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# Multitudes Gather: An Overview and Analysis of the Evolution of Research Concerning Crowd Behavior

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# Multitudes Gather: An Overview and Analysis of the Evolution of Research Concerning Crowd Behavior

## **Abstract**

Crowds oftentimes behave in ways that are considered abnormal. This study sought to understand why crowds behave so differently from individuals acting alone. This was accomplished by tracing the evolution of research regarding crowd behavior from its beginnings within the nations of France and Italy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century all the way to contemporary time. Crowds were defined as psychological occurrences and categorized according to the research of Roger Brown and Neil Smelser. In order to explain theory regarding crowd behavior, this study focused on the research conducted by Le Bon, Festigener, Pepitone, Newcomb, Zimbardo, Diener, Prentice-Dunn, and Rogers. The research of all of these individuals together evolved from its focus on the existence of a collective mind within crowds into the classic de-individuation theory and later into the contemporary de-individuation theory. Crowd behavior is seen as being caused by a complex web of variables driven by the environment and situation of the time. Research regarding crowd behavior is continually evolving.

## **Cover Page Footnote**

The Faculty Mentor for this paper was Ryan Darrow, Psychology.

When multitudes of people gather together and begin acting in unison towards a common goal, one of the most fascinating of all psychological phenomenon begins to emerge—a crowd is formed. The word crowd conjures up many images. On the one hand, one may envision a violent mob full of unruly protesters and rioters storming down the middle of the street or, on the other hand, one may think of celebratory gatherings comprised of harmless, peaceful participants. One thing is for certain though, something different, something seemingly mysterious and powerful happens when unique members within humanity begin converging to form a crowd. It is often times within the context of a crowd that the lines between right and wrong become blurred or even made completely irrelevant. Inversely, it is often within the context of a crowd that some of humanity's greatest heroes are emboldened to arise. This begs the question, why? What is so special about a crowd of people as opposed to the individuals who comprise it acting alone? In his book *The Lucifer Effect* Philip Zimbardo makes the statement:

You probably think of yourself as having a consistent personality across time and space that is likely not to be true. You are not the same person working alone as in a group... (2007a, p. 8).

Why do we behave so differently when we are part of a group of people rather than when we are acting as an individual? Many people think of a crowd simply as a gathering of people in the same place at the same time. However, this is an overly simplistic definition for crowds. A crowd is so much more than a simple quantitative being. Sometimes they are volatile and sometimes they are placid. They are oftentimes celebratory and, at the same time, they oftentimes commit unthinkable acts of violence. There is a psychological dynamic at play during the entire construction and operation of crowds that must not be ignored. Research regarding crowd behavior is an exciting field of study that is ever evolving.

## When Did Researchers First Begin to Study Crowd Behavior?

Before diving headfirst into the psychological forces one can find coming to play in both the construction and operation of a crowd, the author finds it necessary to first begin with a general insight into the origins and history of the study of crowd psychology. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact beginning or birth of crowd psychology as a field of academic research. One could argue that its beginnings can be traced all the way back to the mid-19th century with the emergence of sociology, psychology, and political science as recognized fields of academic study. One could go a step further and say that since crowd behavior and its potential hazard to governing forces has been discussed within even the most ancient history and literature, that crowd psychology has always played a role in society. However, the author feels the most accurate pinpoint of origin for the study of crowd behavior within the field of psychology would be the 1890s within the nations of France and Italy; it was then that the first major studies concerning crowd psychology were published (Ginneken, 1992).

Psychologist, Jaap Van Ginneken, published his influential research in 1992 on the history and dynamics of crowd psychology. In his book, entitled *Crowds, Psychology, and Politics, 1871-1899*, Ginneken makes the following assertion:

Although dozens of minor fragments and smaller articles were devoted to crowd theories during subsequent years, only three authors are usually identified having published the first larger papers or books on the subject. These are the Italian Sighele, whose book *La Folla Delinquente* (the criminal crowd) was published in 1891, the French Le Bon, whose book *Psychologie des Foules* (*The Crowd*) was published in 1895 and the Frenchman, Tarde, who published two major articles in 1892-3 and two more in 1898-9 (1992, p. 6).

Therefore, these three men should be considered the founding fathers when it comes to the scientific study of crowd behavior. As time advanced, researchers would build upon, contest, and branch outward from the foundation built by these three early researchers, but the original foundation built by these three men deserves to be recognized. To this day research concerning crowd behavior is an evolving endeavor.

### **How is Crowd Defined?**

Before continuing with a discussion on the research of crowd psychology, it is necessary to have an understanding of the basic anatomy of crowds and their main operating features. According to Le Bon, (1896) crowds are much more than the physical presence of the individuals who comprise them; a crowd is best defined as a psychological occurrence rather than a physical one.

Le Bon referred to a psychologically defined crowd as an organized crowd in which the individuals comprising the crowd in essence lose their individuality and become one organized being with the characteristics of the individuals lost to the characteristics of the crowd. According to Le Bon, this loss of individuality is key to the formation of a psychologically defined crowd; a psychologically defined crowd is not a matter of quantity nor the coincidental simultaneous gathering of multitudes. "A thousand individuals accidentally gathered in a public place without any determined object in no way constitutes a crowd from the psychological point of view" (Le Bon, 1896, p. 13). More will be discussed on Le Bon's research and how it has evolved later, but for now let it be known that for the purpose of this paper a crowd is operationally defined as a psychological occurrence happening under the condition in which a multitude of people are present.

In the following paragraphs of this paper, the author has tried to bring greater understanding towards the psychology behind crowd behavior. In order to do this it is necessary to understand the distinction between what sociologist, Robert Ezra Park, termed the public and what the author defines as a crowd. According to Park, the public, like crowds, are comprised of multiple people. However, he considered the public to be a body marked by its tendency, or capability, towards rational thinking, whereas crowds have a tendency to be marked by, "uncritical, impulsive, and anarchical processes..." (McPhail, 1991, p. 6). Future researchers would dispute many of Park's claims, but he did point out an important feature about crowds—they act and behave differently from the public.

French social scientist, Gabriel Tarde built upon this definition with his suggestion that whereas crowds have been an operating part of humanity since the beginning of time, the public is only the result of technology. Tarde emphasized the need for individuals to be physically present within a gathering in order to constitute a crowd. On the contrary, the public is "...given cohesion only by participants' awareness they share some idea" (McPhail, 1991, p. 7). Consequently, according to these early researchers, due to the need for physical presence one can be a member of multiple publics at the same time but only one crowd (McPhail, 1991).

### **How Are Crowds Categorized?**

Under the umbrella term of 'crowd' falls many different subdivisions or types of crowds. The taxonomy of crowds is highly subjective; how a crowd is precisely subdivided largely depends on whose research one consults. Roger Brown suggested crowds should first be subdivided into two main categories, referred to as active and passive crowds or as mobs and audiences (see table 1 in the appendix) with each being further divided into their own sub-categories (Durupinar, 2010).

The category of audience encompasses what Brown referred to as both casual audiences and intentional audiences. A casual audience is an unintentional gathering of people whose interest suddenly becomes piqued by some, possibly abnormal, event or happening. Suppose for instance, an unmanned drone began flying over a small suburban neighborhood. A group of curious onlookers begins to accumulate—their eyes glued to the sky in polarized wonder. This group of peaceful, curious onlookers who never planned on gathering together would be an example of a casual audience. What is an intentional audience? An intentional audience is like a casual audience in that it is comprised of passive, harmless onlookers. However, it differs from casual audiences in that it is a planned gathering. Intentional audiences can be further divided into recreational audiences and information seeking audiences. Recreational audiences are comprised of people who come together for a fun or recreational purpose, such as attending a ball game. An information seeking audience is comprised of individuals who have gathered together in order to obtain some type of information. An example of this type of audience would be a group of people attending a seminar (Durupinar, 2010).

Brown's category of active crowds (or mobs) is somewhat more complicated than audiences. An active crowd is comprised of four main subcategories, aggressive mobs, escape mobs, acquisitive mobs, and expressive mobs. As the name implies, aggressive mobs are marked by their intensive tendencies towards anger or outrage. Under this category of mobs fall three subcategories, lynchings, terrorizations, and riots. The thought that most readily comes to mind at the word lynching would likely be the atrocities committed against African-Americans during the 19th and 20th centuries most often by angry mobs of white Southerners. It seems axiomatic why Brown placed lynching under the category of aggressive mob. Terrorizations are similar to lynching. However, lynching is an act committed by a mob against one individual whereas

terrorizations are actions committed by mobs against multiple individuals. On the other hand, "riots are directed against a collectivity and they are urban as opposed to lynchings and terrorizations, which are rural disturbances" (Durupinar, 2010, p. 48).

Like aggressive mobs, escape mobs are also guided by an urgent sense of emotion. However, aggressive mob are guided by the emotion of anger, whereas escape mobs are guided by the emotion of fear. In a nutshell, escape mobs are panicked mobs. In a mob guided by panic there is no sense of order. Brown defines panic as "... emotional and irrational. The escape behavior of the fear-driven mob must either be maladaptive from the point of view of the individual, or, if personally adaptive, the behavior must ruthlessly sacrifice the interests of others who also seek to escape" ("Mob Psychology," 2004). In other words, escape mobs are bent on surviving some perceived sense of danger no matter the cost. The irony is that in an effort to escape danger, these mobs have the potential to become an even greater hazard in and of themselves.

The last two categories under active crowds are acquisitive and expressive mobs. Acquisitive mobs are guided by sense of competition formed around a desire to acquire an object of limited quantity. An example of this type of mob would be the phenomenon that can sometimes be found during holiday seasons due to companies promoting rarely found deals for items contingent upon the consumer being one of the first in line ("Mob Psychology," 2004). Expressive mobs, on the other hand, are guided by the crowd's desire to express something, such as a value, purpose, or belief, deemed important by the members of the crowd. This expression can be either negatively or positively guided. For example, an expressive mob could consist of members striking against capital punishment or, on the other hand, it could consist of members

of a city parade there simply to express enjoyment and pride in their community (Durupinar, 2010).

However, as the author mentioned previously, this categorization system is highly subjective and certainly up for argument. For instance, some researchers, such as sociologist Neil Smelser argued for a different classification schema. In his research, Smelser did not use the term crowd but rather collective action. Smelser defines collective action as "mobilization on the basis of a belief which redefines social action" (Smelser, 1962, p. 8). He believed the best way to effectively and accurately categorize collective action was to know for what purpose the collection of people are gathered. Smelser divided groups into the following categories, "value-oriented movements, norm-orientated movements, hostile outbursts, and crazes and panics" (Bourgeois and Harton). Smelser defined these categories in the following way:

The value-oriented movement is collective action mobilized in the name of a generalized belief envisioning a reconstitution of values; the norm-oriented movement is selective action mobilized in the name of a generalized belief envisioning a reconstitution of norms; the hostile outburst is action mobilized on the basis of a generalized belief assigning responsibility for an undesirable state of affairs to some agent; the craze and the panic are forms of behavior based on a generalized redefinition of situational facilities (Smelser, 1962, p. 9).

Smelser did not completely dispute Brown's taxonomy of crowds but rather changed the focus of importance within his own research. When Brown was attempting to classify gatherings of people he focused on size, how often the participants met, the tendency of participants within groups to become like-minded, and how the participants were psychologically identified within the group (Smelser, 1962). Smelser, on the other hand, placed his focus on strains within

the structure of society. Smelser wanted to know for what reason, for what purpose, a group gathered. His research indicated that due to strains within society, groups often gathered in order to reconstitute some aspect of social action (Smelser, 1962). Through comparing Smelser's and Brown's typologies of crowds, the reader has hopefully gained a greater appreciation of the complexity that can be seen in this field of research. In recent years, however, psychologists have placed less importance on researching typology of gatherings and more importance on theoretical orientation (Bourgeois and Harton).

### **An Introduction to the Evolution of Thought Regarding Crowd Behavior**

A quintessential question that researchers of crowd behavior seek to answer is simply: How does crowd behavior develop? Through the years research regarding crowd behavior has grown and developed. The previous pages provided the necessary informational framework for an effective discussion of this evolution of thought regarding crowd behavior. The goal of studying this ever-evolving research is to gain a better understanding of why humans have the potential to behave in a manner within the context of a crowd that would most likely be considered untypical to their natural tendencies when they are acting outside of the context of a crowd.

### **Collective Mind Foundation**

The idea of a collective mind guiding crowd behavior is the brainchild of the French social scientist, Gustave Le Bon. Le Bon's contributions to the social sciences are many and far reaching. Within his lifetime he authored over 40 books and 250 articles over a wide range of topics. Originally, Le Bon's mission was to become a medical physician and he obtained his medical degree in 1866. However, shortly after receiving his degree, he decided that he was more interested in being a researcher than in practicing medicine (Perry, 2003). His research is

astounding in its variety. His research included, but was not limited to, a study of theoretical physics, Arab and Indian civilization (Wernick, 2006), atomic energy, physical anthropology ("Biography of Gustave" 2004), tobacco smoke, social movements, military problems, and crowds (Perry, 2003). However, he is most widely recognized for his study on crowds through his book *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* published in 1897. This book contains his revolutionary research on crowd behavior.

Le Bon was fascinated with understanding the psychological processes at work within the context of a crowd. He proposed that a crowd forms an entirely different entity altogether from the individuals composing it; all of the unique individuals with their unique ways of thinking, expressing emotion, and perceiving life altogether in essence mend together and form a new type of collective mind in which the individuals lose their self-identity and assume the identity of the crowd. Le Bon compared this transformation from being a solo individual to simply a member within a crowd to the chemical reaction that occurs when two or more elements are combined to form an entirely new body which is often times incomparable to its original constituents and to the cells comprising a living being. Each individual cell acting alone is entirely different from the new being that is formed from all of these cells acting together. Therefore, according to this line of thinking, it would be illogical to expect an individual that is a part of a crowd to behave in the same manner that he or she would were this person acting alone. After all, a crowd is an entirely new being no longer operating under the same rationale as its individual components (Le Bon, 1895).

According to Le Bon, this new collective mind is guided by the unconscious. He proposed that although people differ greatly in matters of intelligence and the ability to logically reason, most within humanity experience similar emotions, passions, and a sense of morality. "It

is precisely these general qualities of character, governed by forces of which we are unconscious, and possessed by the majority of the normal individuals... that in crowds become common property" (Le Bon, 1896 p. 16-17). In essence, the conscious, rational mind of the individual is now controlled by the unconscious, irrational mind of the crowd. Because of this swap from conscious to unconscious, reason to emotion, Le Bon considered the collective mind of crowds to be highly unintelligent.

It would be reasonable to think that this collective mind formed by crowds would still be capable of rational intelligent thought if all or most of the individual components were normal intelligent individuals. Le Bon argued that this was not the case and that the collective mind forms totally new characteristics that are often times alien to the normal behavior of the individuals (Le Bon, 1896). How can these new characteristics be accounted for? Le Bon credited the following three elements for their formation: anonymity, contagion, and suggestibility (Postmes, 2007).

According to Le Bon the sense of anonymity experienced by members within a crowd alleviates their sense of personal responsibility for their actions. No longer guided by a sense of responsibility, members of a crowd rely on raw instinct to direct their actions. He argued that every opinion, every action, of the crowd becomes contagious to all. This sense of contagion within a crowd then enables its members to deny their own true interests in favor of the expressed interests within the crowd. This unstable mindset created by crowds makes them highly susceptible to suggestion. Because the members within a crowd have in essence lost their sense of self and the ability to direct their own actions they now follow the suggestions of the crowd no matter how much these actions contradict their normal behavior. Because of this loss

of rationality and reliance upon instinct Le Bon considered crowds to be highly primitive beings and even referred to their participants as barbarians (Le Bon, 1895).

As influential as Le Bon's work was to the study of crowd behavior, it was marked by flaws. The most profound was his claim that "*all* collective behavior was irrational" (Postmes, 2007 p. 234). In fact, modern research indicates that the opposite is true; within most types of collective behavior, even gatherings marked by violence, one can find somewhat of a sense of order. When there is violence within a crowd it is not guided by chaos or a primitive regression back to instinct, but by consensus—members of a violent crowd act (sometimes in hideous ways) against what is seen as a common target (Postmes, 2007).

### **De-individuation Theory**

As time elapsed, Le Bon's idea of a collective mind would evolve into what would later be termed the theory of de-individuation. Scholars Leon Festinger, Albert Pepitone, and Theodore Newcomb first used the term de-individuation in 1952 in an attempt to further explain crowd behavior (Postmes, 2007). Like Le Bon, these three scholars realized that crowds have the potential to behave in a manner considered abnormal for the individuals composing it. Festinger et al. attributed this behavior to a loss of accountability experienced by members within a group. They believed that "under conditions where the member is not individuated in the group, there is likely to occur for the member a reduction of inner restraints against doing various things" (Postmes & Spears, 1998, p. 239).

**Festinger, Pepitone, and Newcomb.** This early version of the de-individuation theory was in many ways similar to Le Bon's theory. After all, although Le Bon did not use the specific term de-individuation, he did believe that members within a crowd lost their self-identity. However, Festinger et al. parted from Le Bon in one key area; they did not believe that the

individual self was superseded by a collective mind as Le Bon did. Rather, they hypothesized that this removal of self in essence removed all or most moral restraints. Thus, they believed much the same as Le Bon that crowds create a kind of anonymity to which individuals lose much of their sense of personal responsibility. Therefore, individuals are no longer guided by a sense of personal moral restraint. The part within the hypothesis of Festinger et al. that marked a major milestone in crowd theory, however, was their insistence that the anomalous behavior often seen within the context of a crowd is not induced nor directed by a collective mind taking the place of the rational individual as Le Bon had believed, but was, in essence, the result of this loss of individuality in and of itself. With the reduction of individuality experienced by crowds also comes a major reduction or a complete loss of individual reasonability, individual blame, and individual moral restraints. This lack of a guide is what drives the new entity of a crowd to behave in a manner in which the individuals composing the crowd may have never imagined themselves capable (Postmes & Spears, 1998).

**Zimbardo.** Largely due to the efforts of social psychologist, Philip Zimbardo, the theory of de-individuation has continued to be developed and evolve past the original work conducted by Festinger et al. Zimbardo wanted to understand what elements or variables led to a de-individuated mindset. Zimbardo reiterated the research of Le Bon and Festinger et al. by specifying anonymity and a diffusion of responsibility as variables leading to de-individuation, but he also attributed de-individuation to many other variables such as but not limited to, "arousal, sensory overload, novel or unstructured situations," (Postmes & Spears, 1998, p.239) "group size and activity" and "altered temporal perspective" (so that the focus is more on the here and now than on the past or future) (Douglas, 2010, p. 192).

Zimbardo differed from prior researchers in that he did not view de-individuation as applying only to groups or crowds; he also applied this theory to anti-normative acts, such as suicide or murder, committed by individuals apart from a group. Throughout the 1970's Zimbardo was responsible for several experiments regarding de-individuation. Similar to the now infamous Milgram obedience studies, Zimbardo conducted several experiments in which he tested the participants' willingness to act with aggression toward other participants. Zimbardo's experiments differed from Milgram's, however, in the fact that Milgram's experiments were geared towards testing the participants' willingness to act in aggression in accordance with obedience to an authority figure and Zimbardo's experiments were geared towards testing the participants' willingness to act in aggression after being dressed in manner conducive to a de-individuated mind set. Zimbardo wanted the aggressors in his experiments to be dressed in manner that would inspire a feeling of anonymity (Douglas, 2010; Postmes & Spears, 1998).

In multiple experiments he divided the aggressors into different groups; in one group the aggressors were dressed in a white-hooded lab uniforms similar to those used by the Ku Klux Klan and in the other group the aggressors were not placed in a uniform but were simply required to wear an identifying nametag. The aggressors were then asked to give an electric shock to the subject of the experiment. This order was in no way enforced, for Zimbardo simply wanted to know if the aggressor's de-individuating uniforms would in any way affect their willingness to act out in aggression towards the subjects. Unbeknownst to the aggressors, the experimental device (known as a Buss aggression machine) did not actually produce a shock as they had been led to believe. The experiments found that the aggressors who had been de-individuated were much more willing to shock the subjects for a longer period of time than the

aggressors whose identity was made obvious through use of a nametag and regular clothes (Douglas, 2010; Postmes & Spears, 1998; Zimbardo, 1969).

By far Zimbardo's most well-known and far-reaching study was the Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE) conducted in the basement of Stanford University in 1971. Zimbardo and his two graduate assistants, Curtis Banks and Craig Haney, wanted to conduct a social experiment that would help to explain the role that situational and institutional settings play in determining one's behavior (Zimbardo, 2007a). In order to do this, a mock prison was set up in the basement of Stanford University. This imitation prison, dubbed the 'Stanford County Prison,' was made to look as close to the real thing as possible. Several small rooms with bars on the doors and cots lining the walls were used to simulate prison cells and a small solitary confinement room was set aside to be used should it be necessary. An ad was placed in a newspaper asking for willing college students to participate in a psychological study for monetary compensation. Originally, the study was supposed to go on for two weeks; due to severe psychological trauma it was put to an end after six days (Haney & Zimbardo, 2007; Zimbardo 2007a).

From the students who answered the ad, only twenty-four were chosen to participate in the study. These students were not exclusively from Stanford but came from all over the country. They underwent in-depth psychological assessments in order to determine their fitness for the experiment in order to insure that none of them had any preexisting psychological problems. They were then randomly assigned to two separate groups; one group contained those who would act the part of prisoners and the other group contained those who would act the part of guard. The guards received next to no training on how to occupy their new role of guard. They were simply told that they must keep the prison in order and allow no escapes without actually

resorting to physical violence. They were however aware that the mock prisoners were students just like themselves who had committed no real crime (Zimbardo, 2007a).

The whole point of the experiment, however, was to create an atmosphere psychologically simulating that of a real prison and to see how this situation would help to create an entirely new mindset equal to that of a prisoner and a guard. Or, as Haney said, "Another way of looking at it is, you're putting good people in an evil situation to see who or what wins" (Zimbardo, 2007a, p. 33). In order to further ensure this atmosphere, those who would play the part of prisoner in this experiment were arrested and taken to the Stanford County Prison in actual police cars. (This was done without warning the prisoners that this would be a part of the experiment.) The drama that played out in the Stanford County Prison over the next few days would forever change the field of social psychology and, in the process, deepen our understanding of crowd behavior.

Both the guards and the prisoners were given new uniforms to wear; the prisoners were required to wear a simple smock with identifying numbers on it and the guards were required to wear a simple khaki uniform with deflecting sunglasses. Both of these uniforms were meant to inspire a de-individualized mind (Zimbardo, 2007a). At first, the situation could best be described as awkward. Neither the prisoners nor the guards were really sure how to act in their new position. This changed, however, when the prisoners acted out in rebellion by refusing to leave their cells. The behavior that issued forth from both the prisoners and the guards from this point on was astounding. They literally took on the persona of prisoner and guard and, in essence, that became their new identity. The guards now viewed the prisoners as a threat that needed to be dealt with and thus treated them in an increasingly abusive manner. In the beginning of the

experiment the prisoners resisted and rebelled against the authority of the guards. But the more the prisoners resisted, the more assertive and abusive the guards became (Zimbardo, 2007b).

The punishment tactics employed by the guards were hideous in nature. The guards were not allowed to use physical punishment but they used almost every type of psychological punishment imaginable. The prisoners were continually made to line up outside their cells and shout their ID numbers (this helped to create a de-individuated mind set in the prisoners). In addition, they were forced to strip naked and imitate acts of sodomy, they were chained together, and they were denied the basic physiological need for sleep. By the fifth day five prisoners had to be released because they were experiencing severe trauma. All of these prisoners were degraded and faced unimaginable humiliation and the experiment was put to an end by the sixth day. This begs the question how could these guards, a group of perfectly normal and good college kids, be capable of committing such despicable acts of evil? Indeed, this is the same question that the author has been asking throughout this entire paper. How do crowds composed of perfectly normal individuals sometimes engage in extreme riotous or violent behavior? Zimbardo asserts that this is most often not due to any type of innate evil within the individual. In fact, the majority of people possess an inherent desire to be their best. However the Stanford Prison Experiment shows us the power that situational forces have in overcoming this desire. Or, as Zimbardo would say, the prisoners and the guards were both good apples in a bad barrel (Zimbardo, 2007b).

**Diener.** As we have seen, Zimbardo's work focused largely on understanding what variables lead to a de-individuated mindset. He argued situational forces such as anonymity and a diffusion of responsibility largely promote de-individuation. After Zimbardo's experiments in de-individuation, Ed Diener continued to fill in the holes of our understanding regarding de-

individuation. Like Zimbardo, Diener believed that certain variables, such as anonymity and a diffusion of responsibility, can lead to a de-individuated mind set but he emphasized that this did not actually cause de-individuation. Diener argued that more focus needed to be given to understanding what was actually happening within a person's mind to establish de-individuation (Postmes & Spears, 1998). He believed that de-individuation is actually caused by a loss of object self-awareness within a person—but the variables that Zimbardo was concerned with (anonymity, etc.) were what leads to this loss of self-awareness. The variables which lead to de-individuation cause a shift in focus; one is suddenly less concerned with monitoring their behavior to ensure that it is congruent with societal norms and their own internal sense of morality (Douglas, 2010). However, Diener was less concerned with anonymity as a leading variable than Zimbardo was. In fact, in certain tests, anonymous individuals were found to be exhibiting fewer signs of aggression than identified individuals (Postmes & Spears, 1998).

For instance, in one experiment the participants were given an anonymity-providing uniform similar to those in the experiments conducted by Zimbardo and others. However, in this experiment the participants were found to display reduced signs of aggression. How could this experiment produce such marked differences from previous experiments? The uniform in which these participants were dressed was that of a nurse and nurses are thought of as caring individuals who would never purposefully harm another. Thus, it is thought that participants acted with less aggression because they were aware of what society considers normal behavior for nurses (Postmes, 2007).

### **Contemporary Interpretation of De-Individuation**

The theory of de-individuation discussed up until now is what many researchers refer to as the classic de-individuation theory. In the years since its birth, the theory of de-individuation

has continually been stretched, added to, and evolved into what is now referred to as contemporary de-individuation theory (Postmes & Spears, 1998). The differences between classic and contemporary theories of de-individuation might seem somewhat minute to the average person, but they are important to researchers. Most researchers today believe that not all crowd behavior is irrational nor are all individuals made completely irresponsible for their actions, as Le Bon had originally proposed. Crowd behavior today is viewed as looking chaotic from the outside but in reality possessing a high degree of organization. Crowd members are no longer assumed to have lost their own self-identities but to have gained a new group social identity. However, this new group identity is not guided by a new unconscious, irrational mind as Le Bon had thought, but by a new set of norms that develops within the crowd. Contrary to Le Bon's belief, people within a crowd, although affected by a great number of variables often times leading to de-individuation, are still capable of making conscious decisions (Postmes, 2007). However, in the context of crowd behavior, both classic and contemporary theories maintain their purpose—to explain why we often behave in abnormal ways within the context of a crowd (Postmes & Spears, 1998).

**Prentice-Dunn and Rogers.** Within the contemporary theory of de-individuation researchers, Prentice-Dunn and Rogers built upon Diener's work by further refining the concept of reduced self-awareness. These researchers believed that "there are two routes to disinhibited collective behavior" (Postmes & Spears, 1998, p. 240). These two "routes" are basically a form of reduced public self-awareness or a form of reduced private self-awareness. Public self-awareness is reduced due to variables in a crowd such as anonymity and a lessened sense of personal responsibility. Due to this lessened sense of public self-awareness a person tends to be less worried about what others are thinking about him or her. In addition, they do not usually fear

punishment for their actions. After all, everyone else is doing mostly the same thing as him or her. One's private self-awareness is reduced due to the sense of excitement, psychological arousal, and cohesion found within crowds. Due to this decreased sense of private self-awareness one tends to forget about their own moral standards for behavior which is why impulsivity is such a predominate feature within crowds (Douglas, 2010; Postmes & Spears, 1998).

### **Conclusion**

Throughout the course of this paper it has become clear that crowd behavior is not the result of a simultaneous convergence of a group of malcontents, but of a complex web of variables occurring in the right situation. Because of the work of dedicated researchers, we now see organization and predictability in crowd behavior when we once only saw chaos. Still, crowd behavior can be a difficult concept to come to terms with. When we flip through the pages of our history textbooks or turn on the news and see such examples as the riots playing out in Ferguson, Missouri or the infamously gruesome actions of the French Revolution it is very easy to place all blame on the individuals involved. When we see crowds behaving at their worst, it is easy to question the integrity of individuals and to think that our own moral compass is so strong that we would never behave in a similar manner. We seldom take into consideration the environmental and situational forces so powerful in creating a crowd-like mindset. This is not to say that we should excuse wrongful behavior within a crowd, but rather that we should not be so quick to perceive it as simply the result of innate character flaws within the individuals and instead attempt to understand what is driving this behavior. As time goes on the research regarding crowd behavior will continue to evolve and with it so will our understanding of why crowds often times behave so abnormally. With a better understanding of crowd behavior maybe we will more easily be able to alter our own actions should we find ourselves in a similar situation.

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## Appendix

Table 1

Roger Brown's classification of crowds (as cited in Douglas, 2010, p. 48).

