# Don't panic! The Social Identity Model of Collective Resilience

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Date: Wednesday 29 February 2012

Time: 1.15 pm for 1.30 pm - 3.00 pm

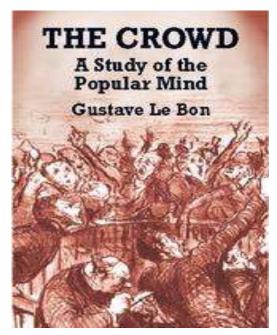
A402, Checkland Building,

#### Outline

- Theoretical contexts
- Rehabilitating the collective
  - solution vs problem
- The myth of 'panic'
- Collective resilience vs. Vulnerability
- Future research ideas

# Crowd psychology in context

- The irrationalist approach
  - Le Bon & De-individuation
- Social Identity Approaches
  - ESIM, SIMCR



- Crowds inherently irrational
- Crowd members lose individuality to collective 'mob mentality'
- Crowds actual or potential threat to status quo & should be treated as such

#### De-individuation

- Being in a crowd decreases individual responsibility & increases chances of anti-social behaviour
- Developed to explain how 'normal civilised' people can commit evil acts (Zimbardo 1973)
  - Stanford Prison expt, Abu Ghraib prison scandal etc

Commonly referred to as effect of group membership



- But largely rejected by social psychologists as outdated & not supported by evidence- situational norms better predictor of pro or anti-social behaviour
  - Postmes & Spears, 1999

#### Elaborated Social Identity Model

- Shift from personal to more collective identity, can lead to collective action
- During riots crowd can change so violence becomes considered legitimate & necessary in face of illegitimate attacks by out-group
- But crowd still has limits & self-polices antinormative behaviours
- Explains why people with no previous history of criminality get involved in riots much better than 'mindless' mob mentality

## Millbank protest Nov 2010

- Much talk about extremists 'hijacking' tuition fees march from 'peaceful' students
- Implies crowd is gullible & will uncritically copy 'anti-social' behaviour
- Watch following clip and decide for yourself!
- http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/nov/11 /student-protest-demonstrator-fireextinguisher

#### Don't Panic!

- Term often used to describe behaviour in emergencies
- But is fleeing a potentially fatal threat panic or logical flight behaviour?
- Difficult to define
  - 'extreme and groundless fear' (Quarantelli 2001)
  - 'collective flight based on hysterical belief' (Smelser, 1963)
- But I don't think it's a useful term for describing emergency behaviour in any case!



INSIDE THE IROQUOIS THEATER WHILE THE FIRE RAGED.

#### The Panic model

- From irrationalist tradition
- Crowds seen as vulnerable to panic in emergencies
- Threat causes emotion to overwhelm reason
- Collective identity breaks down
- Selfish behaviours
  - pushing, trampling
- Contagion
  - behaviours spread uncritically to whole crowd

#### Panic model-Implications

 Mass emergencies seen as potential public order problem & emergency planning

strategy can reflect this CBRN responses often involve Police/army rather than health workers



- Info withheld from public lest they 'panic'
- Crowd seen as problem rather than potential resource to draw from

## Problems with panic model

- Mass panic rare & noticeable by absence in many different emergencies;
- Atomic bombing of Japan
- Kings Cross underground fire (1987)
- WTC evacuation 9/11 'classic panic action or people behaving in an irrational manner was noted in [just] 1/124 (0.8%) cases' (Blake et al. 2004)

#### Under-reaction rather than overreaction is dangerous

'When people die in fires, it's not because of panic, it's more likely to be the lack of panic'

Neil Townsend, London Fire Rescue Service (2003)

Lack of sense of urgency/ unwillingness to deviate from normal behavioural patterns better explains fatality risk

# Social attachment model (Mawson, 2005)

- Inspired by Bowlby's attachment theories
- During stress people seek out attachment figures – affiliative behaviour
- Social norms rarely break down & people tend to leave or die as a group
- But problems remain;
  - a) Implies panic in crowd of strangers more likely
  - b) Neglects possibility of strangers co-operating with each other

# Social identity model of Collective Resilience (SIMCR)

- Disasters can create common identity through sense of shared fate
- Orderly, altruistic behaviour to escape common threat
- Increased threat enhances common identity
- Supported by evidence from studies of disasters

# 7/7 & Resilience



## Response to 7/7

- Individual fear & distress but no mass panic
- Evacuations characterised by orderly, calm behaviour
- Many reports of altruism, cooperation, and collective spirit of Londoners/ UK as a whole

# PARADISE BUILT IN HELL

THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMUNITIES
THAT ARISE IN DISASTER

REBECCA SOLNIT

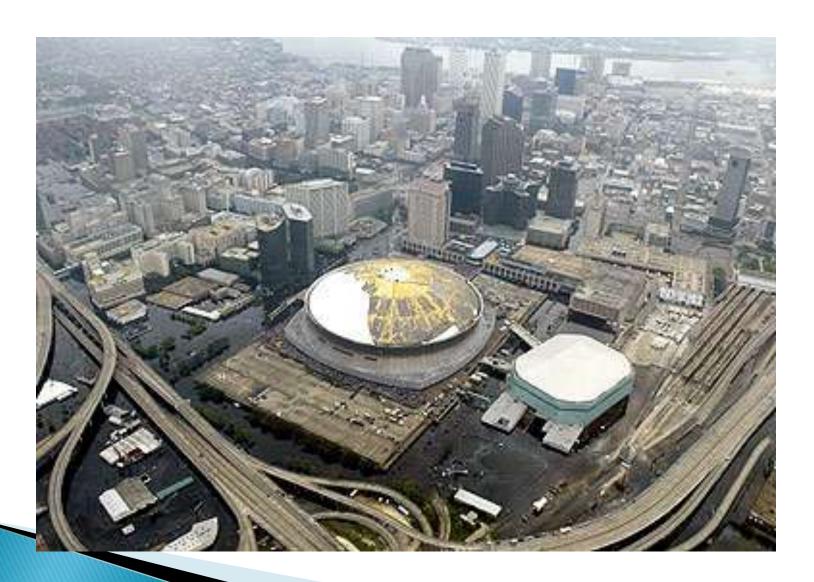
# Panic on 9/11?



#### Hurricane Katrina, Sept 2005

- Initial reports of mass looting, gang-rapes, and murders in Superdome, New Orleans
- But wildly exaggerated & not substantiated
  - crime rate in New Orleans actually dropped!
- Looting' or 'gathering essential supplies'?
  - subjective (and often racist) judgement made
- Local Police chief resigned when scale of exaggeration emerged

#### Fear of mob has fatal results?



# Cultural variations in resilient responses?

- Common belief that lack of panic due to specific national identity (e.g. 'British Bulldog spirit') & panic would happen elsewhere
- But little evidence to support this!
- Some minor cultural variations in responses to disasters & existing inequalities may be enhanced, but people usually remarkably resilient
- During 2004 Asian tsunami, co-operation between locals & tourists during emergency
  - but common ID diminished once danger passed

#### Variations in resilience?

- Communities who experience small disasters tend to cope better with big ones later
- Older Japanese coped better with Tsunami, as had developed resilience from previous earthquakes, WW2 etc
- Some responses by authorities (eg forced evac during Fukushima) could be more harmful than leaving it up to individual choice
- Some public responses to perceived radiation threat not necessary & potentially maladaptive
  - But mixed media messages & lack of public trust in nuclear industry post Chernobyl

#### The Politics of resilience

- Possible rhetorical nature of resilience during national emergencies (WWII, 9/11, 7/7 etc)
- But vulnerability model still assumed
- Need to ensure that resilience not used as excuse for not taking public protection seriously
- Or justification for cutting post disaster psycho-social support
- Resilience doesn't mean absence of distress/disruption!

#### The Politics of resilience



## Where am I going with this?

- Focus on resilience in clinical settings usually personal/developmental
- Need to focus on collective resilience & how it can be a general process
- So I plan to look at how common ID that SIMCR predicts may shield from stress/trauma from one-off incidents & ongoing chronic stressors

## Summary

- Concept of mass vulnerability in face of stress largely a myth
- Collective resilience seems to be predominant response to disasters & may be of use in future psycho-social care
  - Collective not pathological, & perhaps 'the social cure'
- How to encourage such collective resilience?
- Any comments/ideas, interest in research collaboration most welcome!

#### Refs/ links

- http://cocking.socialpsychology.org/
- http://dontpaniccorrectingmythsaboutthecro wd.blogspot.com/
- Cocking C (forthcoming Nov 2012) Collective resilience versus collective vulnerability after disasters – a Social Psychological perspective In Arora, R (ed) Disaster Management: A Medical Perspective
- Jetten et al (2011) The Social Cure