

Crowd representations in event management: Effects on wellbeing and collective resilience

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Enacting identities and representing social relations

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Background

How is mass emergency behaviour represented?

The *disaster myths*: maladaptive and pathological collective behaviour

Power matters – who believes these myths?

Practical interest:

Disaster myths rationalize for practices which undermine the resilience that crowd membership provides

Three psychological disaster myths

1. 'Mass panic'

Over-reaction to danger

Rash, individualistic and

competitive escape behaviour:

- Primitive 'instincts' overwhelm cognition and socialization
- 'Contagion'

The reality of mass emergency behaviour

- Panic is rare (Sime, 1990)
- Flight \neq panic (Quarantelli, 1960)
- Actions based on reasonable beliefs (Donald & Canter, 1992)
- Behaviour constrained by social norms (Johnson, 1988)
- Cooperation and delay (rather than individual flight) is common (Mawson, 2005)



Three psychological disaster myths

2 Civil disorder

The crowd is a 'cloak' for wilful wrongdoing:

- Rioting
- 'Looting'

The reality of mass emergency behaviour

- 'Lawless' behaviour collectively constrained and collectively functional for survival (Tierney, Bevc, & Kuligowski, 2006).



Hurricane Katrina

Three psychological disaster myths

3 Helplessness

The population is too shocked and helpless to take responsibility for its own survival

The reality of mass emergency behaviour:

- 'Activism more common than fatalism'

(Alexander, 2007, p. 97)

- Survivors act as first responders

(e.g., 2005 London bombings;

Drury, Cocking, & Reicher, 2009)

- Survivors can act as a 'therapeutic community' (Fritz, 1996/1961)



Research aims

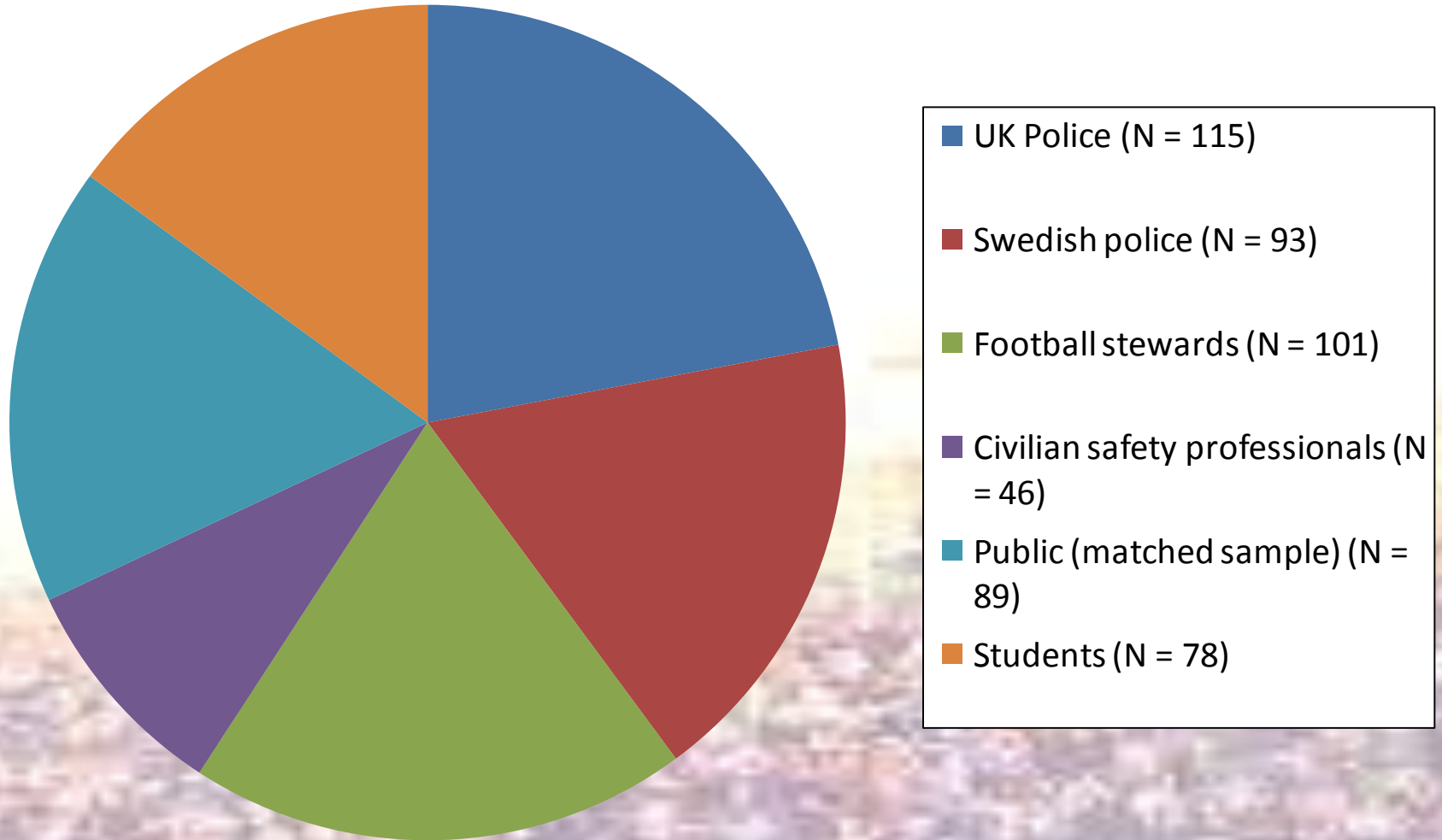
- To survey groups professionally involved in public safety and emergency planning: do they endorse these myths?

- Do they endorse beliefs about public *resilience* ?



- Do different beliefs about mass emergency ***behaviour*** (maladaptive vs resilient) predict choice of crowd ***management relationship*** (paternalistic and coercive vs inclusive/mass-democratic)?

Participants



Results: belief in mass panic

UK and Swedish police officers, civilian safety professionals:

- **Did not endorse or reject** the view that *'when there is an emergency, mass panic is inevitable'*
- **Rejected** the view that in mass emergencies *'crowd members act selfishly'*

BUT agreed:

- *'... people in crowds exaggerate the threat'*
- *'... people in crowds are driven by simple instincts'*
- *'... false rumours spread easily through a crowd'*
- *'...the emergency services are not subject to the same tendency to panic as the crowd'*

Results: belief in mass panic

Football stewards

- More ready to endorse '*mass panic*'
- The only item they did not agree with was '*selfishness*'

Students

- Agreed with all except '*selfishness*'

Matched sample of general public

- Agreed with every feature of the '*mass panic*' myth

Results: belief in civil disorder

'When there is an emergency, there is a danger that it can develop into public order situation'

UK police

- Neither agreed nor disagreed

Swedish police, civilian safety professionals, football stewards, general public, students

- Agreed that civil disorder occurs



Results: Helplessness

'When there is an emergency, crowd survivors wait helplessly to be rescued'

All rejected this myth



Results: Beliefs in resilient behaviour

'When there is an emergency ... mass evacuation tends to be orderly'

Everyone disagreed, except civilian safety managers (neither agreed nor disagreed)

'... crowd survivors pro-socially assist one another'

'... examples of heroism among survivors take place'

All groups agreed

'... people in a crowd draw upon their knowledge (for example of building layout)'

All groups agreed, except Swedish police (neither agreed nor disagreed)

'Emergencies and disasters bring people together in solidarity'

All groups agreed strongly

Beliefs about management relationships

Coercion

- ‘...we need a strong response from authority to maintain order in emergencies’

Paternalism

- Restricting information: ‘... it is best to give out only minimal information about the nature of the danger’
- Need for exclusive expert control: ‘... members of the public get in the way by trying to help’.

Mass democratic/ inclusive approach - trust in and reliance on the public:

- ‘When there is an emergency, crowd survivors have the resourcefulness to organize their own escape’
- ‘... the emergency services may have to rely on the initiative of survivors themselves (e.g. organizing evacuation and first aid)’.

**Model of
mass emergency behaviour**

**Management
relationship**

Mass panic

$(\beta = .51, p < .001)$

Helplessness

$(\beta = .08, p = .04)$

Mass panic

$(\beta = .44, p < .001.)$

Civil disorder

$(\beta = .50, p < .001)$

**Exclusive expert
control**

$(R^2 = .29)$

**Restricting
information**

$(R^2 = .20)$

Coercion

$(R^2 = .25)$

Model of
mass emergency behaviour

Management
relationship

Resilient
behaviour*



Rely on survivors'
initiative

($R^2 = .17$)

Resilient
behaviour*



Trust crowd
survivors'
resourcefulness

($R^2 = .24$)

*Order

*Co-operation

*Heroism

*Use of knowledge

('Mass emergencies bring people together' was NS)

Key findings

- Widespread endorsement of two of the disaster myths
- 'Helplessness' rejected
 - Most previous research has been carried out in the USA
- Demographic patterns:
 - Nothing for experience
 - Specialist (police, civilian safety professionals) vs non-specialists (stewards, public, students)
differences: role of professional training?

Contradiction

- Contradiction within respondents, across models:
 - endorsed both mass panic and resilience
 - exclusive control was needed but survivors could be trusted and relied upon

Is this surprising?

- '*Mass panic*' and the '*mad mob*':
recognizable parts of common-sense

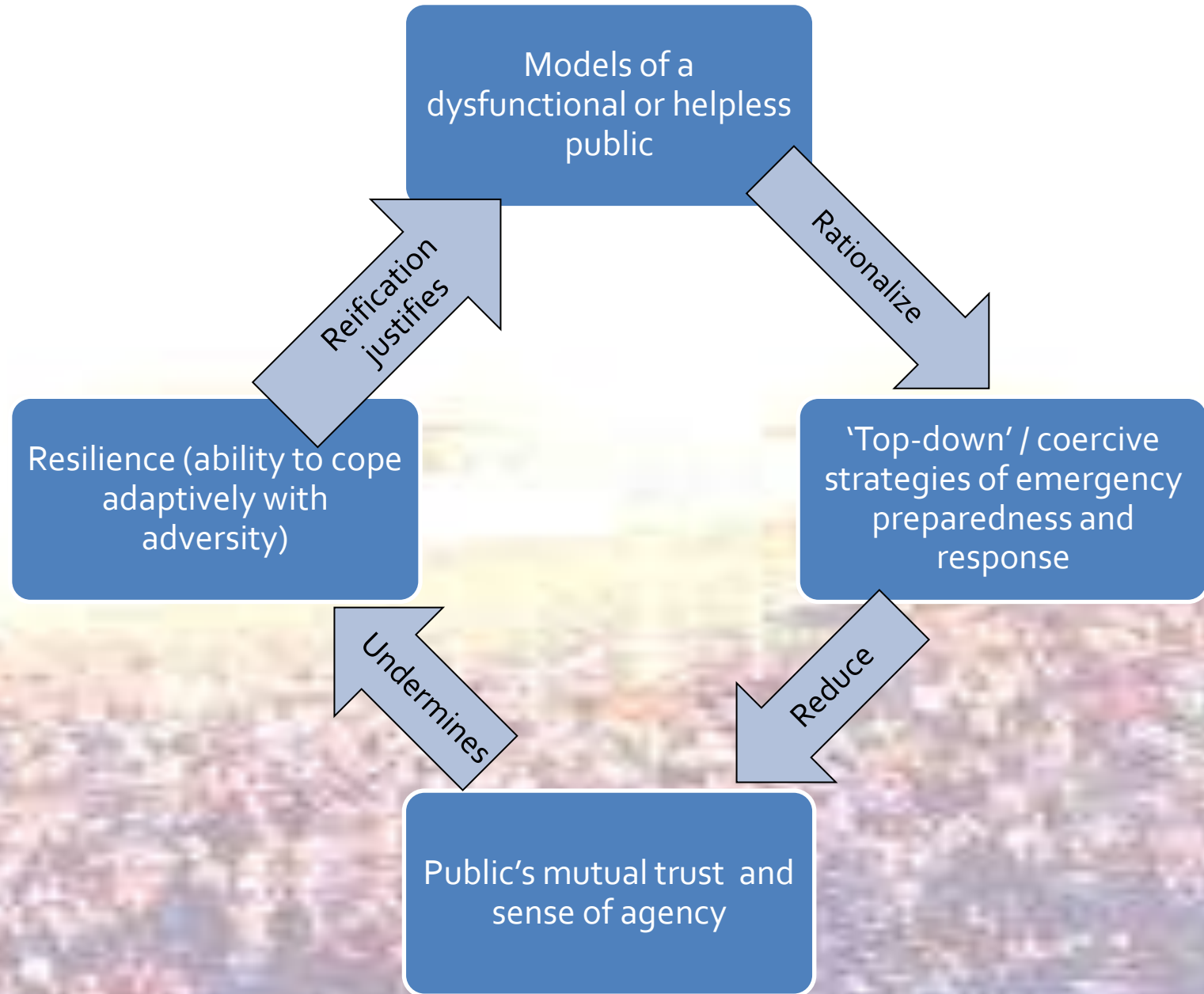


But so are notions like the *Blitz spirit*, a model of resilience ('*We all know*' that adversity brings people together)

Coherence

- BUT also evidence of **coherence** *within* each common-sense representation
- Mass pathology models predicted endorsement of coercive and paternalistic management relationships
- Resilient behaviour beliefs predicted inclusive, mass-democratic relationships

Conclusions: Practical significance





Example: Lack of information ➡

- Disempowering
- Creates anxiety
- Creates distress

Conclusions: Theoretical significance

The intragroup:

Psychological group membership provides us with

- Support
- Agency (empowerment)

Hence

- Resilience
- Wellbeing
- Joy

The nature of the intergroup relationship

- Can either *facilitate* or *undermine* these intragroup features
 - In mass emergencies
 - In other crowd events