

The Role of Police Perceptions and Practices in the Development of "Public Disorder"^{1, 2}

JOHN DRURY³
University of Sussex
Brighton, United Kingdom

CLIFFORD STOTT
University of Liverpool
Liverpool, United Kingdom

TOM FARSIDES
University of Sussex
Brighton, United Kingdom

Recent studies suggest that crowd conflict needs to be understood as an interaction between the crowd and out-groups such as the police. This paper describes a questionnaire survey in which 80 police officers from 2 United Kingdom forces were asked about their perceptions of crowds, appropriate "public order" policing methods, and attributions of responsibility for crowd conflict. As predicted, police officers saw the composition of crowds as mixed; yet they also constructed a dichotomy between a powerful minority, capable of exerting influence in the service of disorder, and a majority, who are unable to resist this influence. Police officers did not clearly endorse the view that crowds pose a homogeneous threat. They recommended control and quick intervention to prevent the escalation of crowd violence but denied that such methods might themselves contribute to conflict. Path analysis provides suggestive evidence that these perceptions of the crowd are related as part of a coherent ideology. Overall, these results offer support for the elaborated social identity model of crowd behavior as a dynamic intergroup process.

Accounts from historical and other research disciplines agree that crowd behavior should be understood as normative rather than anti-normative (Thompson, 1991; Turner & Killian, 1987), as identity-related rather than deindividuated (Davis, 1978; Gaskell & Benewick, 1987), as historically generated rather than generic (Reddy, 1977; Rudé, 1995), and as a function of intergroup relations rather than individual characteristics (McPhail, 1991; Waddington, 1992).

In social psychology, the elaborated social identity model (ESIM; Drury & Reicher, 2000; Reicher, 1996a, 1996b, 1997; Stott & Reicher, 1998a) of crowd

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²The term "public disorder" is problematized throughout to acknowledge the contested nature of this category.

³Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to John Drury, Department of Psychology, University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton BN1 9SN, United Kingdom. E-mail: j.drury@sussex.ac.uk

behavior was developed to articulate these dimensions of normative structure, identity, historical situatedness, and intergroup context. The ESIM suggests that although crowd members may attend an event with given identities that in turn specify normative behaviors, such norms and identities can change over time through interaction with an out-group. Since the out-group in question is typically the police, any adequate explanation of crowd conflict must include not only the actions of crowd participants themselves, but also those of the police. The present paper contributes to a growing body of research aimed at addressing the police perspective in the explanation of crowd dynamics.

Crowd Conflict: An Elaborated Social Identity Model

The ESIM of crowd behavior is located within the social identity tradition. It is based on the tenets of social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1978) and self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). SIT suggests the notion of social identity itself, according to which identity is irreducibly social (defined in relation to others), rather than individual in origin and content. SCT adds that categorization is the psychological basis for self-stereotyping and hence shared norms, social influence, and collective behavior in general. The ESIM thus suggests that crowd members act in terms of social identity; that is, an understanding of their social location in a set of social relations along with the actions that are proper and possible, given such a location. The model further suggests that crowd events are intergroup encounters. Importantly, out-group members (e.g., the police) may understand the identity and actions of crowd members in ways that are different to crowd members themselves. For example, where crowd members see their sit-down protest as both harmless and a traditional (legitimate) part of demonstrating, police may define it as a threat to both public safety and public order, and hence to their own control.

The ESIM suggests that conflict can arise where (a) there is an asymmetry between the way in which the social location of crowd members is seen by crowd members themselves and by out-group members (cf. Waddington, 1992; Waddington, Jones, & Critcher, 1987, 1989), and (b) the out-group has the power to enact its understanding over and against the resistance of crowd members. Where the out-group defines the crowd action as illegitimate, its own action against the crowd is therefore not only possible, but also legitimate.

Once conflict has begun, the ESIM suggests that it can escalate through the change in the social location of crowd members that comes about through the out-group action. In the first place, where out-group action toward in-group members is perceived by the in-group as indiscriminate, then in-group members will come to define themselves as a common social category sharing a common relationship of threat in relation to the out-group. This may mean that previously

disparate subgroups and individuals come to see themselves increasingly as a single (superordinate) group or that an already existing single group may come to see itself as increasingly homogeneous. This in turn entails enhanced expectations of mutual support and hence power among the in-group, who now feel more able to respond to the out-group. In the second place, where out-group action is also perceived to be illegitimate in in-group terms, then in-group action against the out-group may be legitimized. Thus, for example, in-group action previously seen as violence may be redefined as self-defense. Furthermore, to the extent that in-group boundaries have been extended and action against the out-group legitimized, then in-group exemplars previously regarded as marginal for their hostility to the out-group may become prototypical and hence a source of social influence.

The role of normativity and identity as specified by the ESIM has been shown through a case study of an urban riot (Reicher, 1984) and a recent meta-analysis of laboratory studies (Postmes & Spears, 1998). The explanatory utility of the full ESIM has been shown through analyses of a variety of types of crowd events: public demonstration disorder (Drury & Reicher, 1999; Reicher, 1996a; Stott & Drury, 1999, 2000), football⁴ hooliganism (Stott, Hutchison, & Drury, 2001; Stott & Reicher, 1998b), and environmental mass direct action (Drury & Reicher, 2000). However, though each of these studies has stressed the importance of including the out-group perspective in a proper intergroup account of crowd conflict, data from out-group sources often have been fragmentary and incomplete relative to that of the in-group of crowd members. There are often impediments to the police providing the same kind of access offered by crowd members. In some cases, there may be legal reasons for the impediments (Canter, 1994); in other cases, the institution may see the researcher as a member of an antagonistic out-group and so will not want to cooperate (see Drury & Stott, 2001, for a full discussion of these issues).

Only one study in the series of research on the ESIM has been able to examine the police perspective in any detail. Stott and Reicher (1998a) provided a qualitative analysis based on a series of interviews with riot-trained police officers. This analysis identified a number of consistent themes. Although the officers described the composition of football and demonstration crowds as heterogeneous, they also characterized these crowds as comprising antisocial minorities powerful enough to exploit the potential mindlessness of the majority in the mass. While acknowledging that heterogeneity of composition implies differential treatment, understanding all crowd members as liable to become involved in disorder and therefore the crowd as a whole as dangerous implies the need for coercion against the crowd as a whole. Moreover, the analysis indicated how

⁴All references to *football* in the text refer to soccer, rather than the American sport of the same name.

officers' perceptions of a homogeneously dangerous crowd were reinforced through their own public-disorder tactics, which themselves necessitated treating all crowd members as one.

Stott and Reicher's (1998a) interview study, in conjunction with research on demonstration riots (Reicher, 1996a; Stott & Drury, 2000), suggests that the relation between the police perspective and their actual practice in the crowd event could be understood as a self-fulfilling prophesy (cf. Chen & Bargh, 1997; Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977). The police perception of a uniformly dangerous crowd combined with public-order tactics leads to the use of coercion against the crowd as a whole, which in turn functions to unite the crowd in hostility against the police. Ironically, widespread concern at the threat inherent in the crowd and attempts to undermine such a threat actually can create the very hostility that the police were seeking to avoid.

Aims and Expectations

The foregoing account of crowd conflict has not only theoretical significance—demonstrating the role of identity and out-group action in structuring in-group norms—but also practical importance. To the extent that both police perceptions and police tactics themselves may contribute to the initiation and escalation of conflict, then such perceptions and tactics need to be subject to critical scrutiny. However, the detailed claims about police perceptions rely on a study using a single and relatively small sample combined with a qualitative analysis. This problematizes the generalizability of the findings and means that they are in need of further validation. Therefore, the present study aims, first, to explore the validity and generalizability of previous claims using quantitative techniques on data from a different and larger sample of riot-trained officers from different United Kingdom forces.

A secondary aim is to explore the role of police rank. Stott and Reicher (1998a) suggested that differences in rank among police officers might affect perceptions or reactions to crowd events and crowd members. On the one hand, the social perceptions of police officers develop through an occupational socialization process common to all (Fielding, 1984; Reiner, 1992; Stradling, Crowe, & Tuohy, 1993). Indeed, public-order training in the United Kingdom has been designed explicitly to be as uniform as possible to allow police support units⁵ (PSUs) from different police forces to act together if necessary (Northam, 1988). On the other hand, different ranks of police officers stand and act, literally, in different locations in relation to crowd disorder. This means that the lower the officer's rank, typically the closer he or she is to the frontline in any crowd

⁵In public-order policing, officers are organized into police support units, comprising two serials of constables, each under the direct supervision of a sergeant, with the whole unit under the command of an inspector (Waddington, 1991).

conflict. Given their different social locations, and despite potentially shared stereotypes of the crowd, different ranks of officers therefore will be in different practical relations to crowd members. While senior officers may have broader (i.e., strategic) concerns and more power over lower ranks, the lower ranks are typically better placed to act against crowd participants and more likely to suffer from and be concerned about personal injury. Thus, the extent to which representations that are held among police officers actually translate into a self-fulfilling prophecy may depend on rank. The small size of the sample meant that Stott and Reicher (1998a) were unable to explore this suggestion. Using a larger sample than in Stott and Reicher, combined with quantitative techniques, enables the current study to examine these possible differences.

The current study employs a survey methodology, using a questionnaire containing a series of items based on the main themes identified in Stott and Reicher's (1998a) interview study. We predict that police officers will endorse the views (a) that crowds are made up of a variety of people, but also that (b) crowds are dichotomous, being made up of a powerful violent minority and a susceptible majority. Given (b), we also expect that officers will endorse the view that that crowd members are all potentially dangerous, will express concern for their own safety upon entering crowds, and hence will recommend strict control and quick intervention against crowds in case of conflict. In addition to these perceptual dimensions, we also expect police officers to endorse tactical reasons for treating a crowd as a single unit. Moreover, given that the logic of defining a crowd as inherently irrational and dangerous denies responsibility to outside forces, we expect the police sample to agree with the view that police tactics would not be to blame for the development of crowd conflict.

In addition, it is expected that location in relation to the crowd, operationalized as police rank, will lead to differences whereby constables would be more likely than higher ranks to perceive crowds as a threat and to endorse the importance of coercive intervention. Moreover, we might predict that constables, operating on the frontline in a public-disorder situation, will be less reflective about police methods and hence will be less likely than more senior officers to attribute the cause or escalation of conflict to the methods themselves. Finally, given that officers differ in their level of experience and may be part of the communities they police, it was considered worth exploring simply as an open-ended question the possible mediating or moderating role of personal experience of crowd events (participating and policing) among our sample of officers.

Method

Sample Characteristics

A total of 80 police officers took part in the study. From a force in southern England, 32 officers were given the questionnaire immediately prior to taking

part in seminars on crowd behavior as part of their Police Diploma course. None refused to take part. In addition, eight Scottish police forces were contacted via their chief constables requesting the distribution of the questionnaire among their public-order-trained officers. One Scottish force agreed to distribute the questionnaire among their 75 PSU-trained officers, from which 48 replies were received. In each case, no measures were taken of age or gender in order to ensure anonymity of the sample as a whole. Time served in the police force ranged from 4 to 25 years ($M = 13$ years). Of the sample, 46% ($n = 37$) were constables, 23% ($n = 18$) were sergeants, 20% ($n = 16$) were inspectors, and 8% ($n = 6$) were chief inspectors (3 participants [3%] did not indicate their rank).

Materials and Measures

The questionnaire contains a series of items based on the themes identified in Stott and Reicher's (1998a) qualitative analysis, plus the theme of responsibility for the escalation of conflict. As in the previous study, a distinction was drawn between and items referred separately to both demonstration crowds and football crowds.

Measures were taken of perceptions of and reactions to crowds in terms of the following themes: (a) heterogeneous composition ("People of all sorts can be found among crowds"); (b) dichotomous composition ("Professional agitators are skilled at inciting violent behavior among previously peaceful members of demonstrating/football crowds"); (c) homogeneous threat ("Once violence starts in a demonstrating/football crowd, everyone nearby is liable to join in"); (d) coercive methods ("Demonstrating/football crowds must be strictly controlled in order to prevent widespread violence erupting"); (e) tactical reasons for treating the crowd as a unit ("By the time the police take any serious action against violent members of a demonstrating/football crowd, most genuinely peaceful crowd members will have retreated to a place of safety. Most people remaining want conflict with the police"); and (f) attributions ("When violence occurs involving demonstrating/football crowds, the police are rarely responsible for either the initiation or any escalation of such violence").

For all of these items, participants responded on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Finally, separate measures were taken of the extent of officers' experience of both policing and participating in football and demonstrating crowds. Participants responded on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*very little*) to 6 (*considerable*).

Procedure

Participants from the English force were asked to complete the questionnaire as a way of getting them to think about issues surrounding the policing of crowd

behavior prior to their seminar. Participants from the Scottish force received a letter distributed through the forces' internal mail system.⁶ The letter requested their participation, assured the officers of their anonymity, and informed them that our research goal was to measure police officers' views of crowds and crowd behavior. Officers also were instructed how to complete and return the questionnaire should they choose to participate. The Scottish force involved was informed that they would receive a copy of the report of the study and a seminar on our findings once the study was complete.

Results

Overview

We examine, in turn, police endorsements of each of the three general themes characterizing police perceptions of crowd behavior that emerged in Stott and Reicher's (1998a) interview study—the composition of crowds, the threat of crowds, and tactical considerations in public-order policing—plus the question of attribution for the escalation of crowd conflict. We also examine the ideological relation between attitude items across these themes. Finally, we compare differences on each of these items, within the sample, in terms of experience and rank.

In order to test participants' endorsement of the statements in the questionnaire, we focused on 95% confidence intervals (CIs). Our rationale for this focus is that simply reporting significance levels of difference of the means from the midpoint glosses over the inherent problems involved in the scalar representation of attitudes. In the present case, readers can judge for themselves the extent of participants' endorsement of the questionnaire statements by the distance of the confidence intervals (indicating the spread of scores) from the scale midpoint of 3.5. Table 1 summarizes mean values for each composite measure.

Endorsement of Accounts of the Crowd

Composition of crowds. In the interview study by Stott and Reicher (1998a), it was noted that despite police officers describing crowds as comprising a wide variety of people, they also characterized them as being made up of essentially two parts: a powerful minority of agitators, and an uncritical mass subject to the influence of this minority. In the present study, the two items making up the factor on the heterogeneity of crowd composition failed to scale acceptably ($\alpha = .66$), so separate tests were carried out on each of them. For the item measuring the extent to which police officers agreed that "People of all sorts can be found among football crowds," the 95% CI was 5.18 to 5.59. The 95% CI for the item

⁶In order to ensure anonymity, the letters were distributed via the forces' Research Unit.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Significance Values for Discrepancy of Means From Midpoint for Each Composite Variable

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
People of all sorts at football crowds	5.39	0.95	17.81	<.001
People of all sorts at demonstrations	4.47	1.34	6.43	<.001
Crowds are dichotomous	4.68	0.79	13.36	<.001
Homogeneous threat of crowds	3.67	0.92	1.63	.11
Importance of coercive intervention	4.64	1.04	9.87	<.001
Tactical reasons for treating crowd as one	3.68	1.25	1.31	.19
Police responsibility for conflict	4.09	1.19	4.46	<.001

measuring the extent to which police officers agreed that "People of all sorts can be found among demonstrating crowds" was slightly lower, at 4.17 to 4.77. However, the distance of both from the midpoint suggests that the sample agreed that both football and demonstration crowds have a heterogeneous composition.

The six items measuring the extent to which police officers characterized crowds as dichotomous (i.e., comprising a powerful, violent minority and a gullible mass) scaled acceptably ($\alpha = .71$), so they were conflated into a single measure. The 95% CI for this item was 4.51 to 4.86, suggesting that participants did indeed endorse the view that both football and demonstration crowds consist of a powerful antagonistic minority and a susceptible majority. Thus, on the question of crowd composition, the sample simultaneously agreed that football and demonstration crowds are made up of a mixture of people and yet also are characterized by a simple dichotomy.

Homogeneous threat of crowds and implications for policing. If a crowd is made up of a variety or a clear dichotomy, this would seem to imply that policing strategies should be differentiated. Yet, as discussed earlier in the interview study by Stott and Reicher (1998a), police officers were of the view that once conflict had begun, the crowd as a whole was threatening since "everyone" was subject to the influence of the powerful minority of agitators. This, they argued, would at least in part account for policing strategies that treated the crowd as one and that were perceived by crowd members as harsh and indiscriminate. In the present study, the six items referring to the homogeneous threat of the crowd scaled acceptably ($\alpha = .71$), but the 95% CI for the conflated measure was only 3.46 to 3.87, suggesting that police officers in the sample did not clearly endorse—although they did not reject—the view that crowds pose a homogeneous threat.

However, to the extent that the crowd is threatening, then we would expect police officers to endorse coercive policing methods (e.g., strict control, quick intervention). The four items on such forms of police intervention scaled acceptably ($\alpha = .81$), and the 95% CI for the conflated item was 4.41 to 4.87. Thus, consistent with an account of crowd threat, the officers in the sample recommended strict control and quick intervention to prevent the escalation of violence.

Tactical considerations in public-order policing. If the crowd as a whole is inherently a threat, then it should be treated as a unit (as one). Stott and Reicher (1998a) argued that this is an ideological rationale for policing methods. As in the classic crowd psychology of Gustave Le Bon (1895), it reifies crowd violence as a characteristic of the crowd, rather than a dynamic intergroup relationship, and thus pathologizes the crowd (cf. Reicher & Potter, 1985). However, Stott and Reicher argued that there were also tactical reasons for treating crowd members alike. The three questionnaire items on tactical concerns scaled at .72. However, the 95% CI for the conflated measure was only 3.41 to 3.96, which represents at best only a moderate endorsement of the stated tactical reasons for treating crowd members as one.

Attributing responsibility for and reflecting on the causes of public disorder. If public disorder is a function of the power of violent minorities to spread violent behavior among an uncritical majority, then police practices themselves are not responsible for such disorder. The three items making up the measure on whether or not the police themselves had some responsibility for the initiation or escalation of public disorder scaled acceptably at .78, and the 95% CI for this conflated measure was 3.83 to 4.36 (where a higher score indicates less police responsibility). This suggests that, as predicted, the police sample did not see police tactics themselves as having any responsibility for the initiation or development of public disorder.

Relations between attitudes. In the interview study by Stott and Reicher (1998a), the different themes within the police officers' talk were argued to be related as part of a constellation of attitudes that served to justify particular forms of policing methods. As a first step in examining the extent to which the different attitudes made up a structured whole, we correlated all the composite measures, along with the major demographic measures (which we discuss in detail later). As Table 2 indicates, for the attitudinal items, there is a strong positive relationship between perceptions of dichotomous composition, homogeneous threat, and the endorsement of coercive policing methods. There is also a relation between coercive methods and attributions.

A second step in charting the possible ideological relations between the variables is to suggest a predictive model. Based on the previous study by Stott and Reicher (1998a), we might suggest that the perception that crowds are composed of a dichotomy enhances the perception that crowds pose a homogeneous threat (through the ability of the powerful minority to influence the gullible majority).

The perception of dichotomous composition would lead to coercive policing; but this might be mediated by the perception of a homogeneous threat, which would itself be expected to predict coercive policing. Moreover, the perception of a dichotomous composition might be expected to predict relatively more self- or system-justificatory attributions, directly as well as being mediated by perceptions of homogeneous threat and endorsement of coercive policing, each of which also should have a relation to such attributions. The relation of homogeneous threat to attributions should be mediated by endorsement of coercive policing, which should itself have the strongest relation to attributions, since endorsement of actions would be expected to demand more self-justification than mere attitudes. Finally, we also might expect a relation between attributions and tactical reasons for treating the crowd as one, though the nature of the relation is not clear a priori. On the one hand, the supposed situational necessity of adopting certain tactics could mean that police officers attribute conflict escalation to the crowd; on the other hand, police officers might concede that their own tactics, necessary though they are, might have the unwanted side effect of exacerbating conflict.

These predictions define a series of regression equations. In the first place, we tested how far the perception of the crowd's dichotomous composition predicted each of the following: perceptions of homogeneous threat, endorsement of coercive policing, and self- or system-justificatory attributions. While there was a clear relationship between dichotomous composition and homogeneous threat ($B = .37$, $SE B = .12$), $t(78) = 2.96$, $p < .01$, as well as between dichotomous composition and coercive policing ($B = .42$, $SE B = .14$), $t(78) = 2.98$, $p < .01$, we found no relationship between dichotomous composition and attributions ($B = .05$, $SE B = .17$), $t(78) = 0.31$, $p = .76$.

Next, we examined how far the relationship between perceptions of dichotomous composition and endorsement of coercive policing methods was mediated by perceptions of homogeneous threat. When perceptions of homogeneous threat were added to perceptions of dichotomous composition in the regression equation, the former also was found to be a significant predictor of endorsement of coercive policing methods ($B = .36$, $SE B = .12$), $t(78) = 2.93$, $p < .01$. However, although the strength of the relationship between perceptions of a dichotomous crowd and endorsement of coercive policing methods decreased ($B = .28$, $SE B = .14$), $t(78) = 2.03$, $p = .05$, it did not become nonsignificant. Hence, according to Baron and Kenny's (1986) criteria, we are not able to show here that perceptions of a homogeneous threat within the crowd operate as a mediating variable.

There was no relationship between perceptions of homogeneous threat and attributions ($B = .17$, $SE B = .15$), $t(78) = 1.14$, $p = .26$; but coercive policing, as expected, was found to have a strong relationship with attributions ($B = .31$, $SE B = .13$), $t(78) = 2.51$, $p = .01$. Finally, tactical considerations were found to have

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Matrix of Major Measures and Demographic Variables

Variable	People of all sorts at demonstrations	Crowds are dichotomous	Homogeneous threat of crowds	Necessity of coercive intervention	Tactical reasons to treat crowd as one	Police are not responsible for conflict	Rank	Experience of policing football crowds	Participation in football crowds
People of all sorts at crowds	.53**	.14	.03	.15	.13	.21	-.29*	.16	-.17
People of all sorts at demonstrations	—	.24*	.03	.01	.11	.18	-.37**	.26*	.01
Crowds are dichotomous		—	.32*	.32**	.09	.04	-.18	.05	.10
Homogeneous threat of crowds			—	.37**	.15	.13	-.06	.01	-.04
Necessity of coercive intervention				—	.20	.28*	.14	.23	.15
Tactical reasons to treat crowd as one					—	.15	-.12	-.13	.05
Police are not responsible for conflict						—	-.29*	.05	-.07
Rank							—	-.31*	.06
Experience of policing football crowds								—	.36**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

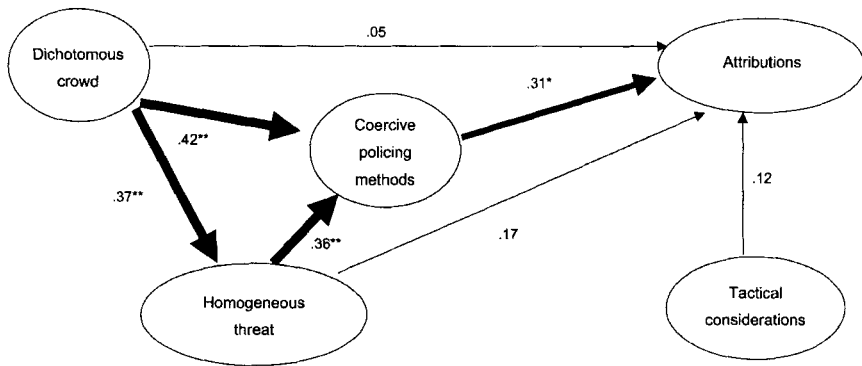


Figure 1. Path diagram of relations between major variables. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

no relationship with attributions ($B = .12$, $SE B = .11$), $t(78) = 1.15$, $p = .25$. The summary of relationships between the variables is illustrated in Figure 1.

Differences Within the Sample

Experience of policing and participating in crowd events. Examining the distribution of responses to the items measuring experience, we found that responses for policing and participating in demonstration crowds were too skewed to make comparisons: 79% of respondents had relatively low experience of policing demonstrations, while 96% had relatively low experience of participating in demonstration crowds (in each case, *low* was defined as 3 or below on the 6-point scale). However, experience of policing football crowds was more evenly distributed. Eliminating those 19% ($n = 15$) of participants scoring 4 (*moderately high*) gave us 35 in the low category and 30 with high experience. The distribution of participating in football crowds was also relatively even: 53% ($n = 42$) indicated 3 or less (*low*), while 47% ($n = 38$) indicated 4 or more (*high*). Therefore, each of these measures was dichotomized in order to make comparisons.

Table 2 indicates a positive relation between experience of policing football crowds and the perception of heterogeneity within demonstrating crowds. For those with high versus those with low experience of policing football crowds, this was the only significant difference found among our seven dependent measures. That is, those with relatively high experience of policing football crowds ($M = 4.87$) were significantly more likely than were those with relatively low experience ($M = 4.15$) to endorse the view that people of all sorts can be found among demonstrating crowds, $t(62) = -2.14$, $p = .04$. In relation to experience of participating in football crowds, no significant differences were identified between those with low experience versus those with high experience.

Rank. The Scottish sample consisted predominantly of constables, while the English sample was predominantly sergeants and higher ranks. Hence, it is possible that any differences we identify between ranks might, in fact, be a function of regional culture. To examine the independent effect of region on attitudes, we compared just the sergeants of each of the two forces (this was the only rank of comparable size across the two forces). No significant differences were found between the Scottish sergeants ($n = 5$) and the English sergeants ($n = 13$) in terms of policing and participating in football and demonstration crowds, or on any of our seven dependent measures. These subsamples are obviously too small for us to have complete confidence in these results, thus an explanation for the results in terms of region cannot be discounted. Nevertheless, this is suggestive evidence that rank differences are more important in the sample's responses on our measures.

Ideally, one would want to compare samples of police officers from all ranks (in the United Kingdom: constable, sergeant, inspector, chief inspector, superintendent, etc.). However, the distribution of ranks within the present sample reflects that of the structure of the police service itself (constables are the largest subgroup, followed sequentially by sergeants, inspectors, and chief inspectors). Sergeants and constables are equally likely to be at the frontline in public disorder, compared to higher ranks (e.g., chief inspectors). However, there is some evidence that, as well as having views in common, constables psychologically distinguish themselves from sergeants (e.g., perceptions of workload, pay and conditions, and relations with the public; Stott & Drury, 1998). Indeed, technically, sergeants are a grade of management. For our measures of experience of policing and participating in football crowds and our seven dependent measures, only one difference was found: Sergeants ($n = 18$, $M = 5.09$) were more likely than were inspectors and above ($n = 22$, $M = 4.40$) to see crowds as dichotomous in composition, $t(38) = 2.53$, $p = .02$. Therefore, we can have some confidence in treating sergeants and the higher ranks in the sample as a single category for analytic purposes. We therefore divided the sample between constables on the one hand, and all the other ranks on the other hand.

Table 2 indicates significant negative correlations between rank and perceptions of the heterogeneity of both football and demonstration crowds, and in the attribution of crowd conflict to police actions. Thus, on the question of crowd composition, constables ($M = 5.70$, $SD = 0.57$) were more likely than were higher ranks combined ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.15$) to endorse the view that football crowds are made up of a variety of people, $t(75) = 2.88$, $p = .005$. Similarly, constables ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 0.57$) were more likely than were the higher ranks combined ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.40$) to agree that football crowds are made up of a variety of people, $t(75) = 3.89$, $p < .001$. No differences were found between constables and other ranks for the measures of homogeneous threat, policing response, or tactical considerations. Finally, higher ranks combined ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.18$) were

significantly more likely than were constables ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 1.01$) to acknowledge that police tactics themselves might be responsible for the initiation or escalation of public disorder, $t(74) = 3.79$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

Taken as a whole, the results of this study support and develop the analysis of Stott and Reicher (1998a). For the police sample as a whole, on five out of the seven measures, findings were clearly in line with our predictions. Police officers, who are often the out-group in situations of crowd conflict, see the composition of football and demonstration crowds as mixed. Yet, at the same time, they construct a dichotomy between a powerful minority, capable of exerting social influence in the service of violence and disorder, and a majority, who are unable to resist this influence. On our measures of crowd threat and police response, the results were not quite so clear-cut. Police officers in the sample did not clearly endorse—nor did they reject—the view that crowds pose a homogeneous threat. On the other hand, we found, as expected, that police officers recommended strict control and quick intervention to prevent the development and escalation of crowd conflict.

The finding on perceptions of homogeneity is out of line with that in Stott and Reicher's (1998a) interview study, and it is therefore necessary to look again at the measures. Although the six items on homogeneous threat used in the present study scaled acceptably, in fact two of them were on the "wrong" side of the midpoint: Police officers actually disagreed with the statement that "Once violence starts in a demonstrating (football) crowd, everyone nearby is liable to join in": for demonstrations, $M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.37$, $t(79) = -2.85$, $p = .006$; for football, $M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.29$, $t(79) = -5.02$, $p < .001$. Yet, the police officers fully endorsed the view that "All demonstrating (football) crowds are potentially violent and dangerous": for demonstrations, $M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.44$, $t(79) = 3.87$, $p < .001$; for football, $M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.53$, $t(79) = 2.34$, $p = .02$. They also agreed that "When going into situations involving demonstrating (football) crowds, the thought of possible extreme and violent behavior by the crowd makes me worry about my safety": for demonstrations, $M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.48$, $t(79) = 4.23$, $p < .001$; for football, $M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.49$, $t(79) = 2.67$, $p = .01$.

Despite endorsing the view that the "Respectable are likely to become irrational," the police officers in the present study might have felt that some of the items on homogeneity were too simplistic to be endorsed fully. Indeed, it is difficult to reconcile how officers can view the majority as potentially irrational and easily influenced by "professional agitators [who] are skilled at inciting violent behavior," but not as prone to engage in disorder. The officers in the interview study employed a variety of phrases to express the view; for example, "Otherwise law-abiding decent people . . . get drawn into it" and "It only takes one idiot

to steam a shop⁷ . . . and the rest of the crowd is doing it." It may be that including other, subtler measures might have led to greater endorsement.

The results for tactical reasons for treating the crowd as one were also weak, with endorsement being moderate at best. In hindsight, it would have been preferable to break up the compound tactical measure into several different items, since it attempts to deal with a number of different variables (poor visibility in riot gear, difficulty of identifying individual crowd members, the need to get past "innocent" crowd members to get to the "guilty," the need for the police to remain in groups for the sake of safety). Clearly, officers may want to endorse some of these and not others. Hence, if faced with an all-or-none situation, the only reasonable response is to be neutral, which is more or less the response that we received.

There is also a possible problem with the other two items making up the tactical reasons measure. In Stott and Reicher's (1998a) interview study, when police stated that those who remain behind when police take action desire conflict, it is also clear that this presumes orders having been given to the crowd to disperse. The items in the present study did not mention dispersal orders. Hence, respondents could draw the implication that football and demonstration crowd members might be remaining behind for quite legitimate reasons, thus the item would not be endorsed strongly.

Stott and Reicher (1998a) argued that certain police methods (particularly the use of coercive force against the crowd as a whole) can contribute in part to the development of crowd conflict. As predicted, however, police officers in the present study did not see their own practices as responsible for the escalation of conflict. Public disorder is negatively valenced for police officers. Indeed, Reiner (1992) stated that maintaining public order is the key imperative for the police, even above protecting life and property, for which it is the prerequisite. This might suggest that a self-serving attribution bias (Heider, 1958)—or, more precisely, a *group*-serving attribution bias (e.g., Hewstone, 1989)—is at work here. However, an intrapsychic explanation is actually superfluous in explaining this result. The path analysis suggested a structural relation between the different attitudes: The perception of a dichotomous crowd predicted both the perception of a homogeneous threat and the endorsement of coercive policing methods; and the endorsement of coercive policing methods was a strong predictor of group- or system-serving attributions. The latter was to be expected, given that recommended actions (quick intervention, strict control) perhaps engender greater accountability demands than do mere attitudes. In sum, the relation between the view of the crowd as inherently threatening and the attribution to the crowd rather than the in-group for the development of conflict is ideological rather than cognitive.

⁷This term means "to attack a shop" (e.g., by throwing bricks through the window).

Given that ideology is a function of social relations, it was also perhaps to be expected that there was a difference between the ranks in the attribution for public disorder. Constables are "closer to the ground" in conflict than are higher ranks; they are more likely to experience the threat that, from their point of view, comes out of the crowd itself. Higher ranks may be able to stand back and perhaps be a little more self-critical about the role of the police's own methods in the success or otherwise in preventing public disorder. This pattern of attitude/group-membership differentiation is consistent with the suggestions of SCT that social perceptions are grounded in the reality of social (group) relations (e.g., Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994).

It might have been expected, perhaps, that firsthand experience of participating as a member of a football crowd (as opposed to always being outside the crowd) might moderate the types of perceptions we have seen endorsed in this study. However, no differences were identified between those who were low and those who were high in such experience. The comparison of those who were high versus low in policing football crowds was similarly somewhat uninformative. The only difference that we found suggests that greater policing experience led to greater endorsement of the view that demonstrating crowds are heterogeneous in composition: a view widely shared in the sample anyway.

Although this study found overall support for the argument that police officers view football and demonstration crowds as comprising powerful minorities and labile majorities, and that they are therefore dangerous, this does not mean that other social groups do not also hold such views. Indeed, this Le Bonian (Le Bon, 1895) ideology of the crowd is a recognizable leitmotif in popular culture (e.g., Budworth, 1991; McClelland, 1989; Postmes, 1992) and is also the mark of the outsider perspective in general (Reicher & Potter, 1985). However, the key point is that not all outsiders are equally able to act upon such representations. Unlike most other social groups, the police have both the legal sanction and the physical ability (e.g., organization, equipment) to act upon a crowd that they define as constituting a threat (Stott & Reicher, 1998a).

This takes us to a general point about social location and intergroup stereotypes. The present study can be seen as contributing one part to an account of how intergroup representations feed into intergroup relations. As Stott and Reicher (1998a) argued, one feature that distinguishes the ESIM from previous accounts of stereotyping as a self-fulfilling prophecy is the emphasis on the role of power. Power is a historical category. Historically, certain institutions have been able to promote particular representations of social groups that, in turn, have had consequences for attributions of blame and legal sanction (Tajfel, 1981). For example, Griffin (1993) suggested that particular representations of youth (e.g., the biologicistic storm-and-stress model) have served to justify discriminatory practices through constructing young people as a locus of various contemporary crises (e.g., unemployment, teenage pregnancy, delinquency).

Thus, some commentators attributed the 1992 Los Angeles rioting to the high incidence of teenage pregnancy among African American young women. Similarly, Loader (1996) argued that the particular images of young people held by police officers—hostile or vulnerable—can serve as a broad ideological license for undemocratic practices of supervision (also see Drury & Dennison, 2000).

The question finally arises of what, if anything, studies such as these say to public-order policing itself. Cerrah (1998) argued that police training in a number of countries is based on a Le Bonian (Le Bon, 1895) model of the crowd. The current study likewise reinforces the view that police officers, at least in the United Kingdom, see the crowd as essentially irrational and prone to the influence of powerful minorities, and hence to disorder. Therefore, these officers see disorder as a consequence of processes internal to the crowd. As such, police practices themselves cannot be responsible for the production and escalation of disorder. Yet, previous research on the ESIM has discredited such a view. The development of crowd conflict is characteristically a dynamic intergroup process.

This is not to deny that crowds may contain minorities intent on instigating widespread violent conflict. Indeed, recent studies of demonstration and football crowd disorder have acknowledged the presence of violent minorities and have pointed out how, prior to conflict with the police, majority members explicitly distanced themselves from such minorities (Stott & Drury, 1999, 2000; Stott et al., 2001). In the present study, participants in the English sample were debriefed through the tutor presenting a case for the ESIM and against ideological (e.g., Le Bonian) models of the crowd. Yet in the seminar discussion that followed, officers' comments still presumed that the essential problem in public-order policing was one of combating a supposed powerful minority within the crowd. While the presence of (real or imaginary) violent minorities may explain certain crowd–police dynamics, the ESIM in fact suggests that the presence of an active violent minority is not sufficient for the development of crowd conflict. Any such minority only becomes potentially influential to the extent that other crowd members see police practices against it as an attack on the crowd itself. But neither is the presence of an active violent minority actually necessary in the explanation of crowd conflict. Where powerful out-groups such as the police endorse the ideology of the crowd as comprising a potentially irrational and hence dangerous majority, this is itself enough to rationalize police practices that in turn can lead to conflict.

Ideology is not just a set of opinions, but also a function of social relationships. The ideological view of the crowd as a dangerous and irrational entity arose in the 19th century to make sense of a situation in which the existing order was under threat (Barrows, 1980; Nye, 1975). Though most crowds are not revolutionary, crowds are nevertheless historically the form through which subordinate classes bring about social change (Ackerman & Kreugler, 1994; Hobsbawm, 1964; Rudé, 1959). In general, crowds are more powerful than the

individuals that comprise them. Therefore, it is perhaps inevitable that the police will recognize in the crowd the potential antithesis of the present public order that it is their role to defend.

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