

Collective Behavior

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2002

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Chapter 6

Individualist Approaches to Collective Behavior

A different conception of collective behavior appeared not too long after the development of Contagion Theory (Chapter 2). Contagion theorists like LeBon and Blumer focused heavily on the process whereby an individual loses his or her ability to reason clearly and think rationally. Other theorists, to be discussed in this chapter, share a totally different sense of what goes on in a crowd. They believe that people only engage in behavior that they (as individuals) already possess some inner drive or tendency toward. Crowds do not drive people mad and crowd members do not lose their ability to think. On the contrary, crowds simply allow people to engage in behavior that they desire but normal circumstances do not permit. These theories are generically referred to as "Convergence Theories."

Convergence Theory focuses heavily on the characteristics and drives that individuals bring to a crowd. Convergence Theory argues that people in crowds only engage in those behaviors that they have an individual predisposition for (see Figure 6.1). Convergence theorists argue that individuals within a crowd are still individuals and if they act mad it is only because the presence of others allows them to do so. Collective behavior allows people to follow the true inner feelings that they normally repress in polite society. This explanation is *individualist* in the sense that it places the drive for collective behavior within the individuals. Situations do not create collective behavior, individuals do. When violent individuals gather, violent group

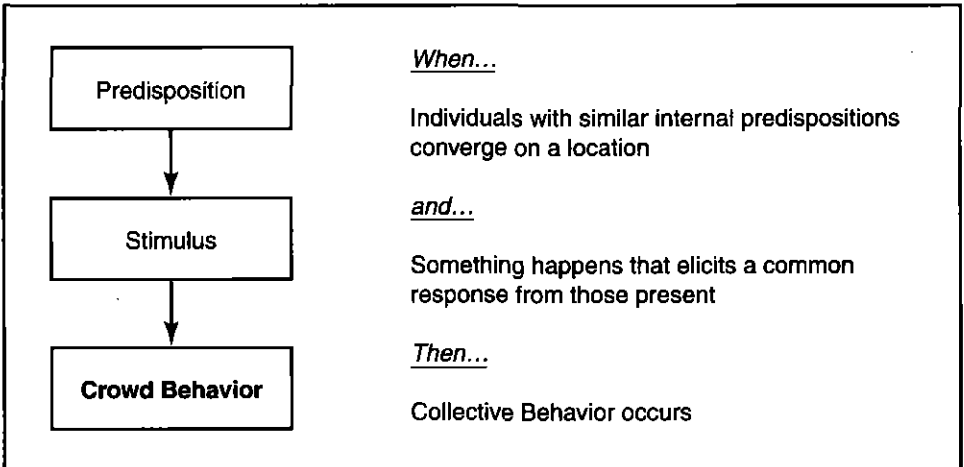


Figure 6.1 The general Convergence model of Collective Behavior

behavior becomes likely. *Collective behavior* is dictated by individual tendencies rather than by crowd circumstances. Convergence theorists focus most heavily on acts of mob violence such as riots and lynchings.

The Convergence perspective does recognize that people may be encouraged to act violent in some situations. However, they claim that those individuals who do not have an inner tendency toward violence will not engage in violent behavior no matter how strongly circumstances encourage it. According to Convergence Theory, a person's behavior in a crowd is ultimately dictated by his or her own inner drives:

Particular types of people *converge* in particular settings. Similar people are drawn together because they are attracted to the same events. The individuals who are in an art museum on a Monday afternoon probably have certain things in common with each other, just as those individuals who choose to go to a radical political rally are similar to each other in some ways. Members of each group share certain social characteristics and behavioral tendencies. This is why, convergence theorists argue, a riot is more likely to occur at a rock concert or certain types of political events than at an art gallery opening or during a church service. Individuals who are more likely to be attracted to a loud, exciting, and potentially violent event are psychologically different from those individuals who are attracted to quiet, reserved events. Since the individuals comprising the groups have different characteristics, each group has different characteristics. A crowd comprised of intoxicated young male concert fans is fundamentally different than a crowd of funeral attendees.

Convergence Theory began with Floyd Allport (1924). Miller and Dollard (1941) also popularized it in a different form. They emphasized social factors and appealed to then-popular ideas about human nature. In the United States, we seem to prefer to believe that individuals are responsible

for their own behavior at all times. For example, we believe that successful people possess inner characteristics that make them successful, and unsuccessful people lack these qualities. This outlook has made individualistic explanations for collective behavior quite popular with the general public since Convergence Theory first appeared in the early 1920s.

The basic premises of the convergence perspective can be summarized as:

1. People are not driven insane or transformed by a crowd. Individuals retain their core personality traits.
2. Even in a crowd situation people behave in ways that match their individual predisposition. For example, people with violent tendencies are likely to engage in violent behavior, peaceful individuals are not.
3. People with certain predispositions will tend to converge at particular events or at particular times and places. This means that members of crowds will tend to have various things in common with each other. Whenever people with a predisposition toward a particular behavior gather, that behavior could potentially occur within the crowd.
4. Collective behavior is nothing more than the mass release of those internal, individual tendencies or predispositions. These tendencies may be brought out or encouraged by circumstances, but no individuals will engage in a behavior that he or she does not possess a tendency toward. Individuals are not transformed by crowds, although they may be provoked or encouraged. This encouragement is enough to bring out the behavior in an individual who has a predisposition toward it. Those who do not will refuse to engage in the behavior no matter how strongly others encourage it.

The last point explains why some individuals seem to leap at the chance to engage in looting, while others do not. Some types of crowds seem willing to start a riot at the drop of a hat, while others will remain quiet and cooperative under extreme duress. No matter how much strain a situation puts on them, some people just do not engage in outlandish behavior. These behavioral differences are inside of us, and external circumstances can draw out the good, the bad, or the ugly within us.

This chapter is going to examine two forms of Convergence Theory. It concludes with an analysis of Social Identity Theory, a much more recent addition to the individualistic approach to collective behavior. Social Identity Theory is a hybrid theory that combines elements of the original Convergence perspective with elements of the Emergent Norm perspective (Chapter 3).

Floyd Allport

In the early 1900s, Floyd Allport began to formulate an explanation of collective behavior that was almost the opposite of the Contagion theorists. Allport began with the argument that "there is no psychology of groups which is not

essentially and entirely a psychology of individuals" (1924: 4). In other words, a group of people only possesses the qualities of the people who make up that group. If a number of impulsive, violent people gather together, they form an impulsive and potentially violent group. A group composed entirely of intelligent, thoughtful, and gentle individuals will be a group that acts intelligently, thoughtfully, and without violence. According to Allport there is no such thing as the "group mind" that LeBon and Park described (see Chapter 2). Allport argues that group phenomena such as collective behavior can only be explained through underlying psychological processes. Although individual action may be facilitated or even intensified by crowd dynamics, group behavior always originates within the individual drives of the crowd members.

Allport approached collective behavior from a much more psychological perspective than other collective behavior theorists of the time. He believed that individuals are always responsible for their own behavior, even in crowd settings. Like LeBon, Allport was horrified by the behavior that mobs and crowds sometimes engage in. Unlike LeBon, Allport believed that normal people would never perform such behavior regardless of the circumstances. He argues that crowd members are not mentally impaired by those around them. Rather, they sometimes allow their own worst impulses to rise to the surface. Allport sought to explain crowd behavior without letting individuals off the hook for their behavior. The result was Convergence Theory.

Allport's Convergence Theory

According to Allport, although the excitement or confusion of a crowd may encourage individuals to engage in particular behaviors, people only engage in behavior that they are inclined toward in the first place. No amount of pressure, confusion, or reinforcement from others could lead a person into behavior that he or she did not already have the capacity to engage in alone. If someone engages in violent behavior in a crowd, it is because that person has violent tendencies. People only engage in behaviors for which they have a *predisposition*. These individual predispositions, added together, determine the behavior of a group.

If people always gathered randomly, we would expect behavioral predispositions to be irregular, and collective behavior would never occur. A few people within a crowd might engage in a behavior, but the rest would not join in. The result would always be wide variations of behavior within any group. However, not all crowds are haphazardly formed. Key to Allport's theory is the idea that many groups do not form randomly or by accident. People are often in particular places at particular times for a reason. Those who *converge* at particular events are likely to share certain predispositions. This convergence explains why certain groups act with unity: they are made up of individual people who share certain behavioral tendencies in common.

Allport states that there are two basic types of innate human responses, "avoidance" and "approach." He views *all* human behavior as a learned modi-

fication of these two responses. We *avoid* anything that is unpleasant and *approach* anything that is interesting or desirable. Allport sees everything we do as a learned version of this. Everyday behavior is dictated by our drives to avoid anything negative and seek out anything positive. We will attempt to overcome anything that interferes with these drives.

Convergence occurs when people are brought together by a common interest in overcoming interference with some response they have learned in order to satisfy their drives. In other words, people are interested in the same thing so they go to the same place. In this way, a group of like-minded individuals is formed. Those individuals who are least inhibited are likely to act first. Their behavior acts as a model for other members of the group, encouraging them to drop their own inhibitions. This process of modeling behavior is called "social facilitation." If the majority of group members share a predisposition for that particular behavior, it will appear to observers as if the entire group spontaneously decided to do the same thing. If the majority do not possess that particular tendency, the behavior will not catch on within the group.

From Allport's perspective, both of these situations are examples where individuals behave according to their own internal disposition. Although they are influenced by external facilitation, ultimately it is their own internal drives that determine whether or not they join in. A crowd can only engage in violent behavior if the majority of crowd members possess violent tendencies. Therefore, if a crowd does turn violent, it is because the individuals within the crowd were violent people before joining the crowd. People will only engage in behavior for which they have a predisposition. External cues such as social facilitation merely reinforce the internal impulse.

However, Allport does believe that crowd formation makes individuals much more likely to follow impulses that they would normally keep hidden or even remain unaware of. He believes that humans are conditioned to submit to the will of the majority. This goes all the way back to the "primitive ascendance of direct physical power": We instinctively follow the majority because we fear what they may do to us if we do not comply.

Further, people believe that it is okay to engage in behavior that they might normally suppress because they manage to rationalize their own participation. In *Social Psychology*, Allport states that people go through a three-step process in convincing themselves that it is desirable to engage in behavior within the group that is normally socially condemned:

1. "Even if I get caught, they can't punish me without punishing *everybody*, which is impossible" (1924: 312, emphasis in original).

The individual falsely convinces him- or herself that the sheer number of fellow group members protects him or her from punishment. This is not the same as anonymity. The person is not worried about being identified, because they believe that any punishment of specific individuals would be unjust. They feel untouchable.

2. "Such large numbers of people can't be wrong" (312).

This goes back to Allport's claim of our inherent conditioning to follow the will of the majority. Looking around, we simply convince ourselves that such the behavior must be acceptable if so many other people are doing it.

3. "Since so many will benefit by this act, it is a public duty and a righteous deed" (313).

"So many people" refers to the other members of the group. Allport believed (like LeBon) that crowd members not only engage in socially condemned behavior, they somehow convince themselves that it is a great or honorable thing to do. In Allport's theory, this is achieved by thinking of other group members as comrades of a sort. If the behavior is desired by all of them, and they seem to think that it's a good idea, then taking part in the behavior is to all their benefit and therefore an act of public duty.

None of these rationalizations force people to do anything that they do not possess the drive to do. They are encouraged to choose one potential behavior over another, but the behavior must exist within them as a predisposition in the first place.

Summary

Allport saw collective behavior as the group release of innate individual behavioral tendencies. People with similar predispositions tend to converge and form groups due to their similar interests and similar learned techniques for satisfying innate drives.

From the Convergence Theory perspective, the crowd does not drive sane people to madness. A "mad" crowd is driven by people sharing similar anti-social tendencies.

Neil Miller and John Dollard

In *Social Learning and Imitation* (1941) Neil Miller, a psychologist, and John Dollard, a social anthropologist, took Allport's theory one step further. Applying even more specific psychological principles to human behavior, they created what they called "Learning Theory." Their goal was to create an integrated science of human behavior. Although Learning Theory does not focus exclusively on collective behavior, Miller and Dollard did dedicate more than one chapter of their book to analyzing of crowd behavior, including a well-documented lynching.

Learning Theory is different from Allport's Convergence Theory only in its emphasis on the learned patterns behind individual behavior. It is the same in its reliance on the gathering or convergence of similar people into

groups, and on the theoretical assertion that individuals only engage in behavior that they possess a personal tendency toward.

Social attitudes changed between the 1920s and the 1940s. In Allport's time, individual behavioral tendencies were believed to be innate. Differences between different races, ethnicities, or social classes were often believed to be genetically inherited. Miller and Dollard, however, argued that these tendencies were simply learned responses to various drives. In other words, they believed that all humans had certain drives. As we grow up in society, we learn particular ways of satisfying these drives. Whereas Allport could be interpreted as arguing that members of certain social categories are inherently predisposed to behave in certain ways, Miller and Dollard argue that people have *learned* to behave in those ways.

Miller and Dollard's Learning Theory

According to Miller and Dollard, in order to learn a person must want something ("drive"), notice something ("cue" or "stimuli"), do something ("response"), and get something ("reward"). They argue that crowd behavior is nothing more than common responses to stimuli. In other words, when the members of a crowd act the same, it is because they have the same responses to their circumstances. Individuals have learned various responses to various stimuli as they have grown up in society. When faced with a cue, those individuals automatically respond in whatever way they have learned.

Like most other collective behavior theorists before the 1960s, Miller and Dollard focused heavily on violent crowds. In fact, they characterize "crowds and crowd-mindedness" as "a continual danger to an orderly social life" (1941: 218). They argue that aggressive or violent behavior is specifically driven by frustration. Frustration is caused whenever an individual is blocked from satisfying a drive. Miller and Dollard called this the "Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis," though it is now sometimes referred to as the "Deprivation-Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis." Individual deprivation causes aggression in the form of violent behavior.

Miller and Dollard began their analysis of crowd behavior with the statement, "People in a crowd behave about as they would otherwise, only more so" (1941: 218). Although they stated that the "more so" is at times extremely important, it is clear that they placed more emphasis on the idea that people behave according to their own individual tendencies, whether alone or in a crowd. When faced with a set of circumstances, people act in whatever way their learned patterns guide them.

What Miller and Dollard call "drive stimuli" and "crowd stimuli" determines the strength of individual responses to any cues. *Drive stimuli* are the excitation that a person experiences inside, regardless of whether others are present. They are the initial individual responses to any situation. *Crowd stimuli* have to do with the excitation created by other crowd members. The behavior of others provokes, encourages, or modifies the strength of response

from drive stimuli. In other words, when an individual notices something he or she has an immediate, internal reaction. This reaction is modified, magnified, or reduced by the behavior of others. Although circumstances might alter our behavior somewhat, we still behave according to our own individual tendencies. "Strength of response" is the measure of individual action taken under both of these stimuli. A person notices something, responds to it in whatever way he or she has learned to, and then sometimes modifies this response based on the action of others. The result is a majority of crowd members behaving in similar ways.

Miller and Dollard view collective behavior as any instance where a group of people engages in behavior that is in some way unusual or unexpected. They believe that all examples of collective behavior begin when a common stimulus (focus of attention) is noticed and responded to by a large part of the crowd. Once a common response occurs, the individuals begin to think of themselves as a group and other members of the crowd heavily influence their behavior. In other words, people first respond to something in whatever way their own personal, internal tendencies drive them. These drives are then modified by other members of the crowd (see Figure 6.2).

They argue that crowd stimulus is stronger under certain conditions. In fact, if the drive stimulus is sufficiently dangerous, frustrating, or aggression-provoking, crowd stimulus does not matter at all. For example, Miller and Dollard argue that if something explodes and bursts into flames, people run

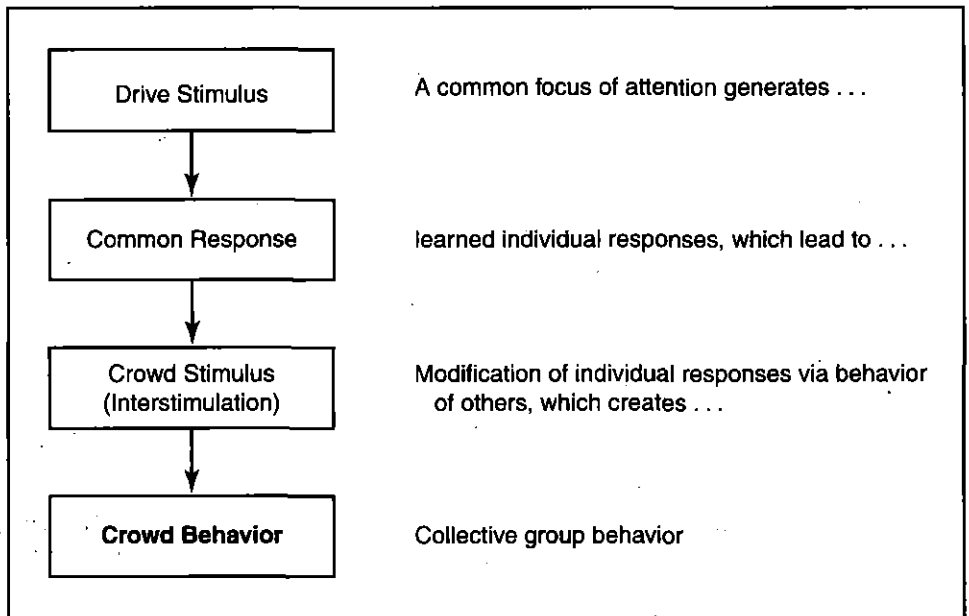


Figure 6.2 Miller and Dollard's model of Collective Behavior

from it, regardless of what others are doing. However, most of the time the drive stimulus is much more neutral, and this is when individual behavior is most influenced by group dynamics. Crowd stimulus is stronger and more important when crowd members experience *interstimulation*, *proximity*, *numbers*, *anonymity*, and leaders with a *prestige factor*.

Interstimulation

Interstimulation is the process that generates crowd stimulus. It refers to the actual excitement created by others. Miller and Dollard illustrate interstimulation by giving an example where it cannot occur: if a number of people who are blindfolded and wearing earplugs are placed in a room, interstimulation cannot occur. The ability to communicate, to see and hear each other, makes interstimulation possible.

Proximity

The closer people are to each other, the more they influence each other's behavior. Intense proximity tends to lead to intense interstimulation and, hence, intense crowd stimulus.

Numbers

The larger a crowd is, the more each member of the crowd feels protected. This reduces each member's self-editing of responses. More importantly, a large crowd makes each member feel as if others share his or her feelings and desires. Being surrounded by hundreds of like-minded individuals is enough to convince some people that the vast majority of society agrees with them about something. Miller and Dollard also argue that as we grow up we have learned to obey the will of large numbers of people for the sake of our own personal safety. We have learned that it is safer to go along with a large crowd than it is to go against it.

Anonymity

Miller and Dollard argue that large crowds make people feel anonymous. People have learned that they are less likely to be punished for their actions if their identity is unknown.

Prestige Factor

Finally, crowd stimulation is more intense when a crowd leader holds some sort of prestige as recognized by crowd members. Again, Miller and Dollard argue that this has been learned over time. As children we are taught to obey authorities. Parents and teachers consistently urge us to do as we are told. As a result, we grow up with a deeply rooted, learned response to obey the commands of anyone who seems like an authority figure.

Any or all of these factors can combine to increase crowd stimulus. However, it is important to remember that no matter how strong the crowd stimulus may be, it cannot create behavior that the individual does not possess a predisposition toward:

“Responses evoked by crowd excitation are ready-made. Apparently, no considerable amount of learning new responses takes place under crowd conditions” (1941: 228).

Miller and Dollard clearly believe that collective behavior is only possible when a crowd contains a majority of members who possess a predisposition to engage in that particular behavior.

Summary

Although Miller and Dollard place much more emphasis on the learned, rather than innate or inborn, nature of individual response, they still clearly accept the convergence model of collective behavior. Learning Theory views collective behavior as driven by the individual behavioral predispositions within the crowd. Those individual predispositions or tendencies have been learned over time. If violent people converge at a certain time and place and a drive stimulus occurs, they are likely to respond with violence. Crowd interstimulation will increase this tendency. On the other hand, a crowd of people who do not possess violent tendencies will not engage in violence, no matter what. It is simply not within their personal characters to do so. Each crowd's initial response to the drive stimulus will be different, and consequent crowd stimuli will reinforce and encourage that response.

Each of us has a certain repertoire of potential behaviors.⁷ We carefully choose among those potential behaviors when faced with mild or unexciting circumstances or stimuli. We have learned to engage in those behaviors that are most socially acceptable. However, when faced with unusually exciting stimuli we may initially react in a way that is socially unacceptable. If we are in a crowd of people, and if many of them also react in the same way, then crowd conditions encourage us to continue and perhaps even increase the behavior. Social conditions allow us to engage in behavior that we would normally repress. In this way, the crowd allows our inner tendencies to come out. No matter how we act on a regular basis, collective behavior allows us to follow our true inner feelings. Irrational people create irrational crowds, and quiet, calm people create quiet, calm crowds.

Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams

In the 1980s, there was an effort by Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams to modify and in some ways resurrect the individualist approach to collective behavior. Social Identity Theory argues that much of what we do is driven by

our self-images. These self-images exist in relationship to the social roles that we occupy. For example, if you are playing football, you act in ways that you believe a player should behave while playing football. When you are on a date, you act the way that you believe a date should behave. In every situation, whatever identity is called attention to will determine how we behave. Hogg and Abrams apply their own brand of Social Identity Theory to collective behavior.

Although they argue that convergence theorists are reductionist because they seek to explain the behavior of a group by looking at individuals, Hogg and Abrams' own version of Social Identity Theory is really a modification of the same individualist approach. In *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes* (1988) they argue that collective behavior is the result of the formation of a group identity within a crowd. Individuals orient their behavior according to this new identity.

Although Social Identity Theory seems at first glance completely different from the contagion theories, there is a clear link between Learning Theory and Social Identity Theory when applied to collective behavior. Argyle (1957) made an argument similar to Learning Theory when he stated that "suggestion" is best classified with "imitation," and both can be explained as behavior learned through the satisfaction of various needs. However, Argyle went on to state that "An individual (or group) is said to be exposed to 'threat' or 'ego-involvement' if he believes that he stands to gain or lose by his performance" (1957: 148). Argyle conceptualized people as performing roles in an attempt to impress others. He shared Miller and Dollard's focus on the satisfaction of needs, but creates a stepping stone to Hogg and Abrams by arguing that the need most commonly sought to be fulfilled is the need to be accepted or approved of by those making behavioral suggestions. In other words, people modify and monitor their behavior within a group in the hopes of achieving or maintaining acceptance from other group members.

Hogg and Abrams begin with the idea that we are influenced by others, and that our own behavior is often driven by social forces. However, like Miller and Dollard and Argyle, they also argue that the driving force behind collective behavior occurs mostly within the individuals involved.

Hogg and Abrams' Social Identity Theory

Hogg and Abrams seek to explain how a group of individuals can act collectively. They start with certain assumptions about the nature of society and the nature of people, and the interrelationship between people and society:

Hogg and Abrams characterize society as "a web of social categories." Each of these social categories has a level of power and status relative to all others. Social categories can include things like nationality, race, class, occupation, sex, religion, and so on. These categories only exist in relation to each other. For example, "male" is meaningless unless there are other gender categories to compare males to, and "upper-class" means nothing if there are no

classes below it. Categories can also come and go over time within any culture. "Computer programmer" is a social category that simply did not exist a few decades ago. Hogg and Abrams argue that people tend to create social groups based on their membership within these categories.

Hogg and Abrams assume that humans seek to impose order upon potential chaos: This is why we categorize. Categorization simplifies our world. It also creates connections between things in our minds. At times when these categories are apparent, the connections are accentuated. For example, if we are sorting objects by size, we pay more attention to size than if we were sorting them by color. The same is true for people. We pay more attention to gender when we are discussing anything that we associate with gender categorization, and so on. Hogg and Abrams argue that abundant evidence shows that those who place greater importance on a particular categorization tend to stereotype more extremely than others do. Prejudice is a form of rigid focus on categorization, usually by race, gender, religion and so on.

People derive their identity or self-concept in large part from the social categories to which they belong. Hogg and Abrams argue that there is no innate self. This totally separates their Social Identity Theory from Allport's Convergence Theory. Allport seemed to believe that the self is almost totally innate and unconscious. Hogg and Abrams' conception of the self is much more compatible with Miller and Dollard's Learning Theory, which placed so much emphasis on the learned nature of human response.

According to Hogg and Abrams, our self-concept is a composite of our personal identity and our social identity. *Personal identifications* are idiosyncratic descriptions of our self which emerge from interpersonal relationships. *Social identifications* are based entirely on category membership. For example, "brave" is a personal identity. "Fireman" is a social identity. "Brave fireman" is a self-concept based on personal and social identifications. Collective behavior may occur any time social identity becomes more important than personal identity. Members of the crowd think of themselves as "crowd members," and act accordingly. Category membership (the social identity) becomes more salient than personal identifications to crowd members who, for example, are being treated as a mass by police. Their collective identity leads them to engage in collective actions.

Hogg and Abrams define "collective behavior" as people cooperating to achieve a goal, in the same place at the same time, by acting as a group. A crowd is just a type of social group. The same processes of self-categorization and self-identification that drive individual behavior determine crowd action. In other words, as soon as the members of a crowd categorize and identify themselves as members of a crowd, they will consciously behave in ways that they believe are appropriate for members of that crowd. *Referent informational influence* takes place. All members of a group learn the norms and *critical attributes* necessary for group membership, and then try to fit that model of an ideal crowd member. Hogg and Abrams go on to state that categorization often occurs *prior* to crowd formation. People decide to become members

of the crowd before it forms. Similar people gather (converge) in particular times and places because they are interested in similar things. Football fans converge at football games, and so on. The O.J. Simpson trial provided an interesting example: people who were deeply concerned about the trial and hoping for a particular verdict gathered in restaurants and bars across the United States to watch the verdict among like-minded people. Hogg and Abrams argue that there are often distinctive or opposing groups already present in many situations. For example, audience members and security guards at a concert venue comprise two distinct categories, as do students and police officers at a college protest.

These factors (common interest, common social category membership) encourage identification with one's group, and make referent informational influence possible. As soon as any factor (idea, emotion, behavior, etc.) becomes a criterion for crowd membership, those who identify with the crowd assimilate the criterion. Crowd behavior is therefore driven by the creation of a new identity: "crowd member." Individual differences become less important to crowd members' social identity. They consciously choose to behave the same because they all want to act the way a crowd member is supposed to behave. Conformity to group norms is driven by conformity to one's self-definition. Interpersonal pressure is relatively unimportant: It is internal individual pressure that each person puts on him- or herself that creates unanimous crowd behavior (see Figure 6.3).

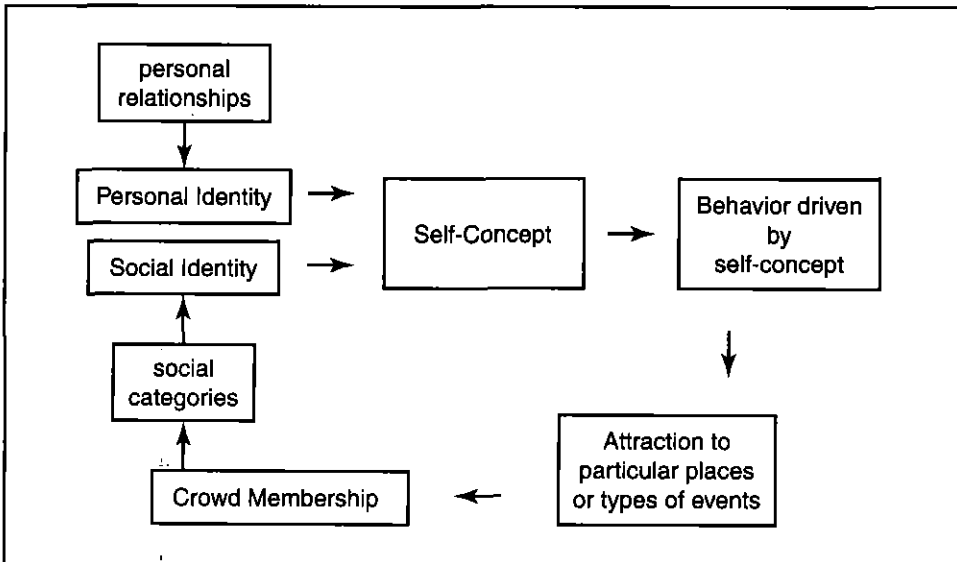


Figure 6.3 Hogg and Abrams' model of Collective Behavior

Summary

Hogg and Abrams' view collective behavior as an attempt by all crowd members to fit the category of crowd member. In this sense, their approach is individualist despite their protests that social forces are important to their theory. Social forces do nothing more than allow circumstances to come about whereby individuals feel compelled to fit the new identity. Further, Hogg and Abrams clearly accept the basic premise of Convergence Theory when they emphasize the importance of the fact that similar people often gather in the same place and time. Allport argues that these people shared common innate internal tendencies. Miller and Dollard argue that crowd members share common learned behavioral tendencies. Hogg and Abrams argue that they share common identifications, which lead them to common behavioral tendencies.

Discussion

Overall, individualist theories of collective behavior have had mixed success. Convergence Theory and Learning Theory never really led to much empirical research in sociology because the outcome is already decided before the research begins: the event occurred because of the internal tendencies of the crowd members. However, the basic idea that individual people are somehow responsible for their collective behavior appeals tremendously to those outside of social science. McPhail argues that the convergence perspective "probably has been the most pervasive and influential explanation of human behavior in the twentieth century" (1991: 226). This is because the general public latched onto the convergence perspective as a simple explanation for a complex phenomenon. It is much easier for most people to believe that "those people" (whoever they may be) are more violent or more irrational or more aggressive or more gullible than the rest of us.

Most other theories of collective behavior argue that circumstances alone drive otherwise normal people to do things that they would never do. Convergence Theory, Learning Theory, and Social Identity Theory all argue that circumstances simply allow people to do things that they want to do or were willing to do anyway. Therefore, the people in the crowd are to be held personally responsible for their actions. Even more importantly, such events are avoidable in the future if we simply try to prevent "those people" from forming large groups. The danger is believed to exist within particular people, not within social circumstances.

This argument seems blatantly false when one views American news clips and political speeches from the early 1970s. News anchors, politicians, and even the President of the United States all condemned "those college students" as a bunch of radical, spoiled, violent, and dangerous people. They were basing these descriptions on an individualistic approach to collective be-

havior. However, many of those who were active in the violent anti-war protests and race riots of the time are important leaders in U.S. business and politics today. Yesterday's "violent, spoiled, dangerous" revolutionaries are literally today's leaders, yet American business and society do not seem to be led by radical, spoiled, violent and dangerous people. Clearly, one cannot judge participants by their behavior within the context of collective behavior episodes.

Core Assumptions

Individualist theorists assume that there are always people with anti-social tendencies walking around. The potential for collective behavior exists whenever like-minded individuals converge. If the behavior is violent, individualist theorists assume that crowd members shared the potential for violent behavior. They also assume that the crowd encourages or enhances particular internal tendencies over others. Convergence Theory and Learning Theory both assume that a group of people is nothing more than an aggregate, that a group is nothing more than the sum of individuals. Social Identity Theory does assume that groups are more than just aggregates because they allow the creation of a whole new identity: group member. However, Social Identity Theory, like the other individualist theories, still assumes that individuals who attempt to fulfill some inner drive create the collective behavior. They even imply that those drives, the drive to fit into a group and the drive to fill a social identity as closely as possible, are innate (as stated by Argyle, 1957).

Evaluation

Ultimately, the individualist theories of collective behavior have lost most of their earlier popularity. Despite the efforts of Hogg, Abrams, and others (see Abrams and Brown 1989), the more structural/situational theories have won acceptance within the social sciences. Many have realized that theories based on internal predispositions and drives cannot explain why truly spectacular collective behavior occurs so rarely, nor why collective behavior does not occur every time people with similar dispositions gather in crowds.

The greatest problem lies in the concept of predispositions. It is inherently circular to assume that individual predispositions are revealed by crowd behavior. Allport, Miller and Dollard, and to a certain extent Hogg and Abrams all rely upon the same logical tautology: if a person behaves violently, it is because they have a predisposition toward violence. Allport specifically argues that the presence of the predisposition can only be revealed through behavior. There is no other way to successfully test for a predisposition. This means the so-called effect (the behavior) always has to show itself to us *before* the so-called cause (predisposition) can be apparent. This nonscientific approach to human behavior always leads to the conclusion that any crowd behavior reveals the innate or learned tendencies of the crowd members.

The other factor that has led to the relative unpopularity of individualist theories of collective behavior is the potential for snobbery or bigotry. Although none of the theorists discussed in this chapter ever use such language nor express such ideas, one can easily see how theories like Convergence Theory can be used by prejudiced individuals to support their own bigotry: collective behavior reveals inner drives, therefore those who take part in collective behavior are bad people. If a group of poor individuals riot, then poor people must be inherently violent. If members of a particular race are seen looting, then obviously "those people" will steal any chance they get. Such reasoning can go on and on, and only those who find themselves in crowd situations during collective behavior can disagree. However, the entire argument is based on the logical errors discussed above. The idea that crowd behavior reveals individual motivations and drives can lead directly to the condemnation of crowd members, and ultimately to all members of the same social categories as participants. This is exactly the same flawed thinking that would lead someone to conclude that all men are potential dangerous criminals, since prisons are full of men who committed violent criminal acts. Such reasoning is inherently illogical and ultimately does nothing to help those who seek to understand and predict collective behavior.