JOHN M. BRINDLEY
Civilian Tutor,
The Police Staff College, Bramshill

DISRUPTIVE CROWD BEHAVIOUR — A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to introduce police officers to some of the concepts that have emerged from the psychological literature on the subject of crowd behaviour. Ideas, theories and research have been mustered and marshalled in an eclectic manner to provide what is hoped to be not only useful background information but also some thoughts pertinent to operational considerations.

The concepts discussed in this paper are relevant to all crowd phenomena ranging from the religious fervour of an evangelical meeting, through the passionate support of a Welsh rugby crowd, to the hostile aggression of a violent political counter-demonstration. However, as this paper has been written in the wake of the 1981 Summer riots, much of the discussion is orientated towards the latter.

The paper is in three sections: the first examines the psychology of the individual crowd participant; the second discusses the context of the crowd event and introduces a framework by which disruptive events can be analyzed; the third section briefly explores some of the implications of the previous sections for the policing of such crowd events.

Section 1: The Individual

How does crowd membership affect the mental and emotional state of the individual? This is the question that has been debated since Gustav LeBon[1] wrote *The Crowd* in 1896. LeBon considered that crowd membership results in a lessening of the person's ability to think rationally whilst at the same time, his more primitive impulses are elicited in an harmonious fashion with the emerging primitive impulses of all the other crowd members. The result of this is the establishment of a "collective mind". This view of the highly emotional and irrational effect of crowd participation was taken to explain why even normally respectable people could engage in extreme forms of crowd behaviour such as mass panics, lynchings and, of course, riots. Successive generations of psychologists have been influenced by LeBon e.g. Martin[2] in 1920 wrote, "A crowd is a

device for indulging ourselves in a kind of temporary insanity by all going crazy together", and LeBon is quoted at length in the Royal Hong Kong Police manual on crowd behaviour. Other psychologists have questioned thè assumption that people become temporarily insane in crowd settings. Allport[3] for example, thought that people behave in crowds in just the same way as they would like to behave individually. He considered that people of a like mind physically converge to form a crowd e.g. a political demonstration. The crowd setting then allows the individual's emotions to heighten and enables his desired behaviour to emerge with far less fear. of ridicule or reprisal than were he acting in isolation. More recently, Turner and Killian[4] have emphasized how people's behaviour can be affected by "norms" which emerge from the crowd, often quite spontaneously. Such norms suggest what thoughts, emotions and actions are appropriate for people to adopt, thus if the crowd members around an individual start running or start jeering at a public speaker for example, it is argued that the individual will feel inclined to "follow the herd".

This brief summary of some of the main theoretical approaches leaves many questions begging but rather than examine each theory in detail, a model of crowd behaviour will be suggested which, it is hoped, draws together the most useful ideas from different schools of thought (see FIG 1).

The first concept in the model is that of *identification*. This relates to the extent to which an individual sees the members of the crowd as being in some way similar to, or "in the same boat" as himself. Thus if a person strongly disapproves of nuclear weapons and he learns of a C.N.D. demonstration, he is likely to identify· with those who comprise, or are going to comprise, the crowd due to attitudinal similarity. Or, a youth hostile to the police is likely to identify with a crowd of young people surrounding a police station due to similarity of attitude and age. Other similarity factors include class, occupation, race, friendship links with crowd members, etc.

The model suggests that the greater the degree of identification, the greater the likelihood of an individual *participating* in the crowd. However, physical presence in a crowd does not necessarily presume identification with the crowd; pickpockets, journalists, loafers and even psychologists may well be present in pursuance of their own interests.

An individual's participation in a crowd, particularly when that entails involvement in some kind of collective action e.g. marching, singing, chanting, clapping (or even collective inaction such as listening to a singer), will be likely to focus the individual's mind on the *crowd goals*. Or, to put it another way, the interests, concerns and objectives of the crowd become increasingly important and pervasive in the mind of the individual. To the extent that the crowd goals are ·simple, clear and easily communicated, large numbers of the crowd may become attuned in thinking, emotion and behaviour to give the

impression of there being LeBon's "collective mind". Other ideas and concerns are relegated to the back of the mind just as they are when one gets engrossed in a game of squash or in a good book.

Collective action such as chanting, walking in the same direction, applauding, etc., are all examples of *crowd norms* and hence, to a certain degree, acceptance of at least some crowd norms may be a necessary condition of participation. Many of the attitudes, emotions and actions appropriate to a particular crowd setting will have been assumed by the crowd members beforehand, thus members of the W.I. attending a demonstration or meeting organized by the Institution will expect to behave in certain ways which might be quite different from the ways of behaving anticipated by individuals preparing to participate in an ongoing violent picket-line. On many occasions, however, specific activities will have been actively determined prior to the event and these, when introduced to the event with sufficient impact, may be accepted by other group members as norms and consequently, imitated. Thus, for example, gangs of football hooligans, organizers of political demonstrations and instigators of riots prepare their "norms" some time in advance: attempts to "take" the opposing fans' "end"; chants as effective as "The workers united — we'll always be united"; the availability of and determination to use, petrol bombs, etc., do not occur spontaneously. Such attempts to manufacture norms are examples of *directing influences*.

The more that an individual has identified with the other crowd members and the more that he has attuned his mind to the goals of the crowd, the more likely he is to comply with norms of thinking, feeling and action. However, for norms specifying extreme forms of behaviour e.g. throwing petrol bombs, to emerge and be accepted, the model suggests that there must be at least a *latent predisposition* amongst the people constituting the crowd to behave in accord. Thus the summer riots only became established in areas in which there appeared to be considerable feelings of discontent in the community; attempts to precipitate riots in areas in which there was less intensity of feeling e.g. Reading, were not successful.

There are many factors which can affect the individual's immersion in the crowd activity. His level of *emotional arousal* or excitement is certainly significant. In turn, emotional arousal can be fuelled by chanting and other factors which may be termed "expectations", "safe-danger", "victories", etc. Each of these will be briefly discussed.

Chanting has already been referred to as a means of focussing thought. One of the most significant aspects of a chant is its short, repetitive auditory rhythm: a feature used in ceremonies and entertainments in cultures ranging from the most "primitive" to the most "civilized" as a means of getting people "worked up". There can be no doubting the effectiveness of chants such as "The National Front is a Nazi Front — smash the National Front" and "Ho — Ho

— Ho Chi Minh", when repeated continuously, in heightening emotion, focussing thought and also establishing a very strong sense of solidarity and singleness of purpose amongst the members of a crowd.

The football fan engaged in violence with opposing supporters, the individual attending a demonstration, the youth participating in a riot: all will have known about his likely involvement some time prior to the event. For many of these individuals, the occasion may well constitute an important and eventful happening perhaps even to the extent, as appears to be the case with many football fans[5] [6] [7], of providing or reflecting the purpose of their lives. Furthermore, the individual may have had to make a number of personal sacrifices in order to attend, perhaps with respect to finances or time. All these factors may add up to make the event very significant in the mind of the individual and hence one that is anticipated with a degree of excited expectation. The individual, therefore, may well arrive at an event in a charged emotional state.

"Safe-danger" is a term which may be used in the context of disruptive crowd behaviour, to describe the condition of engaging in prohibited action, in the company of likeminded and known peers and in the face of, but anonymous to, authority. Thus for children and youths violently participating in riots or football hooliganism, the high cost of getting caught or seriously injured is seen as unlikely to have to be paid and this small risk is taken in order to achieve the significant reward of doing something novel, exciting and daring and about which they can impress their friends. The appeal of safe-danger is likely to be greatest to those who are less mature and psychologically insecure. Such activity is an extreme form of the type of "kick" which children in the past have typically achieved by smoking behind the school pavilion or ringing door bells and then running away. To the extent that safe-dangerous activity is within the norms of a particular gathering, certain participants will be present for no other reason than to obtain the thrill of engaging in such activity.

A violent confrontation between a rioting mob or an angry group of pickets and the police, is likely to be seen by all participants in terms of a battle. "Victories" on either side e.g. a police vehicle catching fire[8], a police retreat, arrival of reinforcements, have a very significant effect on raising and maintaining a pitch of enthusiastic excitement which will fuel further endeavour and facilitate further "victories".

Many of the factors already mentioned: anonymity, involvement in common activity, chanting, emotional arousal, etc., contribute to and reflect a change in the person's mental perspective which has been termed *deindividuation*[9] [10]. This change in perspective constitutes a lessening of the person's sense of individuality and an increasing sense of being a unit or cell of a huge organism — the crowd. More specifically, one psychologist[11], understands the process

of deindividuation to involve:

 a. a minimization first of self observation and evaluation and secondly, of concern about social evaluation.
 b. a weakening of self-controls based on guilt, shame, fear and commitment.
 c. a lowering of one's threshold for expressing inhibited behaviours.

It is clear that even in the most extreme manifestations of crowd activity such as riots, many people do maintain to a significant degree a sense of individual purpose: when looting, targets are not picked indiscriminately and, as discussed earlier, many individuals are concerned to enhance their self-esteem by their acts of daring. Nevertheless, it is likely that ready identification with and willing participation in, crowd objectives and activities will induce the process of deindividuation to a greater or lesser degree. The more the process takes place, the greater the decrease in the ability and desire of participants to think rationally for themselves; the thoughts, emotions and actions being displayed by the people around a "deindividuated" person will be automatically imitated by him — crowd morality replacing his own individual sense of morality.

Section 2: The Context of the Crowd Event

Crowds do not occur in a vacuum: riots, carnivals, pop festivals, demonstrations, etc., all have causes, they involve certain types of people and there will be consequences to the event. A consideration of these and other context factors of a crowd event is crucial to an understanding of the event and also in making strategic and tactical decisions about the policing of that event. One police officer[12], recently writing on the subject of riot control made the point in these terms: "Riot control entails more than the actual capacity or degree of force needed to suppress it, it entails the study, amongst other things, of the reasons for the riots, of the areas in which they occur, i.e. urban, rural, residential or commercial, etc., of the type, age and motivation of the persons involved and of the social conditions and level of violence in the society in which it occurs. More importantly, in our unique case, it should involve the study of the social consequences of our actions in riots and the likely consequences and effects on the force if the wrong decisions are made and the wrong actions taken."

Whilst it is often claimed that it is important to take such factors into account when considering means of social control, it is not easy to do this without a *framework* for such consideration. A framework which, it is suggested, may be suitable for post-hoc analyzes of crowd events — especially those of a disruptive nature — is shown in FIG 2. The figure shows four *data foci: people, conditions, event* and *reactions.* Objective details about the event itself, together with information about the nature of those who participated; their social, economic and environmental conditions and information about the

various reactions to the event, collectively constitute a *factual data base* with respect to the event. Two further foci are also seen to be important although information pertaining to these is less likely to be of a factual nature; there are: *perceptions*, the participants' feelings, attitudes, values, etc., about everything which might be relevant to their participation; and *predisposing factors*, the likely patterns of influence which inclined the people to act. Clearly, certain of the people's perceptions will contribute significantly to the predisposing factors.

The framework outlined above constitutes only minimally a model of crowd occurrence as it merely identifies various areas of consideration which need to be mapped out in order to see relevant issues clearly; it is not predictive in any specific sense. Indeed, psychological and sociological models such as the model of crowd behaviour described earlier, theories of relative deprivation and group conflict[13] [14], etc., can be successfully imposed on the framework. Thus the framework not only constitutes a template for compiling relevant information but it also allows the application of theoretical models which together provide a system for understanding the emergence and nature of disruptive crowd events, generating ideas about control and, to a certain degree, evaluating the likely efficacy of these ideas.

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore in detail the application of this framework to any one particular event, for illustrative purposes some ideas pertaining to the likely perceptions of people involved in the recent riots will be explored.

It is clear that theories of the riots emphasizing unemployment, poor housing, poor relations with the police, etc., are inadequate. Most major cities in Great Britain experienced little more than normal levels of street violence during the period of the riots even though in Glasgow[15], for example, about one in three young people are unemployed and relations between the police and youth are something less than amicable. If factors such as unemployment, etc., had causal influences with respect to the riots, they operated indirectly, via the perceptions of the people involved. People will not react strongly to their conditions, however bad (or good) these may be, unless they feel significantly frustrated by them. Relative deprivation theory suggests that people will be inclined to ill-feeling and perhaps action when they see other people or groups of people who they consider no more deserving than themselves, substantially "better off" than themselves. Grievances will grow once a group or community believe they can assign the responsibility for their unsatisfactory state of affairs to an identified agent, e.g. local or central government, the police[16]. Feelings of frustration and hostilities will often be crystallized by the local and minority press. Thus, for example, *Westindian World* and *Caribbean Times* have been concentrating for some time on themes such as youth unemployment, bias of the national press, the increasing schism

between the police and the blacks[17]. Perceptions of isolation and a belief that the country as a whole is unconcerned may be further encouraged in some ethnic minority groups by a corresponding lack of coverage of many of these issues by the national media. According to one Asian newspaper editor, "People say the nation was caught unaware by the riots but that was because the national press didn't cover the problems of the inner cities"[18].

Frustrations can only be heightened if those who should be representing the interests of the people in question do not have the confidence and respect of those people. A spokesman for the Liverpool 8 Defence Committee dismissed local community leaders in these terms: "They're just middle class blacks with £20,000 houses in Wooton. They don't speak for the people. They couldn't stop a riot. They couldn't even start one."[19].

These factors and others, when taken together, may have constituted for certain of our inner city communities a general feeling of dissatisfaction with conditions and a sense that all avenues to social progress were blocked. According to many theorists e.g.[20][21], such perceptions constitute strong predisposing factors to concerted group violence.

In deprived areas, frustrations of the nature described above will be often related to and compounded by, blocked psychological needs of belongingness and self-esteem[22]. The more these needs are blocked, for example by lack of parental consideration, unstimulating schooling, lack of means by which young people can become good at something, the less adequate and significant those people will feel[23]. Psychological inadequacy, as argued earlier, will be conducive to youths engaging in delinquent acts in attempts to achieve significance from bravado.

With the existence of strong predisposing factors such as those described the actual precipitation of a riot may take no more than a street encounter with the police or a recognition that riots have taken place elsewhere and the thought that "this is what we should be doing".

The framework also suggests that another set of perceptions are important: the participants' perceptions of the reactions — including their own — to the event. Substantial feelings of success, failure, power, vulnerability, excitement, etc., will be influential in determining post-event behaviour and relations with authority.

Section 3: Some Implications for Policing

It is impossible to discuss implications for policing in any specific way without applying the framework and various models described to a specific event. Nevertheless, some general points may usefully be raised:

1. Large numbers of police officers dealing with a crowd situation, themselves constitute a crowd and, as such, they are susceptible to all the psychological processes outlined in Section 1. Good channels of

communication, sensibly used; good supervision; officers feeling confident in the way they are being deployed and in their own abilities to cope; a minimum sense of fear and uncertainty: all these are factors which will reduce the likelihood of officers being subject to less than professional feelings, thoughts and impulses. All this comes only with adequate training of all ranks involved with the policing of disruptive crowd events. The importance of adequate training is difficult to overemphasize: the more professional and competent the police are in responding to crowd violence, the less stress individual officers will feel and the more impersonally they will treat the aggressiveness directed towards them. Such a sense· of lack of personal involvement in dealing with violent crowd situations minimizes any likelihood of police reaction exacerbating the situation and allows the officers involved to resume normal policing duties — maybe dealing with the same sections of the community that constituted the crowd — with an attitude minimally affected by their crowd experience.

2.   Offensive tactics should be kept to as perceptually a low key as possible. The employment of plastic bullets, gas, etc., would be likely to take police tactics into a higher league, perceptually, whilst even the use of vehicles to keep rioters in small groups need not be seen as unduly provocative — except in case of injury — due to the fact that existing resources only are being utilized.

3.   Breaking the crowd up into small groups is a useful tactic for a number of reasons. It limits the participants' sense of anonymity and also limits the process of deindividuation. Furthermore, as such tactics can allow relatively large number of arrests to be made, the danger of participants of riots becoming "addicted" to the ecstacy of unimpeded and successful rioting[24], is reduced.

4.   Morale-boosting "victories" need to be prevented as far as possible: the need to keep unattended police vehicles well clear of the scene of violence and to avoid deploying officers in a way which makes them excessively vulnerable has been well illustrated during the last two years.

5.   Police forces faced with serious problems in their inner city areas must be very concerned to prevent or to overcome themselves being seen as "armies of occupation". Perhaps some systematic thought could be usefully applied to the concept of image-management.

Conclusions
It will be realized that the points raised in the previous section are in the order of alleviating the symptoms of the malady of violent crowd activities in this country. Cure, or better still, prevention, does not lie primarily in the hands of the police — even in areas such as Toxteth where many people believe that police harassment is the root of the grievance. Nonetheless, there is considerable art in the development and application of medications which soothe rather than inflame. It is hoped that an appreciation of the issues

discussed in this paper will be helpful to those police apothecaries who are charged with this less than enviable task.
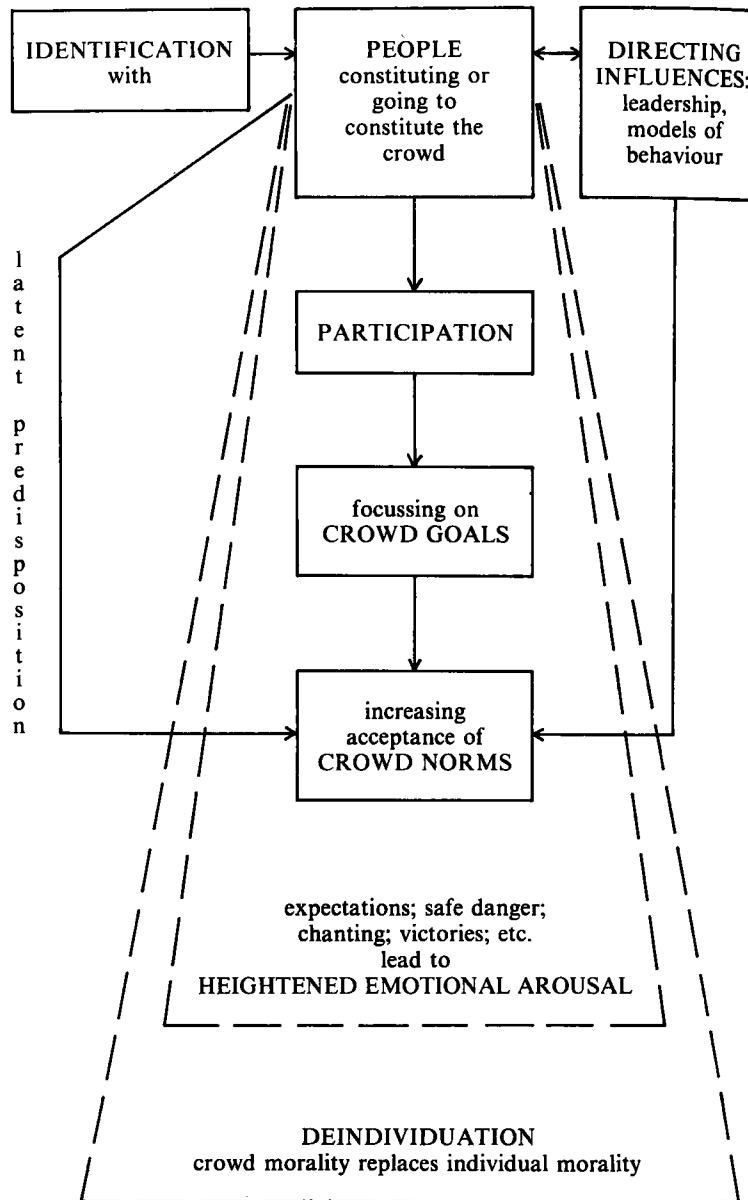
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expectations; safe danger;
chanting; victories; etc.
lead to
HEIGHTENED EMOTIONAL AROUSAL

DEINDIVIDUATION
crowd morality replaces individual morality

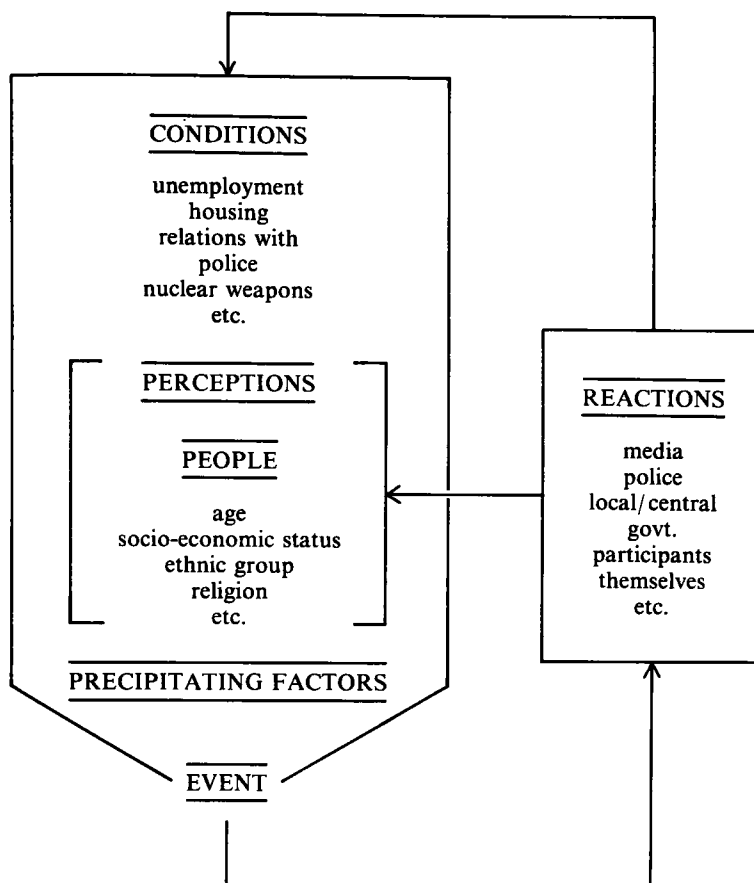**FIG. 1: PSYCHOLOGICAL MODEL OF CROWD BEHAVIOUR**

FIG. 2: FRAMEWORK FOR POST HOC ANALYSIS OF DISRUPTIVE
CROWD EVENT

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