Crowd Psychology

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Synopsis

Crowd psychology is a product of industrialisation and the rise of mass society. More particularly, it reflects the fears of social elites that the masses would challenge their rule. This is reflected in classic crowd psychology which represents crowd members as losing their identities and hence becoming mindless, irrational and destructive. More recent research has challenged this view. It has been shown that crowd events are typically patterned and meaningful and that people behave in terms of norms that emerge during crowd events. What is more, these norms are framed by the group memberships which people assume as members of the crowd. Contemporary crowd psychology thereby rejects the classic notion that crowd psychology is underpinned by identity loss. Rather, it is concerned with the way in which behaviour is transformed when people shift from seeing themselves as distinct individuals with distinct personal identities to seeing themselves in terms of distinct group memberships with distinct social identities. It is also concerned with the way that social identities are themselves transformed through the interaction between crowd members and others (such as the police) during crowd events.

Introduction

In his 1988 textbook on Group Processes, Rupert Brown notes that there is a widespread view both in our society and in our discipline that groups are bad for you. If this is true of groups in general it is particularly true of crowds. Indeed the very language used to denote crowds – terms such as 'the mad mob', 'the herd', 'the rabble' – speaks in equal measure of fear and derision. This is entirely understandable if one considers the contexts in which a science of crowd psychology emerged.

Although one can find negative epithets flung at the mass as far back as one cares to look - Herodotus, sometimes styled 'the father of history' declared that 'there is nothing less understanding and more proud than the blind mass' (cited in Giner, 1976, p.4) – a distinctive crowd science developed through the late nineteenth century. This period was dominated by a crisis of social order. Industrialisation had transformed a largely agrarian population into the urban masses. New forms of social organisation such as trades unions and new political movements such as syndicalism, anarchism and, above all, socialism, were leading these masses to challenge gaping social inequalities. How, then, were the elite to maintain their dominance? How were they to face down the challenge of the masses and even engage them in defence of the existing order? These were the dominant questions of the day (see, for instance, Giner, 1976; Nye, 1975).

But if the masses in general were seen as a potential threat to the status quo, the crowd was the mass in action. It was the potential catastrophe made actual. And so the crowd became a dense symbol which regrouped all the bourgeois fears and fantasies of chaos. If social discipline seemed under threat from alcoholism, the crowd was characterised as drunken, either metaphorically or literally. If the patriarchal order seemed under assault from independent women, the crowd was described metaphorically as feminine while the worst of crowds were seen to be crowds of women - such as the 'petroleuses' of the 1871 Paris Commune (see Barrows, 1981).

Indeed the Paris Commune has a particular prominence in the history of crowd psychology. For, to take our progression one step further, where the masses were and potential threat and crowds in general an actual threat to the elite, the Commune

crowds had, at least temporarily, overthrown the elite and created what has been described as the first socialist republic in history (Lissagaray, 1871/1976). Those of the elite who had experienced the Commune had witnessed a future they did not like and which they would do everything to prevent. A key part of this was to find ways of mitigating against crowd action. It is hardly surprising, then, that French theorists dominated early crowd science and that they presupposed that crowds are a purely negative phenomenon (see Nye, 1975, van Ginneken, 1992).

I shall start by analysing this early crowd science and showing how its social concerns are embedded deep within its core assumptions. I shall then outline alternative approaches which, rather than seeking to pathologise crowd action, pay attention to the perspectives of crowd participants, analyse the patterns of crowd action and seek to understand the relationship between the two. Above all, I shall seek to demonstrate that the early crowd theorists have done us a disservice by characterising crowds as aberrant and irrelevant to the normal functioning of society. For crowds provide a particularly productive site in which to understand how people are constituted and act as social subjects. Crowds, that is, are critical to the formation of the social identities and social relationships which regulate our everyday life.

Classic crowd science: A tale of loss

Early crowd science was a vibrant field. Many theorists such as Fournial, Tarde, Sighele, Rossi and others debated crowd behaviour, not only in academic texts but also in the society magazines of the day. But these names have largely disappeared. Only one remains, that of Gustave Le Bon. His book 'The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind', first published in 1895, is still cited both in psychology journals, in official reports and in the popular media. It has been described as the most influential psychology text of all time in that it not only analysed mass behaviour, but also that it helped create the mass politics of the twentieth and twenty first centuries (Moscovici, 1980).

Le Bon – both the man himself and the basis for his enduring influence – exemplify the general themes of fear, hostility and repression which frame the emergence of crowd science. Le Bon's first experience of crowds was as head of ambulance

services in the Paris Commune. That experience bred him in a deep hatred and contempt for the masses. The rest of his career was devoted to understanding how crowds could be tamed and engaged for – not against – the nation. Indeed the text of which he was most crowd was not 'The crowd' but a far more obscure book called 'La Psychologie Politique et la Defence Social' published in 1910 (see Nye, 1975, Rouvier, 1986; van Ginneken, 1992) .

What made Le Bon stand out from his fellow theorists was not so much his conceptual originality as his practicality. Where others documented the bestiality of crowds and did little more than throw their hands up in horror, Le Bon sought to show how leaders could take advantage of crowd psychology and use it to their own ends. His book only in small part a theoretical analysis. The larger part reads like a primer for leaders who wish to exploit the power of crowds. And the leaders he sought to educate were the right wing leaders of his time – for whom he ran a regular weekly luncheon club. Moreover, these leaders reciprocated his enthusiasm. The list of those who praised Le Bon reads like a roll call of the autocrats of the early twentieth century. Mussolini, for instance, after praising Le Bon to the skies, declares that he built the principles of the (fascist) Italian state on the basis of 'The crowd' (Moscovici, 1980).

When it comes to Le Bon's actual crowd psychology, the predominant theme is one of loss. His starting point lies in the notion that, on entering the crowd, people become anonymous and lose their sense of personal identity. This first process submergence is termed *submergence*. Submergence, in turn, leads people in crowds to lose control over what they feel and do. Because they can no longer access the personal values and standards allow them to judge what is, and isn't appropriate, crowd members simply follow passing ideas and emotions – particularly emotions since the self as the seat of intellect has been occluded. This second process is termed *contagion*. Finally, submergence and contagion lead the crowd member to lose their civilized standards. Because our conscious access to internal standards has been blocked, the emotions and ideas which govern action come predominantly from the 'racial unconscious' – an atavistic residue which we share in common from a distant past. And because this residue is ancient and primitive, so are the actions to which it leads. This third and last process is termed *suggestion*.

Altogether, the picture that emerges of crowd behaviour is unremittingly bleak. Crowds, says Le Bon, are only powerful for destruction. The crowd member, he declares, is a barbarian who descends several rungs on the ladder of civilization simply by virtue of becoming part of the crowd. Most revealingly, in a passage that reveals much of both Le Bon's 'science' and his politics, he remarks that: *"among the special characteristics of crowds there are several - such as impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgement and of the critical spirit, the exaggeration of the sentiments and others besides - which are almost always observed in beings belonging to inferior forms of evolution - in women children and savages for instance"* (1895/1947 pp. 35-36).

There is only one exception to this analytic negativity. Le Bon acknowledges that crowd members can be extraordinarily heroic at times. Moreover, this flows not only from the loss of self (and hence a loss of concern for self-preservation) but also from the one element of gain in Le Bon's account. That is, on becoming submerged in the mass, people might forget their individuality, but they become part of something much bigger and hence they evince a sense of immense power which allows them to do almost anything – thus making crowds the ultimate nightmare for those who have stakes in the social order: total power without any sense of responsibility. Over time, however, and as the old concept of submergence was translated into the contemporary construct of deindividuation, the element of empowerment has been forgotten and all that is left is the now total sense of loss. There are several variants of deindividuation theory, some of which suggest that anonymity in the group leads to the expression of anti-social behaviours, some of which suggest that it leads to loss of control by internal standards and the domination of external stimuli, and some of which are a hybrid of the two (for a review, see Reicher, Spears & Postmes, 1995). But what they all share in common is the equation of groups with loss of self and of loss of self with the loss of reasoned action.

Not surprisingly, Le Bon's approach evoked strong opposition from early on. Floyd Allport in particular strongly attacked the notion of a 'racial unconscious' or 'group mind' as an empty and meaningless concept. His 1924 book, often (mistakenly) seen as the first social psychology text, and certainly a seminal influence in the

development of the discipline in North America, is written largely as a rebuttal of Le Bon's ideas. However, paradoxically, it is arguable that Le Bon's influence was enhanced rather than diminished by those, like Allport, who challenged him. For, in challenging his explanation of crowd action they accept his description of such action as mindless and destructive. What is more, the difference at the explanatory level is more a matter of displacing rather than discarding the Le Bonian narrative of loss.

To be more concrete, Allport – and the so-called 'convergence' approach to crowd action which derived from his work (see Turner & Killian, 1972) – suggests that crowd action reflects the pre-existing individual characteristics of crowd members. If crowds are violent or destructive it is because flawed individuals are drawn to such events. All that has happened here is that the locus of crowd pathology and loss has shifted from the group to the individual level. People become crowd members because they lack something already, they don't come to lack something because they have become crowd members.

For all the sharp debates that divided classic crowd science, then, the commonalities are ultimately more telling. Crowds are a pathological phenomenon caused either by a loss of the individual self or the expression of flawed individuality. There is no place here for understanding how social and cultural factors might shape the understandings and actions of people in collective settings. There is no basis for addressing, let alone understanding the socially meaningful nature of crowd action.

Crowd patterns and crowd norms

There are many criticisms that can be made of Le Bon's work and classic crowd science more generally (see, for instance, McPhail, 1991; Nye, 1975; Reicher & Potter, 1985). But at their root lies yet another loss – the loss of context. In both Allport's and Le Bon's accounts the focus is exclusively on the crowd. We see nothing of the broad social context (the acute inequalities and social struggles of late nineteenth century France and early twentieth century USA). Equally we see nothing of the immediate social context (and the fact that crowd events were characteristically conflicts between crowd members and the police, army or private security guards). And once the context is lost we can no longer see how action might make sense as an attempt to challenge the other or as a reaction to the acts of the other. Instead

behaviour can only be attributed as reflecting something inherent about crowd members or crowd process, something universal that holds for all time and all places. In short, decontextualisation pathologises and essentialises and eternalises the results of specific social processes.

By the latter half of the twentieth century, however, things were changing. Academia was changing from an elite system to more of a mass system. Academics who experienced crowds were more likely to be positioned as engaged insiders as horrified outsiders, whether (in the US) within the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam protests or (in Europe) in the events of 1968 and its aftermath. And, from this perspective, crowds were to be welcomed rather than to be feared, they were healthy rather than pathological phenomena, and, above all, they were meaningful rather than meaningless.

This was true across the humanities and human sciences. A series of seminal historical studies demonstrated that crowd members are not those who stand at the margins or against society – in more pejorative parlance, 'riff-raff'. Rather they characteristically come from more stable, integrated and 'respectable' layers (Rude, 1959, 1964). They also showed that crowd action, far from being inchoate and universally destructive, is typically highly patterned and that the patterns are highly socially meaningful. Crowds, that is, act in ways that reflect shared social belief systems (see Davis, 1978; Thompson, 1971, 1991). Indeed for many historians, who face the problem of recovering the perspective of those groups in society who, in the past, did not leave written records, crowds provide a uniquely valuable resource for, as Reddy (1977) puts it in his study of 18th and 19th century French textile trade riots: "the targets of… crowds… glitter in the eye of history as signs of the labourer's conception of the nature of society" (p. 84).

Similar conclusions were drawn by those political scientists and sociologists studying contemporary events such as the wave of black urban riots across many US cities in the 1960's and 1970's. The massive report of the US Riot Commission in 1968, using a data base of 1200 interviews from 20 cities, noted that the average rioter was more socially integrated and better educated than the average black person. The evidence also shows that, far from being random or impulsive, riots were articulate protests

against specific grievances (Fogelson, 1968, 1971; Wanderer, 1969). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, close examination of events showed that crowds were neither wild nor orgiastic. They were discriminating in their choice of targets, they only attacked those state officials they viewed as enemies (notably the police), they only looted shops of outsiders against which they had concrete grievances. Fogelson sums up this evidence in a phrase that contrasts markedly and memorably with the prevalent image of mob madness: "restraint and selectivity were among the most crucial features of the riots (1971, p. 17).

In sum, even the most violent of crowd events are subject to normative constraint, even if the norms (attacking particular people and property) are at odds with those which regulate everyday life. How, then, are such norms created? The first answer was provided by Turner & Killian's aptly named 'Emergent Norm Theory' (ENT) first published in 1957 then revised in 1972 and 1987. This theory suggests that crowds do not become homogenous entities in an instant. Rather, there is an extended period where people mill about. They are addressed by many would be influence agents, or 'keynoters'. Gradually, particular keynoters who are more striking than others begin to gain sway and norms begin to spread through the crowd. Homogeneity, like normativity is therefore an emergent property of encounters amongst crowd members.

ENT provided a nuanced and compelling portrait of the micro-interactions in the crowd out of which shared understandings emerge. This is its legacy from the symbolic interactionist tradition (see, for instance, Blumer, 1969). However it is less successful in explaining why particular keynoters are successful and why some norms rather than others come to shape crowd action. This can be traced to Turner & Killian's reliance on a desocialised model of influence deriving from the small group psychology of the time. Such models root influence in the personal qualities and interpersonal relations between individual crowd members (see Moscovici, 1976 for a critique). As a consequence, it is hard to see how group (and crowd) norms relate to broad cultural belief systems. Such a model can explain the patterned nature of crowd action, however it cannot explain why such patterns should be socially meaningful and reflect broader conceptions of society. In effect the micro- is divorced from the macro-social. Although ENT and other normative accounts mark a great step forward

from classic crowd psychology, they, like Le Bon, still face the problem of relating crowd action to the social context in which it occurs.

The Social Identity Model and intra-group dynamics in crowds

Over recent decades, the social identity approach (Tajfel, 1978, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987) has become the dominant psychological approach to group processes in general. This approach aims explicitly to understand how ideological and structural factors shape group action and it is formulated to be as relevant to large scale social categories (such as nation, religion or 'race') as to small groups of familiars. It is understandable, then, that social identity tenets have proved successful in addressing the specific issues of crowd psychology. Indeed the social identity model of crowd behaviour (SIM – see Reicher 1982, 1984, 1987) has, by now, itself become the dominant contemporary approach to crowd psychology.

SIM contests the classic models of crowd psychology as loss through the very concept of social identity which lies at its heart. It will be recalled that Le Bon's analysis starts from the idea that selfhood is lost upon entering a crowd. This derives from a singular and individualistic notion of selfhood: people have a unique personal identity which is the sole basis of behavioural control. If this personal identity is compromised (as in the crowd) then control over behaviour is lost. By contrast, social identity theorists view self as a rich and varied system which exists at different levels of abstraction. Sometimes I think of myself in terms of how I, as an individual, differ from other individuals (personal identity: 'I' vs. 'you'). At other times I may think of myself in terms of belonging to a social category – I am an American, a Catholic, a woman, a Mets fan… - and in terms of how my group differs from other groups (social identity – 'we' vs. 'they').

The foundational assumption of social identity research is that when people act as group members they shift from acting in terms of personal identity to acting in terms of social identity. That is, the eclipse of ones sense of oneself as a unique individual is not a *loss* but a *refocusing* of identity. Hence, a distinction is implicitly made between a *physical* group – a set of people who happen to be co-present at the same place and

time – and a *psychological* group – a set of people who share a sense of themselves as belonging to the same social category. The difference between the two can best be illustrated by a simple thought experiment: imagine you are on a crowded commuter train heading home. People are squeezed together in a carriage, but each remains psychologically an individual, seeking to avoid eye contact with others, reading the same paper as others but resenting anyone looking at theirs, feeling discomfort or even disgust at any physical contact with others. Then the train stops. After a long delay there is an insufficient excuse for what has happened. Now people begin to think of themselves together as aggrieved commuters against the train company. And that shared identification transforms their behaviour. They start turning towards each other, talking to each other, even sharing their sandwiches (for a more precise and concrete example of such transitions, see Drury & Reicher, 1999).

In a similar vein, SIM draws an explicit distinction between physical crowds based on co- presence (aggregates) and psychological crowds based on social identification (for which the term 'crowd' is reserved). SIM proposes three transformations which occur when people join a crowd which we shall consider in turn.

The cognitive transformation: Just as identity is not lost in crowds but refocused from the personal to the social level, so control is not lost but shifted from personal norms and values to those which define the relevant social category. This means that the behaviour of crowds will vary as a function of what categories are involved. The norms and values – and hence the actions - of, say, a crowd of environmentalist protestors will be different from those of a crowd of soccer fans which, in turn will be different from those of a Catholic crowd welcoming the Pope. The process of conformity to group standards may be general, but the behaviours it leads to will always depend upon contextually relevant belief systems.

There are two important implications of this process which need to be stressed. The one is that, insofar as crowd members act in terms of their social identities and that social identities invoke category based belief systems, we here have a mechanism for understanding how the behaviours of specific crowds relate to broad conceptions of society – a key requirement for any adequate model of crowd action. The other is that this process is not mechanical or routinised. Crowd situations are typically either

novel or uncertain – and made all the more so by the fact that they are interactions in which the behaviour of the other side is unpredictable (a point we shall develop in much more detail in the next section). Consequently one cannot just apply preformed rules and norms of action. Rather, one has to determine what the general category means in the concrete situation.

The creation of situationally appropriate norms can happen through a process of induction. That is, people infer group norms from the behaviours of those who are unambiguously ingroup members – as long, that is, that these behaviours are consonant with the broad terms of group identity. So, for instance, in a British urban riot, when someone threw a stone at the police, it was followed by a hail of stones. However, when someone stoned a bus, not only did others not follow, but they actively intervened to prevent further stoning. Or, equally, when someone smashed the windows of a bank (one of the external institutions seen to keep the local community in penury) others joined in, but when the windows of a local shop were smashed others spontaneously defended the shop from looting (Reicher, 1984). This is very different from the process of contagion. It also elaborates upon ENT, both by showing how norm creation can be rapid and responsive to events and also by showing that, while there is space for variability in the interpretation of what is appropriate, there are clear limits set by social identity to the norms that form in crowd events.

This is not to say that the deliberative processes described by emergent norm theorists are irrelevant, mere that they are not necessary. Where there is time – particularly at the start of events – people do mill around, listening to others and trying to determine what they should be doing. But even here, social identity is crucial in framing the emergence of norms. The keynoter (let us say, leader) who is influential is the one who can best represent his or her proposals as instantiations of 'who we are' and 'what we believe in' – of group identity that is. Conversely, the basis on which members deliberate is not simply 'what should we do here', but rather 'what should we do here as environmentalists' (or whatever the situationally relevant category might be. Altogether, the task of leaders and group members is jointly to develop a situationally appropriate elaboration of a pre-existing identity (for a more general

account of social identity processes in leadership, see Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2010).

The relational transformation: In crowds, the relationships between individual members undergo a profound shift. This is not simply as a function of the fact that crowd members identify with a social category. It occurs to the extent that people share a common identity with others in the crowd and also that they are aware of this commonality. Under such conditions fellow crowd members shift from being 'other' at the individual level to being part of a shared collective self. Hence personal boundaries between people are dissolved and the boundary shifts to that between ingroup ('us') and outgroup ('them').

On the one hand, then, the sense of difference to others in the group is dissolved. We expect them to share similar norms, values and beliefs with ourselves (Turner, 1991). 'We' will all see things the same way and strive for the same goals. As a consequence we will both trust and respect our fellow ingroup members more (Haslam, 2001; Tyler & Blader, 2000) and we will look for agreement rather than disagreement with them (Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty & Reynolds, 1998). We will also feel more confident and validated in our own beliefs. Unlike everyday life where venturing an opinion, especially a strong stance, may evoke the disagreement, disapproval, even rejection by the other, in crowds we can express ourselves in the full expectation that others will support our views. More than that, for those in the midst of a crowd, they will be surrounded by others who chants the same chants as them, who look and dress like them, who even smell like them: their sensuous universe is one that affirms their identity.

On the other hand, our sense of 'interest' and of 'fate' is extended to encompass other group members. That is, our self being the collective self, then 'self-interest' becomes a matter of advancing the interest of the group as a whole, and a detriment to any group member becomes a detriment to our (collective) selves. Correspondingly, the act of 'self-defence' is not only a matter of defending ones own body from injury but of defending any group member from attack, especially where that comes from the outgroup. Often, in crowds, people will put themselves at considerable risk to help and support fellow group members who, for instance, are under threat of being

attacked or seized by the police (Reicher, 1996; Stott & Drury, 2000; Stott, Hutchison & Drury, 2001).

In combination, these various consequences of the relational transformation that occurs in crowds creates the conditions where people can coordinate their actions. People are able to coordinate their actions, to support each other and to act in the confidence that they will be supported by others. Whereas, outside the crowd, people may feel isolated and unable to enact their beliefs due to the power of others, in the crowd they feel united. That is, they feel empowered. In this sense, Le Bon provides an important insight about crowds. However, *contra* Le Bon, this empowerment is highly focussed. It is a power to enact crowd beliefs and values – what Drury and Reicher (1999, 2009) call *collective self-objectification*. To paraphrase the historian of the French Revolution, Georges Lefebvre (1984), perhaps it is only in crowds that people are able to become the subjects of history.

The affective transformation: One criticism of the early social identity approach to crowd psychology was that it was a very cold approach which emphasised the mindful and meaningful nature of crowd action but which neglected the emotional; dimension. Empirically, this would be to leave out one of the most striking things about crowd events: they are often highly passionate affairs. People who watch sports at a stadium scream and shout and chant far more than at home or alone. Any model that leaves this out is necessarily deficient. Conceptually, this would be to buy into the Le Bonian duality between reason and emotion (one which is widespread within and beyond psychology) and simply reverse the polarity: from all emotion and no reason to all reason and no emotion.

There are many bases for the strength of emotional experience in crowds. In part, having identified strongly with the group, then acts which are seen either to attack the group or else to deny the group its legitimate rights are highly meaningful and evoke strong reactions (Reicher, 1996; Stott & Reicher, 1998a). However, when talking about their feelings, crowd members lay particular stress on the importance of empowerment and collective self-objectification discussed above. After living ones life in a world made by others and having to trim ones behaviour to what is acceptable to others, at last, in crowds, people can shape the world in their own terms. This is not

only an occasion for joy, it also leads to increased commitment to the group and even to increased individual well-being (Drury & Reicher, 1999, 2009, see also Reicher & Haslam, 2006).

Once again, then, there is value in Le Bon's emphasis on passion in crowds. But the explanation of this passion is the precise opposite of Le Bon's. It does not derive from a loss of mind, a loss of judgement and a loss of individual agency. Rather it flows from the fact that, perhaps uniquely in our experience, ordinary people are able to make their own history. It is because crowds make us agents that we are so passionate about them.

The elaborated social identity model and inter-group dynamics in crowds

The focus of the social identity model is predominantly upon intra-group relations in crowds: the model analyses how individuals an inter-individual relations are transformed within crowds and how this impacts on what they do and feel. And yet, throughout the analysis, there is an implicit recognition of the importance of the outgroup – whether it be a matter of the salient presence of an outgroup transforming a disparate set of people into a psychological crowd with shared identity (as in the example of the train carriage), of the perceived illegitimacy of outgroup action inspiring crowd solidarity and crowd reaction, or else of crowds empowering their members and hence transforming relations with the outgroup.

Nonetheless, there remains the danger that SIM, like preceeding models of crowd behaviour, will seek to analyse crowd action without (explicitly) recognising that crowd events are typically interactions between at least two groups (one group of sports fans against another, the police against rioters, company security guards against strikers) and that it will be impossible to fully understand the behaviour of any one party without looking at both and the ways each impacts on the other. To make the same point slightly differently, if the core problem with classic crowd psychology lies with decontextualising crowd action, then it can be argues that SIM links crowd action to the broader context (by rooting crowd action in broad category based beliefs, norms and values) but that it neglects the immediate interactive context. The

elaborated social identity model of crowd action (ESIM – Drury & Reicher, 2005, 2009; Drury, Reicher & Stott, 2003; Reicher, 2001).

ESIM derives from a common pattern of action observed across a number of crowd events including such different groups as students, environmental protesters, anti-tax protestors and football fans (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Drury et. al., 2003; Reicher, 1996; Stott et al., 2001; Stott & Drury, 2000). In each case, events started with heterogenous crowds comprising multiple psychological groups most of whom were opposed to conflict and violence. However, all those present were perceived as at least a potentiual threat by the police who then acted to contain the crowd and prevent them from progressing as they wished. This common experience of being denied what they perceived to be their legitimate rights led to the formation of a single psychological united around opposition to the police. Moreover, this unified crowd felt thereby empowered to contest police actions, which in turn validated the police's orginal conception of the crowd as dangerous. In this way a spiral of escalating conflict occurred, often resulting in overt violence.

In order to explain this pattern, ESIM conceptualises social identity as a representation of the nature of social relations in our world and where we stand within them along with the behaviours that are proper and possible given that position. Many protestors, for instance, see themselves as living in a liberal democratic society where the police are neutral arbiters who uphold the social order. They themselves may be opposed to certain other groups but they do not view the police as an outgroup. Most of the time, the different parties to a crowd event share the same representations of each other. Hence their interactions serve to confirm and stablise the views of participants.

However, under certain (rare) circumstances there is an asymmetry, such as when protestors do not see the police as an outgroup but the police see all protestors as outgroup (in part because of the continuing dominance of models which portray all crowd members as dangerous – see Hoggett & Stott, in press a, b; Stott & Reicher, 1998b). What is more, when one of these parties (the police) has the power to act upon its perception (by erecting cordons and stopping crowd members from doing what they want), then the perception of the one group becomes an experiential reality for the other. Protestors experience being positioned as 'oppositional'. And, from this

experience, they begin to reconceptualise their relationship to the police and hence their own identity. That is, they begin to see themselves as oppositional.

This shift of identification sets in train a whole series of associated changes. First, new norms and values emerge. Those behaviours that make sense in a world where the police and state are neutral – persuasion and patience – no longer make sense where the police and state stand against one. Hence, those voices (leaders/keynoters) calling for conflict who were earlier shunned are listened to more and there is greater potential for more than a small minority to become involved in conflict. In other words, outgroup actions alter the relative success of contending sources of influence in the ingroup. The irony, often, is that the police, fearing violence, act in ways that make those calling for violence more impactful.

Second, as crowd members redefine their own identities, their relations to others outside as well as inside the actual crowd may shift. Thus, in seeing themselves as oppositional, a common ingroup bond may be formed with other oppositional groups which, previously, had been rejected. For instance, in one anti-roads campaign and early division between local protestors who simply wanted to preserve their amenities and committed environmentalists who were opposed to the overall roads program, was overcome after the police were equally hostile to all involved in trying to stop the tree on the town green being felled. But the 'locals' not only came to see themselves as part of a wider protest and hence included the environmentalists as ingroup, they also started to see groups like striking miners, black people and feminists as part of a common cause against injustice (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Drury, Reicher & Stott, 2003).

Third even the goals and the concept of success of crowd members can shift. To continue with the above example, locals originally conceptualised success as saving their green and its tree. But as they began to see the police and state as arraigned against them and in favour of the roads lobby, so they saw as simply standing up against the police and publicising the nature of what they were up against as an end in itself. Even if the tree was cut down, in this latter sense, the protest had been a success, it was celebrated as such and it led to increased commitment to future protests.

Theoretically, the core message here is that crowd identities and hence crowd action are not simple givens but rather products of intergroup interaction. It is as important to recognise this in order to understand how identities are reproduced and come to be seen as stable or even natural as in understanding the conditions where rupture and change occur. Practically, the core message is that the interventions of the authorities, the police in particular, do not simply serve to contain collective violence. They are a critical part of the escalation, or the de-escalation of violence. In recent years, ESIM has been applied practically to design forms of police intervention which distinguish between groups in the crowd and which seek to facilitate those with lawful intentions. In this way, the influence of those promoting violence can be reduced and the prospects of peaceful democratic protest maximised (see Reicher, Stott, Cronin & Adang, 2004, Reicher, Stott, Drury, Adang, Cronin & Livingstone, 2007; Stott, Adang, Livingstone & Schreiber, 2008).

Conclusion

I began this piece by noting how crowds have long been seen as aberrant – a social aberration caused by psychological aberration – and by suggesting that this has prevented us from learning about both society and psychology from the study of crowds. By now, it should be clear that we cannot understand crowd action if we divorce it from its social context. Even if crowd action is occasionally extreme, this reflects longstanding patterns of social belief about what is acceptable and unacceptable (Davis, 1978, Thompson, 1971). And crowd action does more than reflect existing social beliefs and social identities. Crowds play a critical role in forming the identities of participants and creating new unexpected identities in the crucible of collective interaction.

But even here, we are only beginning to appreciate the wider importance of crowds. There are two ways, at least, in which crowd psychology has much to contribute. First, at a theoretical level, crowds provide a particularly clear example of how inter-group dynamics frame intra-group relations. However, this is not because crowds are unique but rather because (a) in crowds the inter-group dimension is particularly obvious since the police are physically present, whereas in everyday life the impact of

outgroups may be more subtle (enshrined, for instance in the ways that institutions are structured) and less easily to see, and (b) the co-presence of both ingroup members and outgroup members in crowds renders the impact of the inter- on the intra-group immediate, general and hence easy to see. However it is reasonable to suppose that similar processes occur in everyday life, albeit more distributed through multiple encounters between individuals or small numbers of ingroup and outgroup members, and then disseminated slowly through the telling of stories which are disseminated through social networks. In this way, ESIM may provide a model for intergroup relations in general, and the practical insights of the model may help us understand the conditions under which members of certain groups disengage from authority and support conflict against authority.

Second, if crowds are important to the formation of wider social identities, this need not be limited simply to those who participate in them. For crowds are often the embodied reality of broad social categories that are abstractions – groups like nations, classes, religions, 'races', which are too large for all the members to congregate and which are therefore, in Anderson's terms 'imagined communities (Anderson, 1983). What happens in crowd events is therefore often emblematic for all members of the relevant categories whether they themselves were there or not and can therefore impact on the identities of all. Such events tell them about the world, about who they are and how they are treated in society. What is more, crowd events are high profile. They are likely to be covered on the television, in the papers and hence be visible to the broader category membership. In this way, for instance, the US riots of the 1960's impacted on all black people in the US just like the British riots of the 1980's affected the overall views of black people in the UK (US Riot Commission, 1968; Waddington, Jones & Critcher, 1989).

To sum up, crowd psychology has come a long way over the last century or so. There is still a long way to go. But at least the value of pursuing crowd studies is more apparent than it once was.

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Glossary

Contagion: The notion that people automatically follow the ideas and emotions of those around them

Collective empowerment: An increased sense that the group has the ability to do what it wishes, even against the opposition of outgroups.

Collective self-objectification: The transformation of the groups idea of how society *should* be organised into the actual organisation of society.

Deindividuation: The idea that identity is lost in the group and that, as a consequence, people lose control over their behaviour

Keynoting: The act, by particular individuals in the crowd, of trying to define what crowd members as a whole should act.

Social identity: One's sense of oneself as a member of a particular social group (e.g. 'I am an American) along with the significance attached to that membership

Validation: The sense that others will confirm, rather than challenge, ones outlook on the world

Biography

Stephen Reicher is currently a Professor of Psychology at the University of St. Andrews. He is past editor of the British Journal of Social Psychology, a scientific consultant for Scientific American Mind, a member of the Governing Council of the International Society for Political Psychology and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. Stephen studies the relationship between social identity processs and collective behaviour and has conducted research into such topics as delinquency, nationalism, leadership and the psychology of tyranny. However, crowds have always been one of his central concerns ever since he completed his Ph.D on crowd psychology at Bristol University. Over the last 25 years he has studied many types of crowd from urban riots in the UK, to crowds reacting to terrorist incidents to religious festivals in India. He has developed the social identity and elaborated social identity models of crowds which have become the dominant models in the field. His work has also had practical impact, transforming public order policing in the United Kingdom and throughout Europe.