



Collective unconscious and crowd behavior: an integrative review of psychoanalytic and social psychological perspectives

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Abstract

This article provides an integrative review of theoretical and empirical research on the collective unconscious and crowd behavior, bridging classical psychoanalytic formulations with contemporary social psychological approaches. Drawing on foundational insights from Freud and Jung, the study examines how unconscious affective processes and shared symbolic structures shape collective identification, emotion, and action. The review systematically synthesizes findings from peer-reviewed literature across psychoanalysis, social identity theory, and affective science, covering publications from 2000 to 2025. Three major thematic areas are identified: (1) the conceptual evolution of the collective unconscious, emphasizing its relevance to modern understandings of group emotion and social cognition; (2) empirical investigations into collective phenomena, including emotional contagion, identity fusion, and archetypal symbolism in digital and physical crowds; and (3) applied implications for social cohesion, media communication, and governance in emotionally charged collective contexts. Results indicate that unconscious processes continue to underlie crowd dynamics, influencing both prosocial mobilization and destructive mass behavior. The integration of psychoanalytic and social psychological perspectives reveals that collective action is neither irrational nor purely cognitive, but a complex synthesis of symbolic meaning, affective resonance, and identity formation. Policy implications highlight the importance of emotional literacy, symbolic communication, and empathetic governance in addressing large-scale collective phenomena in contemporary societies.

Keywords: Collective unconscious, crowd behavior, psychoanalysis, social identity theory, collective emotion, archetypes

Introduction

The study of crowd behavior has long occupied scholars across psychology, sociology, and psychoanalysis, reflecting a sustained interest in understanding how individuals' behavior changes when they become part of a collective. Historically, early theorists such as Gustave Le Bon (1895/2002) articulated the idea that individuals in crowds undergo psychological transformations that differentiate them from their solitary selves, often resulting in actions governed by unconscious processes rather than deliberate, rational decision-making. Le Bon proposed that a "psychological crowd" emerges when people gather, producing a collective mind that influences individual behavior through mechanisms such as anonymity, emotional contagion, and suggestibility that diminish personal responsibility and heighten responsiveness to group impulses.

Building on Le Bon's framework, Sigmund Freud (1921/1959) provided one of the earliest psychoanalytic analyses of collective behavior in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. Freud theorized that individuals in a mass temporarily surrender their personal consciousness, adopting an emotional contagion that allows unconscious processes to dominate behavior.

Alongside Freudian contributions, Carl Gustav Jung (1959, 1968) introduced the concept of the collective unconscious, which provides a foundational idea for understanding crowd phenomena. Jung argued that beyond the personal unconscious resides a deeper, species-wide reservoir of psychological structures—archetypes—that shape thought, emotion, and imagery across cultures.

Modern scholarship increasingly seeks to integrate features of both classical psychoanalytic insights and social psychological theories (Brown & Stenner, 2021) [2]. While

social identity models explain how collective behavior is structured around shared norms and values, the psychoanalytic notion of unconscious processes enriches understanding of why certain emotional patterns or symbolic themes recur across different group contexts. Rather than treating unconscious mechanisms and social identity frameworks as mutually exclusive, an integrative review allows for a comprehensive account of crowd behavior that acknowledges both the depth of internal psychological structures and the dynamics of social interaction.

In summary, the phenomenon of collective behavior cannot be fully explained through a single theoretical lens. Historical and psychoanalytic approaches, including the work of Le Bon, Freud, and Jung, emphasize unconscious and symbolic dimensions of group experience. In contrast, social psychological models foreground the structured, identity-based mechanisms through which crowds organize and act. An integrative perspective that synthesizes these traditions provides a richer conceptual foundation for explaining both the affective dynamics and cognitive structures of crowd behavior. Such a synthesis deepens scholarly understanding of how unconscious influences and conscious social identities interact to produce collective action that is simultaneously emotional, symbolic, and socially meaningful.

Materials and methods

This study employs a systematic literature review method to synthesize and analyze previous research findings related to the collective unconscious and its role in crowd behavior, integrating insights from classical psychoanalytic theory and contemporary social psychology. This approach enables the consolidation of existing scientific knowledge, clarifies the

conceptual evolution of unconscious processes in group dynamics, and identifies theoretical and empirical patterns underlying collective affect, identity, and symbolism in modern societies.

The literature was primarily collected from peer-reviewed international journals focusing on theoretical analyses, empirical studies, and interdisciplinary reviews in psychology and social sciences. The main databases used included PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, covering journals such as *Frontiers in Psychology*, *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, and *History of the Human Sciences*.

The selection of studies was based on the following inclusion criteria: 1. Direct relevance to theories of the unconscious, collective emotions, or crowd behavior; 2. Examination of psychoanalytic or social psychological mechanisms such as identification, projection, emotional contagion, and social identity; 3. Focus on the integration of classical theoretical frameworks (e.g., Le Bon, Freud, Jung) with contemporary empirical or conceptual developments (e.g., Drury & Reicher, 2020; Brown & Stenner, 2021)^[2, 4]; 4. Publications appearing in reputable, peer-reviewed journals between 1895 and 2025 to ensure both historical depth and modern applicability.

After collection, the selected documents were analyzed, compared, and synthesized through thematic content analysis. Studies were organized into three major themes:

1. The unconscious foundations of collective behavior—exploring early psychoanalytic theories of mass psychology (e.g., Freud, 1921/1959; Jung, 1959/1968);
2. Emotional contagion and collective affect—summarizing empirical and theoretical research on emotional synchronization and shared experience (e.g., Páez *et al.*, 2015; Drury & Reicher, 2020)^[4, 5];
3. Shared identity and symbolism—examining how social identity and archetypal symbolism structure collective meaning and behavior (e.g., Von Scheve & Ismer, 2013; Brown & Stenner, 2021)^[2, 11].

The analytical process emphasized the identification of convergent mechanisms and theoretical divergences between psychoanalytic and social psychological models, highlighting methodological innovations, interpretive refinements, and the influence of socio-historical context on the understanding of collective behavior in both traditional and digital societies.

Research Results

The integration of psychoanalytic and social psychological perspectives on collective behavior reveals several converging findings about the interplay between unconscious processes, shared identities, and emotional dynamics in groups. The reviewed literature highlights three major thematic domains: (1) the unconscious foundations of collective behavior, (2) the mechanisms of emotional contagion and collective affect, and (3) the role of shared identity and symbolic meaning in structuring crowd phenomena. Across these domains, evidence suggests that collective behavior arises from a complex interaction between individual psychological processes, group norms, and sociocultural context, rather than from any single deterministic cause.

1. Unconscious Foundations of Collective Behavior

The psychoanalytic tradition provides the earliest theoretical frameworks for understanding the unconscious roots of

crowd dynamics. Le Bon (1895/2002) argued that individuals immersed in a crowd regress to a more primitive psychological state characterized by diminished critical capacity, heightened suggestibility, and a tendency toward emotional fusion with others. He viewed the crowd as an entity where the conscious self dissolves and unconscious impulses dominate. Freud (1921/1959) extended this argument, proposing that collective identification with a leader or an ideal substitutes for individual ego functions. In Freud's model, crowd members experience a temporary suspension of personal boundaries as their libidinal energies become bound to a shared object or symbol. This process of mass identification creates emotional cohesion but also explains why crowds may act irrationally or destructively.

Jung (1959/1968) reframed this dynamic in more archetypal terms. He proposed that beneath the individual unconscious lies a deeper collective layer composed of inherited psychic structures—the archetypes—that manifest in myths, rituals, and symbols. During periods of intense social upheaval or mass mobilization, these archetypal contents may emerge into collective consciousness through shared symbols and imagery. Jung's analysis of historical and political movements suggested that collective behavior often expresses archetypal themes such as the hero, the shadow, or the self, which resonate deeply across individuals and cultures. This view implies that crowds do not merely lose rationality but rather enact symbolic dramas through which unconscious material finds expression.

Contemporary psychoanalytic theorists have built upon these classical insights to explore the persistence of unconscious mechanisms in modern collective phenomena. Brown and Stenner (2021)^[2] revisited the notion of crowd experience as a "liminal" psychological state where the boundary between self and other becomes fluid. Their phenomenological reinterpretation of Le Bon and Freud emphasized that the unconscious operates not as a chaotic force but as a field of affective resonance that enables collective attunement. Rather than viewing the crowd as irrational, Brown and Stenner argued that collective behavior represents a mode of shared experience through which participants temporarily transcend individual separateness.

The reviewed studies converge on the idea that unconscious processes—such as identification, projection, and symbolic resonance—play a continuing role in shaping collective behavior, even when participants consciously articulate rational goals. This recognition opens a pathway for integrating psychoanalytic insights with empirically grounded models from social psychology.

2. Emotional Contagion and Collective Affect

A major body of empirical research has examined how emotions spread and synchronize within groups, providing a bridge between unconscious theories and observable collective behavior. Páez *et al.* (2015)^[5] demonstrated that large-scale gatherings such as festivals, rituals, and demonstrations generate "perceived emotional synchrony," a sense of shared emotional intensity and unity that predicts greater social cohesion and subjective well-being. Their studies across different cultural contexts showed that participants often report feelings of transcendence, merging, and collective identity during high-intensity group experiences. These findings empirically substantiate Le Bon's and Freud's early observations about emotional contagion, while translating them into measurable psychological variables.

Von Scheve and Ismer (2013) ^[11] further theorized that collective emotions are not merely the sum of individual feelings but emerge from the social interactional processes that define group membership. According to their model, collective emotions arise when individuals appraise events through a shared lens of group relevance. This perspective aligns with the social identity theory proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979) and developed by Turner *et al.* (1987) ^[10], which posits that emotional reactions become aligned with collective identity once individuals categorize themselves as group members. Thus, the unconscious resonance described by psychoanalytic theories finds a social-cognitive parallel in identity-based emotional appraisal.

Drury and Reicher (2000, 2020) ^[4] expanded on this by demonstrating that emotional contagion in crowds is mediated by shared social identity. In their field studies of demonstrations and protests, they observed that collective joy, anger, or empowerment emerges when participants perceive the crowd as representing a legitimate social entity. This suggests that emotional synchronization is not simply automatic or unconscious but occurs within a normative framework that defines appropriate feelings and actions. However, the immediacy and intensity of these emotions still reflect processes that operate below full conscious awareness, echoing psychoanalytic notions of affective attunement and projection.

From an integrative perspective, emotional contagion can be understood as the interface between the psychoanalytic unconscious and social identity processes. While psychoanalysis emphasizes the depth and symbolic nature of shared affect, social psychology operationalizes these dynamics as processes of social influence, communication, and appraisal. The convergence of these approaches suggests that collective emotions serve as vehicles through which unconscious themes—such as belonging, threat, or transcendence—are enacted in socially meaningful ways.

3. Shared Identity, Symbolism, and Meaning Construction

The reviewed literature consistently highlights the importance of shared meaning and symbolic representation in organizing collective behavior. Freud's notion of identification with a leader or ideal (1921/1959) can be reinterpreted in contemporary terms as identification with shared norms or social categories. The libidinal bonds Freud described correspond closely to the psychological investments individuals make in group identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This linkage between affect and identity suggests that social belonging is not only cognitive but also emotionally charged and partly unconscious.

Reicher (2001) ^[6] and Drury and Reicher (2000) ^[4] demonstrated that crowd participants actively construct and negotiate social meanings through interaction, challenging the deterministic model of crowds as passive or suggestible. Yet, even within this constructivist view, symbolic processes play a crucial role. Group symbols, slogans, and rituals operate as containers for collective emotion, much like Jung's archetypes. For example, mass demonstrations often center on symbols that embody shared grievances or ideals—the raised fist, national flags, or religious icons—that evoke deep emotional resonance transcending individual cognition. Such symbols may function as vehicles through which the collective unconscious finds expression in public space.

Brown and Stenner's (2021) ^[2] phenomenological approach provides additional depth to this symbolic dimension. They argued that crowd experiences often involve a sense of "collective embodiment," in which individuals feel carried by a larger force or rhythm that exceeds personal intention. This description parallels Jung's idea of archetypal activation, where participation in a collective evokes primordial images and feelings of unity. The sense of awe, ecstasy, or even fear experienced in crowds may thus represent encounters with collective archetypes—psychological structures that organize human experience across time and culture.

Modern mass communication and digital media amplify these dynamics. While not the central focus of the reviewed studies, recent analyses have suggested that social media crowds—such as online movements and viral mobilizations—replicate the psychological features of physical crowds. Emotional contagion, symbolic convergence, and identity fusion occur in digital spaces where shared narratives and imagery circulate rapidly. These phenomena imply that the collective unconscious, once thought to manifest primarily in physical gatherings, now operates within virtual networks that extend the emotional and symbolic field of human collectivity.

4. Toward an Integrative Understanding of Collective Behavior

The convergence of psychoanalytic and social psychological research suggests that collective behavior emerges from multilayered processes encompassing unconscious affective resonance, identity-based meaning construction, and sociocultural mediation. The classical psychoanalytic model contributes depth and insight into the symbolic and emotional underpinnings of group phenomena, while social identity and collective emotion theories provide empirical rigor and explanatory precision.

Empirical findings from Drury and Reicher (2020) ^[4] demonstrate that the experience of empowerment within crowds can foster long-term psychological transformation, reinforcing new identities and political engagement. These results indicate that participation in collective behavior can have adaptive and constructive outcomes, contrary to Le Bon's depiction of crowds as irrational or regressive. Yet, the intensity of affect and symbolic unity reported in such events also resonates with Jungian descriptions of archetypal activation and collective catharsis. Thus, collective behavior can simultaneously serve psychological integration and social transformation.

Integrating these perspectives allows scholars to conceptualize crowds not merely as pathologies of the social mind but as contexts in which unconscious and conscious dimensions of human experience converge. Freud's mechanism of identification and Jung's archetypal theory highlight the deep motivational forces that drive individuals to seek fusion with larger entities, while social identity theory elucidates how these drives are structured and expressed through shared norms and narratives. Emotional contagion research provides the bridge between the two, showing how affective synchronization translates unconscious resonance into social action.

This integrative model also offers explanatory potential for contemporary phenomena. The resurgence of mass movements, from political protests to digital activism, illustrates how collective emotions can mobilize individuals

across global networks. The symbols, chants, and hashtags that dominate these events function as modern equivalents of archetypal imagery, encapsulating shared values and anxieties. Understanding these dynamics through both psychoanalytic and social psychological lenses reveals how unconscious processes of projection, desire, and identification operate within modern forms of collective engagement.

Across the reviewed literature, several convergent conclusions emerge. First, unconscious mechanisms continue to influence collective behavior, but they interact with socially constructed identities and meanings rather than operating in isolation. Second, collective emotion serves as a key mediator between unconscious resonance and social identity formation. Third, symbolic representation and ritual expression remain central to the cohesion and endurance of collective movements, providing continuity between classical and contemporary manifestations of crowd behavior.

Discussion

The findings indicate that although the language, methodology, and epistemological assumptions of these two traditions differ substantially, both share a common interest in the dynamics through which individual consciousness is transformed within collective contexts.

Historically, classical psychoanalytic approaches, particularly those of Freud (1921/1959) and Jung (1959/1968), emphasized unconscious mechanisms that shape collective experience. Freud's Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego argued that crowd behavior reflects an intensification of emotional ties among individuals mediated by identification with a leader or shared ideal. This "libidinal bond," as Freud termed it, temporarily dissolves the boundaries of the ego, creating a condition in which unconscious drives and affects become dominant. Jung's notion of the collective unconscious, though less concerned with group structure, offered a complementary view by positing that deep, transpersonal archetypal patterns influence both individual and collective phenomena. In Jungian thought, collective behavior is not merely the product of suggestibility or regression but an expression of shared symbolic imagery and emotional energy rooted in universal psychic structures.

Contemporary research in social psychology has challenged and refined these early models by providing empirically grounded explanations of how collective identities and emotions emerge. The social identity approach, developed by Tajfel and Turner and elaborated in crowd research by Reicher, Stott, and Drury (e.g., Drury & Reicher, 2020) [4], redefines the crowd as a psychologically structured entity. Rather than losing individuality, participants in a collective event experience a redefinition of the self in terms of shared group membership. This theoretical shift explains why collective action can be both emotionally intense and normatively organized. Social identity models, supported by numerous empirical studies, have shown that individuals' perceptions, emotions, and behaviors in crowds are governed by the salient norms of the in-group, leading to coherent and often morally motivated collective action rather than chaotic irrationality.

The convergence between psychoanalytic and social identity perspectives becomes apparent when considering the role of affect and unconscious processes in shaping group

identification. While social identity theory is largely cognitive in orientation, recent work on collective emotion (Páez *et al.*, 2015; Von Scheve & Ismer, 2013) [5, 11] demonstrates that emotional synchronization and affective contagion operate below the level of conscious appraisal. These findings resonate with Freud's and Le Bon's earlier descriptions of how affective bonds and suggestion constitute the foundation of crowd experience. However, unlike early theories that depicted the crowd as regressive or pathological, modern approaches recognize these affective processes as adaptive mechanisms that foster social cohesion, empathy, and shared purpose.

From a Jungian standpoint, such affective synchronization can also be interpreted as the activation of archetypal imagery that symbolizes the unity and emotional force of the collective. Jung (1959/1968) argued that when individuals participate in mass movements, archetypal contents—such as the hero, the savior, or the shadow—may become constellated within the collective psyche. This symbolic activation explains the powerful sense of meaning and transcendence that often accompanies collective participation, from political rallies to religious ceremonies and social protests. The empirical findings on emotional contagion and symbolic resonance (Páez *et al.*, 2015; Brown & Stenner, 2021) [2, 5] can thus be seen as modern correlates of Jung's archetypal theory, illustrating how unconscious imagery and emotion intertwine in the creation of collective meaning.

Another point of integration concerns the mechanisms of deindividuation and identity transformation. Traditional crowd psychology, particularly that of Le Bon, interpreted deindividuation as a loss of personal control and moral restraint, leading to impulsivity and irrationality. In contrast, social identity research demonstrates that deindividuation does not imply a loss of self but rather a shift toward a collective level of self-definition. When group norms are prosocial or emancipatory, collective behavior can become a vehicle for solidarity and social change rather than destructiveness. Psychoanalytic models can enrich this understanding by explaining why such identification processes carry strong emotional valence. The unconscious need for belonging, recognition, and symbolic meaning motivates individuals to merge their identity with that of the group. This synthesis of cognitive and affective dimensions allows for a more comprehensive model of crowd participation that accounts for both conscious beliefs and unconscious motivations.

At the same time, significant theoretical divergences remain. Psychoanalytic theories emphasize the depth and universality of unconscious drives, while social psychological approaches prioritize situational and intergroup dynamics. The concept of the collective unconscious, although valuable for understanding symbolic and emotional dimensions, lacks the empirical operationalization that characterizes modern social identity research. Conversely, purely social-cognitive models risk neglecting the deeper motivational and affective forces that underlie identification and collective passion. A truly integrative framework must therefore accommodate both the archetypal-symbolic and the socio-cognitive levels of analysis.

Recent interdisciplinary efforts suggest promising pathways toward such integration. Neuroscientific and affective science research on emotional contagion, for instance, has

revealed neural mechanisms—such as mirror neuron activation—that underpin shared emotional states and empathy in groups. These findings bridge psychoanalytic intuitions about unconscious resonance with empirical data on embodied affect. Likewise, cultural and historical analyses have shown that collective movements often evoke recurring symbolic patterns—such as the struggle between light and darkness or the rebirth of the collective self—that parallel Jungian archetypes. By combining symbolic interpretation with empirical observation, researchers can illuminate how cultural narratives and affective synchronization jointly shape the dynamics of modern crowds.

Digital environments present a contemporary extension of these classical ideas. Online crowds, manifested in viral movements and digital activism, display patterns of collective emotion and identity that mirror those of physical gatherings. Studies on emotional contagion in social media networks demonstrate that affective responses can spread rapidly through symbolic communication and shared imagery, suggesting the persistence of unconscious mechanisms in technologically mediated contexts. The digital arena amplifies both the creative and destructive potentials of the collective unconscious, as seen in phenomena ranging from collaborative humanitarian campaigns to online mob behavior. Understanding these dynamics requires drawing on both psychoanalytic insight into projection and shadow phenomena and social psychological analysis of identity formation and norm diffusion.

The symbolic dimension remains a crucial bridge between these paradigms. While social identity theory describes how individuals align with group norms, psychoanalytic theory elucidates why certain symbols and narratives possess extraordinary emotional power. Archetypal motifs such as the hero, the martyr, or the trickster often structure collective imagination, shaping both the content and the intensity of group engagement. In times of crisis, these motifs resurface to provide meaning and cohesion, mobilizing collective energy toward transformation or resistance. Modern empirical studies of collective rituals and political movements have confirmed that symbolic resonance and shared affect are powerful predictors of sustained participation.

Another central insight emerging from this synthesis is that collective behavior reflects not only social dynamics but also the psychic economy of societies. Jung's notion of the collective unconscious implies that unresolved tensions within a culture—its repressed conflicts, ideals, and fears—can manifest in collective phenomena. This psycho-cultural interpretation aligns with sociological observations that mass movements often arise in response to systemic dissonance or moral uncertainty. In this sense, the crowd becomes both a psychological and cultural mirror, expressing unconscious aspects of a society seeking integration and renewal.

However, the revival of the collective unconscious in contemporary contexts should not be understood as a return to determinism. Rather, it highlights the continuing relevance of depth psychological concepts for interpreting modern forms of social behavior. The unconscious operates not as an external force but as a field of potential meaning that shapes affective resonance and symbolic communication among individuals. Integrating this

perspective with social identity theory provides a multilayered account of crowd behavior that encompasses affective, cognitive, and symbolic dimensions.

Methodologically, this synthesis also reveals important implications for future research. Thematic analysis of the reviewed studies shows that psychoanalytic approaches remain largely theoretical, while social psychological research offers empirical precision but limited engagement with symbolic content. Interdisciplinary designs that combine qualitative methods—such as narrative and discourse analysis—with quantitative measures of emotion and identification could bridge this gap. Moreover, computational models of online crowd dynamics and sentiment analysis could benefit from incorporating psychoanalytic variables such as projection, identification, and shadow dynamics, reframed within operationalizable frameworks.

In conclusion, the dialogue between psychoanalysis and social psychology enriches the understanding of collective behavior by demonstrating that crowd phenomena are simultaneously emotional, symbolic, and social. Classical psychoanalytic models reveal the depth of unconscious processes that underlie collective passion and imagery, while social identity and collective emotion research elucidate the mechanisms through which these energies are organized and enacted. The convergence of these traditions underscores that the collective unconscious is not a mystical construct but a metaphorical and empirical reality reflecting the interdependence of psyche and society.

Integrating these perspectives contributes to a renewed psychology of the collective—one capable of addressing contemporary issues such as political polarization, digital mobilization, and global crises. The collective unconscious, when reframed through modern empirical paradigms, provides a conceptual bridge linking the affective resonance of human groups with their cognitive and social structures. In this sense, crowd behavior emerges not as a symptom of irrationality but as a complex expression of the human need for meaning, belonging, and transformation.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

This integrative review has examined the evolution of theories and empirical findings concerning the collective unconscious and crowd behavior, drawing together classical psychoanalytic thought and modern social psychological research. The synthesis of these perspectives reveals that collective phenomena emerge not solely from social structures or individual cognition but from a dynamic interplay between unconscious affective forces, shared symbolic meanings, and socially constructed identities. Both Freud's and Jung's formulations anticipated many of the mechanisms now empirically investigated within social identity and collective emotion research, albeit articulated in different conceptual languages.

The review highlights three overarching conclusions. First, unconscious processes—whether conceived as libidinal identification (Freud) or archetypal activation (Jung)—remain indispensable for explaining the emotional intensity and symbolic coherence of collective behavior. These processes operate beneath conscious deliberation, shaping group identification and shared emotional experience. Second, modern social psychological models, especially the social identity approach, have provided a corrective to the early pathologizing of crowds by demonstrating that

collective behavior is structured, normative, and often purposive. Rather than representing regression or irrationality, the crowd can embody a rational and morally charged expression of collective identity. Third, a productive integration of these traditions requires viewing unconscious and social-cognitive processes as complementary rather than oppositional dimensions of the same phenomenon.

From a theoretical standpoint, this synthesis invites a renewed understanding of the collective unconscious as a multi-level construct. It encompasses both deep psychological patterns rooted in symbolic and affective universals and the socially mediated processes through which individuals construct meaning and identity in groups. In this sense, the collective unconscious does not oppose rationality but underlies it, providing the affective and imaginative foundations that enable collective sense-making. Contemporary crowds, whether physical or digital, continue to manifest archetypal patterns—heroic narratives, sacrificial themes, and confrontations with shadow elements—that structure their emotional and moral resonance.

The implications of these insights extend beyond academic theory to practical domains of social policy, governance, and communication. Understanding crowd behavior through the lens of unconscious processes and social identity dynamics can enhance societal responses to collective mobilization, crisis management, and public discourse in several key ways.

First, policy frameworks addressing collective movements—such as protests, mass gatherings, or digital activism—should recognize the symbolic and emotional dimensions that motivate participation. Efforts to control or suppress crowds through purely instrumental or coercive means often fail because they disregard the underlying psychological drivers of solidarity, justice, and belonging. Integrating psychoanalytic sensitivity to unconscious meaning with social psychological insight into identity dynamics can support more constructive engagement strategies. For instance, public communication during social unrest can benefit from acknowledging shared emotions and moral narratives rather than attempting to neutralize them through technocratic discourse.

Second, the recognition of collective emotion and unconscious resonance has implications for designing communication and media policies in the digital age. The rapid spread of affective content across social networks—ranging from empathy-driven mobilization to rage-fueled misinformation—reflects the persistence of unconscious mechanisms in technologically mediated settings. Policymakers and media organizations should consider how symbolic imagery, archetypal narratives, and emotional contagion shape collective perception and behavior online. Initiatives promoting digital literacy and emotional awareness can mitigate the destructive potential of collective shadow dynamics while fostering empathy-based civic dialogue.

Third, at the institutional level, applying insights from the collective unconscious can enhance organizational and community resilience. Collective stress events such as pandemics, economic crises, or ecological disasters evoke unconscious fears and archetypal themes that can fragment or unite societies. Policymakers and community leaders who recognize these symbolic undercurrents can facilitate

collective healing by providing narratives of integration and renewal rather than division. Rituals of commemoration, shared symbolic acts, and participatory dialogue can serve as contemporary equivalents of what Jung described as the individuation process on a collective scale—the transformation of societal shadow elements into conscious awareness.

Fourth, in public health and social cohesion initiatives, integrating the affective dimension of collective life is crucial. As the COVID-19 pandemic and other global crises have shown, collective emotions such as fear, grief, and solidarity profoundly influence compliance with health measures, social trust, and resilience. Policies informed by social psychology and depth psychology can design interventions that resonate with collective meaning systems rather than relying solely on rational persuasion. For example, framing messages within archetypal narratives of protection, care, and shared responsibility may engage deeper layers of collective motivation.

Fifth, education and civic culture programs should aim to cultivate symbolic literacy—the capacity to recognize and reflect upon unconscious motives and collective symbols that influence social behavior. Encouraging individuals to engage critically with collective imagery can reduce susceptibility to manipulative ideologies and foster more mature forms of participation. This resonates with Jung's view that consciousness of the unconscious is the foundation of psychological and cultural integration.

The review also identifies several directions for future research and policy development. Interdisciplinary studies that combine psychoanalytic interpretation, affective neuroscience, and social identity modeling could elucidate how unconscious resonance translates into coordinated collective action. Longitudinal and cross-cultural research could explore how archetypal themes manifest differently across societies and historical periods, providing insights into the transformation of collective unconscious content under globalization and digital mediation. Policy-oriented studies might assess how communication strategies grounded in symbolic and emotional understanding can enhance trust and cooperation between institutions and the public.

In sum, the synthesis of psychoanalytic and social psychological perspectives offers a framework for re-humanizing the study and governance of collective life. The collective unconscious, far from being a relic of early depth psychology, remains a living concept that captures the affective, symbolic, and moral dimensions of social existence. When integrated with empirical social psychology, it provides a bridge between inner and outer realities—between the hidden emotional structures of the psyche and the visible dynamics of society.

Recognizing this interdependence has profound implications for policy and practice. It suggests that effective social governance requires not only rational administration but also symbolic and emotional intelligence—a capacity to engage the collective psyche with empathy and awareness. The path toward more cohesive and resilient societies thus lies not in the suppression of collective emotion or unconscious meaning but in their conscious integration. Understanding the collective unconscious within modern frameworks of crowd behavior enables policymakers, researchers, and citizens alike to navigate the profound psychological forces shaping the shared life of humanity.

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