered.

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