The psychology of collective action

C8817
Year: 3
15 Credits
Autumn term (teaching term 1) 2013
Module convenor: John Drury

NOTE: Most of the questions you need answers to about this module are in this document. Please read it fully and carefully before your first lecture and seminar.

NOTE: This document concerns the structure and content of the module. If you have questions about procedures, please consult the School of Psychology Office or via psyoff@sussex.ac.uk.
Module information and requirements

Module outline

This module is about crowd behaviour - in particular riots, ‘disorderly’ protests, and other (conflictual) forms of collective action. Some of the questions we will address include the following:

- What actually happens in crowd events such as riots?
- How did the crowd become a subject of scientific study?
- How is it possible that hundreds of people can act as one in a novel situation?
- Is collective behaviour due to the emergence of a ‘group mind’ or is it a result of personal similarity amongst people?
- Why are some crowds ‘violent’ and others ‘peaceful’?
- How might crowds of otherwise peaceful protesters become conflictual?
- How do identities and norms sometimes change through participation in crowd events?
- What is the relation between crowd events and social change?

It has been argued that the topic of crowd behaviour should be at the centre of social psychology. This is because it provides insights into many of the key questions of the discipline. Thus, in addressing debates in crowd psychology, we shall also discuss such core social psychological topics as self and identity, group formation, the relation between individuals and groups, social influence (conformity, minority influence and leadership), rationality, stereotyping, norm formation, power, and psychological change.

The material on this module is organized chronologically, and students should treat the syllabus as a developing series of debates rather than as a set of discrete ‘topics’. For example, the question that originally led to the development of crowd psychology in the nineteenth century was that of how the ‘civilized’ individual could descend into supposed irrationality and uncontrolled brutality when part of a crowd. Subsequent researchers pointed out that, since most crowds are not in fact violent, any crowd theory must be able to explain the variety of crowd behaviours and thus account for peaceful crowds as well as violent ones. This debate around the supposedly inevitable ‘violence’ of crowd events is one we return to each week.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this module, a successful student will be able to:

1. Critically evaluate the adequacy of models of crowd behaviour using evidence from a variety of different research studies.
2. Give examples of features of particular crowd events from scholarly accounts that challenge ‘irrationalist’ theories of the crowd.
3. Describe the relationship between identity and behaviour in crowd events.
Teaching and learning

The module is taught via 10 lectures, 11 seminars and a video. Each week, we will look at a different case study comprising one (or more) crowd event, as a focus for discussion.

In the seminars, students will report back on their reading for the week, and examine how far the research evidence they have read is adequate to each different theory of the crowd.

In the second half of term, there will be short (non-assessed) presentations. For the presentation, you will be allocated a theory to evaluate. You will be given a title based on one of the essay questions in the back of this handbook. The presentation is therefore an answer to the question set in the essay, and hence will give you practice at some of the skills you will need for the assessment (i.e. use of evidence, organization of material, evaluation of ideas, making an argument). The presentation should be no more than five minutes long and you are not obliged to use visual aids. You will get informal feedback and should therefore use the presentations to gauge your learning.

Reading

The following chapters are the core readings for the whole module:


These chapters, along with other core reading and most of the recommended reading, are available on-line, via Study Direct or the Library reading list facility (Talis Aspire):

http://liblists.sussex.ac.uk/lists/21C6BCCA-F3B6-913E-F660-64303AD0AB20.html

The following e-book is an extremely accessible introduction to academic debates around riots, centred around the English riots of August 2011, which contains sections relevant to much of the material on the module:


This is available for just 99p from Amazon:

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Englishmen-Myths-realities-riots-ebook/dp/B006654U9U

Amazon also provides free downloadable Kindle software / app so you can read the book (and any other Kindle book) on your PC or Mac:
Please only attend the seminars if you have done some of the reading, as you will be expected to talk about your reading rather than just listen to others. The seminars are organized around the report-backs you give on the reading you have done. You should read and be able to talk about one or two readings a week from the reading list. (If you are unable to read a core reading in the designated week, you should ensure that you have read it by the end of the module.)

Study Direct

This module makes extensive use of the VLE, Study Direct, which contains the following resources:
- The module handbook
- On-line access to core and many other readings. (Some readings are only available on Study Direct.)
- The Poll Tax Riot video. (It works best with computers with fast connections so it is recommended that you watch it using one of the PCs on campus.)
- Lecture slides and audio recordings
- Discussion forums for enquiries and discussions about the module. You should use this as the first place to ask questions about the module.

Assessment

Assessment is through a two-hour Seen Exam, which takes place in the mid-year assessment period (A1), in January 2014. Examination details and timetables are displayed on the exam notice board in Pev1 and on the UG office web pages. The convenor and the School office will not give out details of individual exam times.

The exam will consist of two questions, which will be revealed towards the end of term. Sample questions are included at the back of this handbook.

Assessment criteria are given on the School website at the following link:

http://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/internal/students/examinationsandaassessment

The examination will be based on material covered in the lectures and seminars and the reading for each week. It is also important for you to understand that lectures and seminars will not attempt to cover all such material. That is, lectures and seminars are not intended to provide an alternative to you learning the material in your core reading. Any attempt to rely solely on learning material presented in lectures and seminars will severely restrict your ability to do well during formal assessment of this module.

Student evaluation

All modules at Sussex are fully audited. You will be asked to complete an anonymous student evaluation form near the end of term, allowing you to comment on and (if appropriate) criticise any aspect of the module. You may also comment on the module at any
time to the convenor; you may do this directly or via some intermediary (e.g., a student representative). Feedback received in this way will be collated and shown to the module convenor. It will also be reported to all relevant School meetings. Reactions and responses to such student feedback will be reported back to students via student representatives (who attend School meetings). We want the module be as good as it possibly can be so all and any feedback is gratefully received.

**Contact details**

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### Module overview

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All information on rooms and teaching times for the lectures and seminar groups are on Sussex Direct and the University on-line timetable.
1. Introduction: The object of investigation

In the first lecture and seminar, we will be discussing scholarly accounts of crowd events, especially those classed as riots. The aim is to get a sense of what actually happens in these events. What kinds of behaviours seem to require explanation by psychologists? Are there patterns to crowd behaviours in riots? What is their history and context? Are there features common to most riots? How do the events differ? Are they all violent? Where they are violent, how can this violence be understood? What are the targets? Answers to these questions will help us evaluate the different psychological models of crowd behaviour that we encounter in subsequent weeks.

Broadly, the reading for this week comes from three areas. First, there is material from social historians studying pre-industrial crowds. The case study we shall consider here is that of the eighteenth century food riots. Second, there are articles by social scientists and journalists from the huge literature produced following the US urban riots of the 1960s, particularly the riot in Watts, Los Angeles, in 1965. Finally, there is material on the UK urban riots of the 1980s. For this area of the literature, we will focus on the Brixton riot of 1981.

There is no single reading that covers all areas; but one paper which is particularly rich in relevant evidence is the chapter by Thompson, ‘The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century’.

Learning outcome

By the end of this week’s lecture and seminar, the successful student will be able to:

- Identify some of the features of collective action that a theory of crowd behaviour should be able to explain.

Core reading


(See in particular pages 76-91, 98-113, and 120-126)

Available on-line via Study Direct


(See in particular pages 185-200, 212-233, and 238-246)

Recommended reading: US urban riots


**Recommended reading: UK urban riots**


Main / HC 7150 UK (BRI)
Docs 2. (Reserve)
Also in available in the Parliamentary Papers 1981-82, Vol. 49.


**Further reading: Preindustrial riots**


2. ‘Crowd science’ in its historical context: Gustave Le Bon

The crowd first became an object of scientific investigation at the end of the nineteenth century when working class mobilization was perceived to be a threat to the existing order. It was particularly in France, where the bourgeois revolution was most bloody and where its working class supporters threatened to extend it to the abolition of class society itself, where ‘crowd science’ emerged in a systematic form. The first debates, however, were legalistic. The question of legal responsibility arose from the problem of whether the behaviour exhibited by people in crowds was due to the qualities of the individuals involved or whether there was something about the crowd itself that made otherwise law-abiding individuals act in uncharacteristic ways. A number of theorists suggested that there was something new and terrible about collectivity which explained the radical break between individual and crowd behaviour. However, only one of these theorists is well-remembered today: Gustave Le Bon. Le Bon’s work is one of synthesis rather than original theory, but it does illustrate well the concerns of the ruling class at the time: how are crowds dangerous to civilization? What do they do to the rational individual? How should their power be controlled or harnessed?

The reading list this week includes the work of Le Bon, which you should certainly read at some point during the module, as well as that of commentators who describe the historical context of his work and indicate how his perspective arose from a context of struggle. Try to get a sense of the relationship between context and theory in the ‘classic’ theories of crowd psychology – that is, how the theorists’ social locations engendered a partial account of crowd behaviour – through reading some of the historical accounts (e.g. Barrows, Nye, Reicher & Potter, Stott & Drury).

The crowd event case study for this week is the Paris Commune.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this week’s lecture and seminar, the successful student will be able to:

- Demonstrate the links between the concerns, contents and implication of early ‘crowd science’ and the social and historical context in which this science emerged.
- Describe and understand the central elements of Le Bon’s theory

Core reading


Recommended reading: The context of theory


Further reading: ‘Group mind’ theories


Further reading: Context and critique

3. Individualism and the crowd

The argument of Le Bon that crowd psychology was distinct from individual psychology soon came under attack. The developing behaviourist Zeitgeist involved a scepticism towards such nebulous entities as a supposed ‘group mind’. Instead, the ‘crowd’ was understood as a nominal fiction and its behaviour explicable simply in terms of features of the individuals making up that crowd. Allport was the champion of this individualist (and supposedly more scientific) approach to the crowd. Unlike Le Bon, he drew upon laboratory experimental evidence. He shared with Le Bon the assumption that what needed to be explained was the irrational, mindless violence that inevitably seemed to accompany collectivity, but saw the difference between individual and group as quantitative rather than qualitative. He attributed the inevitable violence of crowds to a combination of given dispositions (personalities), learning, and stimulation (which led to instinctive drives overcoming civilized responses).

The reading list includes Allport’s (1924a, b) classic statements of his position. Allport’s individualism is just one example of a type of theory which claims that crowd violence can be understood in terms of the convergence of similar individuals (usually of a particular type of personality, criminal disposition, or lacking socialization), who simply act out their pre-existing tendencies. The critique of this kind of approach focuses on two issues: (1) whether people simply act out given tendencies or whether instead they change in crowd events, and (2) the question of whether people who take part in riots are different than others. The reading list includes some empirical critiques of these ‘riff-raff’ and ‘convergence’ accounts which centre on the US urban riots of the 1960s, though the individualist explanation appears in popular accounts every time there is a riot. Try to read at least one critique (e.g., Fogelson, McPhail, Asch, Turner).

The case study for this week is the Williamson County miners’ strike (1922).

Learning outcomes

By the end of this week’s lecture and seminar, the successful student will be able to:

- Describe the differences and similarities between the early ‘classical’ and individualistic theories of the crowd.
- Critique individualism as an account of collective phenomena

Core reading


Recommended reading: Critiques


Further reading: Allport


4. ‘De-individuation’

Psychology’s interest in crowd behaviour has waxed and waned in line with the extent to which crowd events are defined as a prominent ‘social problem’. Hence academic interest in the crowd was renewed in the 1960s when collective action again seemed to pose a threat to the existing order – in the form of the civil rights movement, anti-Vietnam protests, and, in particular, the US urban riots. The concept of ‘de-individuation’ was an attempt to render key features of Le Bon’s account into a modern, scientific form, and has become one of the most widely cited effects of group membership. Shorn of references to the ‘racial unconscious’ or ‘law of the mental unity’, Le Bon’s account of submergence (loss of self) leading to anti-normative and disinhibited behaviour was mainly studied in the form of laboratory analogues of crowds, and attempted to determine the effects of key variables – such as anonymity, group presence and decreased self-awareness.

The reading list comprises some of the key readings on de-individuation. The concept evolved over the years, from Zimbardo’s (1970) somewhat apocalyptic but sketchy vision to the more careful attempts by Diener (1980) and then Prentice-Dunn and Rogers (1989) to specify the precise mechanisms underlying the de-individuated state. De-individuation theorists have struggled to accommodate the evidence that anonymity does not have generic effects, and the scope of the ‘theory’ has become diminished, leading many to conclude that the whole concept of de-individuation is inherently flawed. Postmes and Spears (1998) provide the most comprehensive and devastating empirical critique.

Try to read at least one of the de-individuation papers (preferably Zimbardo and/or Diener’s ‘trick or treat’ paper) and at least one of the critiques too (e.g., Johnson & Downing, Reicher).

Learning outcomes:

By the end of this week’s lecture and seminar, the successful student will be able to:
- Indicate the relationship between de-individuation theories and earlier accounts of the crowd
- Describe the different versions of de-individuation theories
- Demonstrate the limitations of de-individuation as an account of crowd behaviour

Core reading


Recommended reading


Further reading


5. Norms and rationality in theories of the crowd

From the 1950s onwards, alongside the reproduction of the ideas of the ‘classic’ theories (as in models of de-individuation), there were attempts to break from the assumptions of irrationality and mindless violence that had limited these earlier accounts of the crowd. The early theorists of the crowd were essentially on the outside looking in at alien behaviour. But the theorists of the 1960s were often involved in some of the events themselves – such as the Vietnam protests on college campuses. At the very least, they were interested in participants’ own perspectives and reasons, and not just their behaviours. They suggested that what happened in crowd events, even the most violent ones, might be explained by the same psychological concepts that explained other areas of social life.

One of the first attempts to suggest a continuity between everyday social behaviour and crowd events was Turner and Killian’s emergent norm theory (ENT). Turner and Killian looked to the small group tradition in social psychology, in particular the work of Sherif, which suggested that in ambiguous situations norms developed through interpersonal interaction. Based on these ideas, they suggested that crowd behaviour should be understood as rule-governed rather than ‘instinctual’ and uncontrolled.

A slightly different reaction against irrationalism came in the form of Berk’s argument that collective behaviour was in fact highly rational. His game theory, which was based on economic models of decision-making, explained the behaviour of a looting rioter, for example, simply in terms of a calculus of gains versus losses.

The reading list covers normative models and game theory, both of which have sought to explain other types of crowd behaviours than riots, such as mass emergency evacuations. ENT is a somewhat slippery model which has mutated somewhat since it was first proposed in the 1950s. McPhail’s critical review (1991) provides perhaps the clearest and fullest account.

Note that further problems with both ENT and game theory, and the most succinct critiques, are presented in the articles by Reicher (1982, 1984b, 1987, 2001; see topic 6 ‘Social identity and the limits of crowd behaviour’).

The case study this week is a student protest march (Berk, 1974).

Seminar learning outcome

By the end of this week’s lecture and seminar, the successful student will be able to:

- Explain how the concepts of norms and rationality have been applied to crowd behaviour

Core reading


Recommended reading: Emergent norm theory


**Further reading**


Also in Sherif & Sherif (1969). *Social psychology* (pp. 200-214) and in Sherif & Sherif (1948). *An outline of social psychology* (pp. 249-262)


**Further reading: Norms in mass emergencies**


http://www.ijmed.org/articles/134/download/
6. Social identity and the limits of crowd behaviour

Reicher’s (1982, 1984b, 1987) social identity model (SIM) sought to explain the evidence of limits to behaviour in events such as riots, which theories in irrationalist tradition (i.e., group mind, Allport, and de-individuation) were unable to account for. The SIM suggests that the patterns (of participation and targets) typically observed in even the most violent riots are determined by participants’ adoption of a common social identity. Therefore, people do not lose their identities in crowds, but rather shift from their personal to their shared social identities. It is the shared social identity (not interpersonal interaction per se) that is the basis of norms; and it is the shared social identity (not personal cost-benefit analysis) that defines interests and hence ‘rationality’.

Reicher’s research demonstrated not only the role of social identity, but also offered a completely different account than de-individuation for the role of anonymity in group settings. The field research showed that very often people are not anonymous in a crowd – at least not to each other. The experimental evidence showed that the effects of anonymity depends upon whichever social identity is salient: when a group identity is more salient than a personal identity, anonymity can lead to greater conformity to the group norm (rather than non-normative behaviour).

The SIM is essentially an application of Turner’s self-categorization theory (SCT). You should be familiar with SCT to get some idea of the theoretical background to the SIM. Haslam (2001/2004) and Reicher et al. (2009) are probably the clearest introductions to SCT and the social identity approach more generally.

The classic study in support of the social identity model of crowd behaviour is Reicher’s (1984b, 1987) account of the St Pauls’ riot – make sure you are familiar with this study. The articles by Reicher - particularly his 1987 chapter - also provide the most compelling critiques of earlier approaches, especially de-individuation.

Our case study this week is the St Pauls’ urban riot, which took place in Bristol in 1980.

Learning outcome

By the end of this week’s lecture and seminar, the successful student will be able to:

- Apply the concept of social identity to crowd behaviour in general and (violent) crowd action in particular

Core reading (alternatives)


Recommended reading: Social identity and ‘de-individuation’ phenomena


Further reading: The social identity approach and self-categorization theory


7. ESIM: The intergroup dynamics of crowd conflict

Reicher’s (1984b) St Pauls’ study was a powerful riposte to the whole ‘irrationalist’ tradition, from Le Bon to de-individuation. But the study, and the social identity model itself, left a number of unanswered questions, and hence possible explanatory problems. The emphasis on social identity as the determinant of collective behaviour potentially led to a rather unidimensional reading of the nature of crowd conflict. Conflict was ‘read off’ from the St Pauls’ social identity, as if the participants were already ‘violent’; this left unexplained how the conflict first emerged and escalated over time during the riot. Without further specification, the model risked being read, like Allport’s account, as suggesting that conflict was a product of fixed and pre-given identities that were simply acted out. How could behavioural change in the crowd be grasped without falling back into something like the LeBonian account in which the peaceful, rational individual is ‘transformed’ by the (malign) influence of the crowd?

The analysis of the St Pauls riot was like a snap-shot, examining the nature of the crowd targets, without explaining how conflict actually developed out of relations with the police, and without including the perspective of the police as a possible contribution to the events. Subsequent studies of crowd events by Reicher and colleagues therefore began to address these absences. In each of a number of different type of crowd events, a similar pattern of intergroup interaction between crowd and police was identified. The observation of this pattern of interaction led to the development of the Elaborated Social Identity Model (ESIM) of crowd conflict, which explains the emergence and development of crowd conflict in terms of certain key concepts, conditions and dynamics.

First, the ESIM conceptualizes ‘identity’ as one’s social location in relation to others, and the actions that flow from that location; ‘context’ therefore comprises the identity-based actions of others.

Second, the ESIM suggests that the conditions necessary for the emergence and development of crowd conflict are two-fold:

(i) an asymmetry of categorical representations between crowd participants and an outgroup such as the police (for example, where crowd members understand their behaviour as legitimate, police might define it as a threat to ‘public order’) and

(ii) an asymmetry of power-relations such that the police outgroup is able to impose its definition of legitimate practice on the ingroup of crowd participants (for example, by forming cordons or making baton charges).

Third, there is a dynamic: if outgroup action is experienced by crowd participants as not only illegitimate (thereby legitimizing crowd action against it) but also indiscriminate (i.e., as an action against ‘everyone’ in the crowd), then crowd participants adopt a more inclusive ingroup self-categorization, superseding any prior internal divisions. The formation of a single large self-category, along with the feelings of consensus and the expectations of mutual ingroup support that are thereby engendered, empowers members of the crowd ingroup actively to oppose the police outgroup. Such crowd action against the police may confirm police fears of the inherent threat of the crowd, leading to an escalation of riot-control behaviours.

The original statement of the ESIM is Reicher (1996b). Reicher (1996a) provides the conceptual clarification of the model in relation to SCT and the social identity tradition as a whole.
Our case study this week is the student protest march against tuition fees in 1988, known as the ‘Battle of Westminster Bridge’. Reicher’s (1996b) analysis uses evidence from across the event to trace the origin and development of the conflict that took place on the march.

Seminar learning outcome

By the end of this week’s lecture and seminar, the successful student will be able to:

- Explain the emergence and development of collective conflict with reference to the Elaborated Social Identity Model of crowd behaviour

Core reading


Recommended reading

8. The poll tax riot

This week’s case study is the poll tax riot of 1990, perhaps the biggest riot in London for 100 years. While the initial representation of the event in the mass media was one of ‘criminality’ and ‘anarchist conspiracy’, analysis of the contours of the event, and of the accounts of participants (both demonstrators and police), revealed a more complex and interesting story. The peaceful crowd event escalated into mass conflict through an interaction between the actions of crowd members and the police. The research studies on this riot were also the first to directly investigate the role of police perceptions and practices in the development of crowd conflict.

Core reading


Recommended reading


9. Football ‘hooliganism’ and ‘public order’ policing

Collective conflict involving football fans – particularly English football fans abroad – is sometimes explained simply in terms of the presence and activity of ‘hooligans’. However a problem for this explanation is that sometimes conflict occurs without the presence of ‘hooligans’, and sometimes the presence of ‘hooligans’ does not lead to conflict. Clifford Stott’s research on international football crowds has shown that conflict only becomes collective, and ‘hooligans’ only influential, to the extent that intergroup relations (typically between fans and police) are characterized by asymmetries of perceived legitimate and possible conduct, as described in the ESIM.

Interview and survey research demonstrated that part of this asymmetry in police versus crowd perceptions of crowd events was comprised of police views rather similar to those of Le Bon and Allport. These views rationalize coercive and indiscriminate methods of policing. Ethnographic research showed that these methods could produce the very ‘crowd disorder’ they were meant to counteract.

Perhaps the most powerful support for these arguments about the development of football crowd conflict is Stott’s natural experiment involving fans and two police forces during the 2004 European Championships in Portugal. This is our case study for this week. This and the other football research has provided perhaps the strongest evidence for the pivotal role of police perceptions and practices in many cases of ‘public disorder’.

The reading list also includes the government report on policing following the G20 protests which includes a section on the ESIM (O'Connor, 2009) and an analysis of the policing of a student fees protest in December 2010 (Gorringe, Stott, & Rosie, 2010).

Learning outcome
By the end of this week’s lecture and seminar, the successful student will be able to:

- Explain how psychology (mis)informs ‘public order’ policing in relation to the problem of ‘football hooliganism’

Core reading


Recommended reading


Further reading: football ‘hooliganism’


**Further reading: ‘Public order’ policing**


10. From crowd events to social movements

Scattered throughout political, anecdotal, historical, auto-biographical and journalistic accounts of collective action are numerous references to psychological change – principally in terms of participants’ radicalization, politicization and empowerment. For example, participants in the 1960s US ghetto riots talk about developing a new pride in their Black identity through the experience. Likewise, some of the participants in the St Pauls and poll tax riots developed new understandings of their own place in the world.

The theoretical importance of such psychological changes is that they can help to show how particular crowd events connect with ongoing movements for social change. Those empowered and politicized may interpret their experiences as reflective of an ongoing set of social relationships – of support from a wider social category of oppositional forces, and of illegitimate power from those in authority.

The Elaborated Social Identity Model was concerned principally with explaining change within crowd events, but, through the notion of social identity, it also provides the conceptual resources for understanding the articulation between psychological process and social change.

The ESIM suggests that identity change can be conceptualized along at least four dimensions: ‘who we are’ (identity content), ‘what we can do together’ (empowerment), ‘what we should do’ (aims and definitions of legitimacy), and ‘who is included in and who excluded from our group’ (identity boundaries). Identity change may be a function of changed context, brought about through the consequences of one’s own actions. Such consequences are often unintended and unanticipated because crowd members’ actions may be interpreted in contrasting ways by powerful outgroups such as the police.

The wider significance of these kinds of psychological change is in terms of future action. A limited ‘local’ protest becomes understood as part of a wider struggle against national or even global ‘injustice’ where participants come to see themselves as part of a broader oppositional social category, where such opposition becomes legitimized by illegitimate outgroup (police, state) action, and where there is a belief that the collective is indeed capable of translating its ideas into reality. Particular experiences in collective action can therefore be significant in their role of encouraging people to get involved in further actions, which might themselves be forces for social change.

The case study for this week’s topic is the mass direct action against the M11 Link Road in London in 1993-4.

Learning outcome

By the end of this week’s lecture and seminar, the successful student will be able to:

- Describe the possible relationship between psychological change in crowd events and social movement participation

Core reading


Recommended reading


1. Were commentators right to claim that events such as the UK riots of August 2011 can best be explained through reference to individual differences and contagion?

Sample seen exam questions

1. Why is an explanation in terms of social norms, as in Emergent Norm Theory, an advance on the Le Bonian tradition but ultimately flawed as an account of crowd behaviour?

2. How might a peaceful crowd become violent? Why might a protesting crowd remain peaceful even in the face of attack? Discuss in relation to three theories of crowd behaviour.

1. How is it that, in novel crowd events, hundreds of people can act as one yet without pre-planning? Discuss in relation to three different theories of the crowd.

2. Methodologically and conceptually, why and how does the Elaborated Social Identity Model go beyond the account offered of the St Pauls ‘riot’? Is the original Social Identity Model (Reicher, 1984) still necessary?

1. How does social influence operate in a crowd? Evaluate the accounts of three theories of crowd behaviour using empirical examples.

2. How does the concept of social identity help us to explain crowd phenomena, and what do crowd phenomena tell us about how we should conceptualize social identity? Discuss with reference to both the historical literature (e.g., food riots, US ghetto riots) and recent research.

1. Is crowd behaviour irrational or rational? Or is this a false dichotomy?


1. Some theories explain the limits of crowd behaviour in terms of norms. Where do such norms come from?

2. Is crowd behaviour best explained with reference to processes within the crowd, contextual factors, or both? Discuss in relation to three theories of crowd behaviour.

1. How have experimental studies been used to support ‘de-individuation’ as an explanation of crowd behaviour? More generally, how have experimental studies using the ‘de-
individuation’ paradigm been interpreted instead as providing evidence for the social identity model?

2. How have the different methods used to study crowd events shaped the different explanations given for crowd conflict? Discuss in relation to each of the following: (i) Allport’s account, (ii) the social identity model, and (iii) the elaborated social identity model.

1. How can we explain psychological transformation in crowd events yet retain the notion that crowd behaviour is meaningful?

2. Discuss the relation between emotion and cognition in the following accounts of crowd behaviour: (i) Le Bon (1895/1968), (ii) Berk (1974), and (iii) Reicher and Drury (in press).

1. What have crowd theories taught us about effective policing of crowd events?

2. Does crowd behaviour reflect social norms, or can it construct such norms?