

Panic at "The Who Concert Stampede": An Empirical Assessment*

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I report evidence showing that panic did not cause the death and injury of numerous young people prior to a concert by the rock group, The Who, at Cincinnati's Riverfront Coliseum in late 1979. An analysis of transcripts of interviews with patrons in attendance and police who were on duty when the deaths occurred reveals that people did not "stampede" over others in their rush to enter the Coliseum as media accounts contend. Instead, participants tried to help others, and most competition that did occur reflected efforts to escape the crush rather than to enter the concert. I conclude that theoretical models of panics or "crazes" within the literature on collective behavior are not very useful in explaining this type of incident.

On December 3, 1979, eleven young people were killed in a crush entering Riverfront Coliseum in Cincinnati, Ohio for a concert by the British rock group, The Who. The incident was immediately labeled as a "stampede" by the local media, and commentators were quick to condemn the "mob psychology" which precipitated the seemingly selfish, ruthless behavior of participants. Crowd members were thought to have stormed over others in their rush for good seats within the arena, leading a national columnist (Royko, 1979) to refer to the crowd of young people as barbarians who "stomped 11 persons to death [after] having numbed their brains on weeds, chemicals, and Southern Comfort . . .," and a local editor to write of the "uncaring tread of the surging crowd" (Burleigh, 1979).

The incident was viewed in much the same way in most media accounts and by the scholars quoted in them.¹ According to one psychologist, the crush exemplified an irrational crowd in which "the group itself develops some sort of amorphous personality and individual thinking ceases" (Garloch, 1979). Psychiatrists suggested that the "magnetizing effect" of rock music and the youth of crowd members, "an age at which intimacy is so crucial," exaggerated the usual crowd effects (Garloch, 1979).

Those who interpreted the incident in this way and labeled it as a "stampede" recognized that other factors contributed, such as the unreserved seating and the late opening of an inadequate number of doors. The unreserved or "festival" seating prompted many in the crowd to arrive several hours early to compete for the choicest locations within the building. During the hours before the doors were opened, the large crowd became so tightly packed outside the arena doors that some people who wanted to withdraw could not do so, and policemen patrolling the area could not see the problems that were developing near the doors. In addition, the densely packed crowd was swaying to and fro creating a "wave" effect—people at the edge of the crowd were observed shoving on its fringes just to see the effect begin (Stevens, 1979).

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1. Only one "expert" cited took a different approach. One professor of psychology suggested "If you get all of the wrong factors building up, then an unlikely event becomes not too improbable" (Gerloch, 1979), and referred to the late opening doors, the few entrances available, and the sounds of the band warming up.

This resulted in some people being pushed to the concrete floor of the concourse before the surge for entry began. Nevertheless, police described the crowd at this point as "normal" for a rock concert. Soon after the doors opened, as many as 25 people were pushed down into a pile. Eleven died lying on the concourse just a few feet from the entrances, eight others were hospitalized, and several were treated and released at the first aid station. Although the people were not trampled as more dramatic accounts reported, the event did appear to fit the image of panic held by the public and many scholars.

Previous Research and Theories of Panic

Many social scientists would categorize the crowd behavior described above as a special form of panic—usually termed an "acquisitive panic" (Brown, 1965) or "craze" (Smelser, 1963). Smelser distinguishes it from the classic panics of escape, e.g., flight from a burning building, in that the latter is a "headlong rush *away* from something" while the craze is a rush "toward something [the participants] believe to be gratifying . . ." (1963:170; also see Brown, 1965). In this form, the competition that arises is not to escape possible entrapment, but to acquire some valued commodity. The special group investigating the event for the city preferred the term "craze" to the "stampede" label affixed by the media (City of Cincinnati, 1980).

The several sociological and social psychological theories of collective behavior which consider panic (Brown, 1965; Kelley et al., 1965; Quarantelli, 1957; Smelser, 1963; Turner and Killian, 1987) generally agree that behavior in either form involves selfish competition uncontrolled by social and cultural constraints—i.e., it is unregulated. Yet, they make very different assumptions about the process producing the competition, variously attributing it to irrational behavior produced by fear and social contagion (LeBon, [1895] 1960; Smelser, 1963), rational calculation of potential rewards and costs (Brown, 1965; Kelley, et al., 1965; Mintz, 1951), or the emergence of normative support for selfish behavior (Turner and Killian, 1987).²

Although many collective behavior theorists discuss the phenomenon, systematic studies of panic are uncommon. Researchers conducting such studies generally conclude that panic is a rare form of crowd behavior. Quarantelli and Dynes (1972) report that they have found few instances of panic after years of disaster research. They indicate that even within the famous Cocoanut Grove fire most people did not panic. Smith (1976), a participant observer in a flight from the Tower of London after a 1976 bomb explosion, reported that panic responses were few, and that primary group bonds and roles were crucial in maintaining order in the situation. In fact, primary group ties were important in the minimal panic that did occur.

The particular form of panic represented by the surge at the rock concert is even less frequently studied. In systematic study of a bank run in Australia, Mann et al. (1976) concluded that the behavior in the situation did not match the description of panic. They found that people acted "in a cooperative manner, rather than a stampede" and did not exhibit the "selfish, disordered and uncoordinated behavior" (1976:233) described in discussions of panic.

The core of my analysis is an examination of the Cincinnati Police Division's file on The Who Concert incident. First, I describe the data source and then present a description of the surge based on that evidence. I then use material from the taped transcriptions of interviews with people present at the concert to assess the extent of unregulated competition, breakdown of group ties, and other behaviors characteristic of panic. Finally, I discuss the theoretical implications of this case study.

2. A more recent approach outlined by Miller (1985) and based on a number of published and unpublished works by McPhail and his associates (e.g., McPhail, 1985; McPhail and Wohlstein, 1983) rejects the distinction between collective behavior and routine social behavior, and analyzes phenomena such as this incident in the same way as other social behavior.

Data and Methods

My analysis is based on data contained in a file created and kept by the Cincinnati Police Division, supplemented by accounts in daily newspapers. The police file includes 46 statements taken by officers investigating the event—22 from patrons, 13 from police officers present, and 11 from Coliseum employees or private security guards. The file also includes 10 statements presented by patrons at hearings conducted by a committee of the Cincinnati City Council. My primary data source is transcribed patron interviews and statements that I coded for analysis. I also coded and analyzed six interviews or statements from patrons which appeared in news articles reporting the incident.

I analyzed these materials by developing a questionnaire with which to "interview" each transcript.³ The questionnaire called for information relevant to theories of panic, particularly evidence of unregulated competition. For example, one question asked whether the "respondent" observed crowd members showing a "lack of concern for others," and another specifically asked, "Did the person report receiving help from others?" Coded responses to the latter question indicated whether, and from whom, help was received. A similar question concerned giving help to others. Other questions pertained to potential control variables such as age and sex of respondent, size and type of group with which the person arrived, time of arrival, and physical location relative to the doors.

I base most of my interpretations on vivid descriptions of the event by those present, particularly those most directly involved, and on the interviews with policemen, security guards, and Coliseum employees. In addition, I present quantitative results from the 38 questionnaires I coded. Of course, these data represent only those persons selected by others for interview (often because they were injured or had accompanied an injured person) or who came forward to write to newspapers or appear before a public hearing.

Analysis

I will focus mainly on the issue of whether the observed behavior involved unregulated competition. I assume that competition in crowds awaiting entry into a concert is regulated by appropriate situational norms. I also assume that such crowds are characterized by a rudimentary social structure, reflecting at least the ties of crowd members to others with whom they arrived. Aveni (1977) has shown that crowd members typically arrive in small, primary groups. Accordingly, all of the persons whose transcripts contain relevant information reported that they arrived at the Coliseum with at least one other person, most often primary group members such as their spouse or other family member. An important research question, then, is whether these elements of social organization constrained behavior. A second question, which emerged during the research, is whether the conventional distinction between panics of escape and of acquisition (i.e., crazes) is a useful one.

Description of the Event

A useful and reasonably reliable account of the event can be constructed from the police file, which is the source of the description that follows.⁴ Transcripts of police radio transmissions provided the exact time of certain occurrences and an approximation of others. For instance, the radio log shows that at 1920:29 (i.e., just after 7:20 P.M. local time) an officer's response to a report of a broken door was that "there is little we can do . . . they haven't let

3. See Gamson (1975:24-26 and appendices) for an excellent example of this procedure.

4. I base most of this description on the Summary section of the report completed by the Police Division, City of Cincinnati, Ohio.

this crowd in yet. There must be 8,000 people standing on the outside trying to get in." And at 1954:17 an officer called, "Emergency . . . we need a life squad. Coliseum on the concourse level. We have a man down, a possible heart attack" (Police Division, I, F).⁵

The concert crowd began to arrive at least six hours before the scheduled 8 P.M. performance. The crowd was tightly packed within the space outside the arena doors (See Figure 1) with the greatest crush near the doors to the right (south) of the lobby (Location A, Figure 1). The crowd density became so great that one person reported that he could not raise his arm to scratch his head (Police Division, I, YZ), and another said he could not reach to his pocket for his wallet (Police Division, III, M). Others referred to being lifted from the pavement and carried along by the crowd's movement, unable to get their feet back on the concrete surface (Police Division, I, YZ).⁶

When the doors opened and the surge to enter began, approximately 25 people fell (at location D, Figure 1), some lying on the concrete for as long as 30 minutes (Police Division, Summary). Those immediately behind the first persons to fall were then pushed by the surge onto the growing pile of the fallen, which at its worst was three to five people deep. Many patrons tried to form a protective cordon around those who fell, but they were often forced by the surge to either walk over or to fall atop them. Those further from the doors were unaware that others had fallen and continued to surge forward. Some of the fallen were helped to their feet or were dragged into the arena. Others who would have otherwise fallen were also pulled inside by other patrons, security guards, or arena employees.

Entry through the few open exterior doors (Locations A and B, Figure 1) was into a lobby (Location C) separated from the seating area by a set of turnstiles. As the crowd surged through the doors, the lobby was quickly filled; thus, to regulate flow into the lobby, security guards tried to close and reopen exterior doors as space was available within the lobby. Those still outside could only see that the doors before which they had waited for hours were closing. At the same time, sounds of the band warming up added to their perception that they needed to enter immediately.

An expert consulted by the city's investigating group estimated that a ticket checker can process from 1,800 to 3,000 people per hour, depending on the procedure used (City of Cincinnati, 1980: Appendix). Therefore, in order to accommodate the expected crowd of 18,000, either more time than 30 minutes would be required, or more doors would have to be opened.

Most policemen and security guards were unaware of the growing threat near doors because the density of the crowd prevented them from circulating, and the similarity of the crowd situation to those at previous concerts made it seem "normal." By the time policemen located on the crowd fringe (Location F, Figure 1) became aware of the danger and worked their way through the crowd to those still down, the deaths and injuries had already occurred.

5. The police report, which is undated, is divided into three parts, designated by Roman numerals, following a Summary section. Each part is divided into sections marked by file dividers labelled with letters of the alphabet including one marked Mc and another marked YZ. Citations are to those parts and sections, plus the Summary, without pagination. Thus, "Police Division, I, F" refers to the material behind file divider F within Part I. Generally the direct quotations are in the form used by the typists attempting phonetic spellings to reflect the language used by the speakers. In some cases, punctuation was added for clarification.

6. Movement is impossible and contact with others occurs all around when the occupancy rate of a space is one person per 1.6 to 1.8 square-feet, as on a crowded elevator; at five square-feet per person, movement is restricted but contact can be avoided (see City of Cincinnati, 1980: Appendix). Both the description by patrons and a photograph shot from above the crowd waiting for another rock concert at the same location (City of Cincinnati, 1980: front cover) indicate that crowding could be that severe at the Coliseum. The shaded area in Figure 1 could accommodate the 8,000 people estimated by police to be on the concourse with approximately 3.7 square feet per person. Assuming that the crowd density decreased from front to back, the police estimate of 8,000 seems realistic. More than 18,000 tickets were sold, and to expect approximately one-half to have arrived at least 30 minutes before the scheduled starting time also seems reasonable.

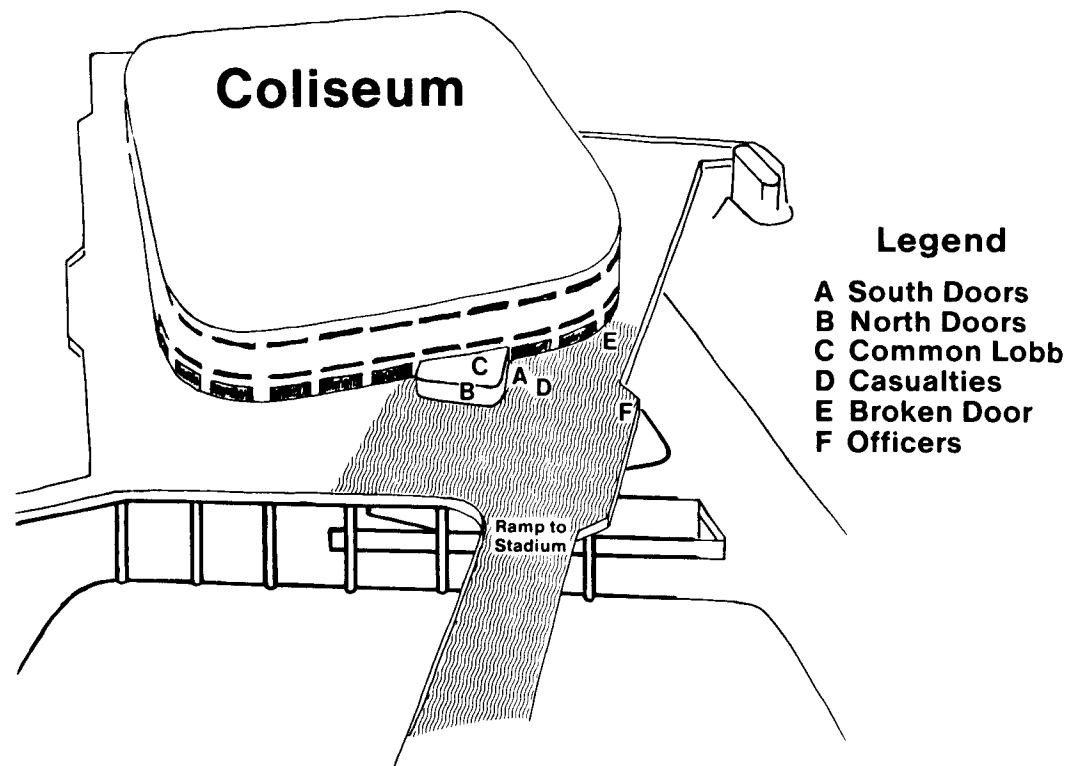


Figure 1 • Diagram of Cincinnati's Riverfront Coliseum and Surrounding Plaza, Site of "The Who Concert Stampede," with Area of Densest Occupancy Shaded and Referenced Locations Marked

Helping Behavior

Since most theoretical explanations of panic focus on unregulated competition, the first research question is whether such competition existed in this case. That many people were killed and injured in a crowd of pushing people is not in dispute; the key issue is whether this was the result of callous competition for a seat at the concert at the expense of the lives of others.

However, evidence from the transcripts does not provide support for the theoretical models of panic and is in clear conflict with interpretations reported in the newspapers. One witness before the City Council committee specifically objected to newspaper accounts of the people as animals or barbarians and asserted:

[T]he people in our area were the most helpful people that I've ever known. . . . Everybody I saw was helping everybody else. At some point in the crowd people could not help them. It's not that they didn't want to. They were physically unable to (Police Division, I, YZ).

The coded interview data support this claim. Approximately 40 percent of those interviewed reported helping behavior in each of three coded categories—giving, receiving, and observing help. Of the 38 people interviewed, 17 reported that they had received some help from others, 16 reported that they had given help to others, and 16 reported observing helping behavior by others. Some reported more than one of the categories of helping activities, and when indicators are combined, more than three-fourths of those interviewed (29) reported at least one form of pro-social activity.

Helping behavior possibly was even more common than indicated by those results. It is likely that additional respondents observed, but did not report, helping activity since interviewers did not ask a direct question concerning helping. In fact, only seven respondents reported action by others that was coded as showing a lack of concern for others, and six of these also reported helping behavior. Thus, just one of the 38 respondents reported *only* self-interested, competitive behavior. Although we cannot infer from this selective sample that a comparably large proportion of the entire crowd continued to behave in a cooperative manner, this evidence does suggest that many of those centrally located within the crowd, at just the location where persons were in most danger, demonstrated concern for others.

Helping behavior began during the early crush, long before the surge, and continued throughout the episode. People first simply tried to get people to step back and relieve the pressure, but others around them either could not hear or could not move. One young man noticed that the girl next to him could not breathe and "turned to ask people to back up, but soon realized that the only people who could hear me shouting couldn't move either." (Police Division, III, M). A small 17-year-old girl near the doors away from the worst crush (Location B, Figure 1) reported having problems nearly an hour before the "stampede." She pleaded with people to let her out, but neither she nor they could move. She told the police detective interviewing her:

I lost my footing an' slowly but surely began doing down. People behind me could do nothing to stop the pushing. I was saying "No. No. Please help me . . ." Some of the people around didn't even hear me. . . . So then I grabbed someone's leg an' whoever that was told three other guys about me. They all pushed me up, pulled me up, but it was hard. . . . At about 7 o'clock I passed out. The four guys who pulled me off the ground helped me to stay up until we got through the door (Police Division, II, V).

Another person reported a similar observation from the view of the person trying to give help:

Smaller people began passing out. I attempted to lift one girl up and above to be passed back. . . . After several tries I was unsuccessful and near exhaustion (Police Division, III, M).

A few were successful in extricating themselves and helping others out of the crush. One man reported that he and friends picked up and carried from the crowd two nearly unconscious girls who had fallen (Police Division, III, M). These particular young men knew the girls they helped, but many helped others with whom they had no social ties. Thirteen of the 17 mentioned above as having received help were aided by others they did not know, and 12 of those 16 giving help gave it to strangers. As one person reported in a letter to a newspaper, "Total strangers probably saved my life" (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1979).

Helping became increasingly difficult after the first persons fell near the doors at the entrance and the pile of people (Location D, Figure 1), which was described as being 10 to 12 feet in diameter, began to form. Persons not in the immediate area were unaware that others had fallen, and those nearest the fallen who might have helped were themselves in danger of

being pushed onto the pile. For instance, one person who, with his wife, was pushed atop the fallen described the situation in this way:

At that point everyone around the perimeter of the circle, of course, was trying to back off and trying to help the people get up onto their feet, but the people in the back of the crowd, of course, could not see this and continued to push forward (Police Division, II, L).

Those who helped others to their feet were not alarmed at first, but then they began to fall. The press forward was impossible to stall, and those on the ground could not be protected because, in the words of another patron,

People in the crowd 10 feet back didn't know it was happening. Their cries were impossible to hear above the roar of the crowd. . . . I screamed with all my strength that I was standing on someone. I couldn't move. I could only scream (Police Division, III, M).

Although most of the evidence leads to a conclusion that acts of ruthless competition were rare, there *were* such reports. For instance, one patron, who from a position just inside the arena doors was pulling people inside to safety, reported being angry with the mob:

People were climbin' over people ta get in . . . an' at one point I almost started hittin' 'em, because I could not believe the animal, animalistic ways the people, you know, nobody cared (Police Division, II, A).

But both the analysis of the coded transcripts and the impressionistic accounts indicate that, even in the face of the throng, most persons tried to help others as long as possible. If a total disregard for others developed—and there is hardly any evidence that it did—it was only after cooperation was no longer possible.

Sex Differences in Helping Behavior

Normative expectations dictate generally that the stronger should help the weaker; specifically, men are expected to help women. The evidence indicates that such sex-role expectations continued to be an important influence on behavior during the event. Nine of the 13 females received help while only one reported giving help. On the other hand, almost twice as many men gave as received help. A few (three) reported helping their wives or members of their group, but, as noted above, most gave help to those around them, either friends or strangers. Thus, the sex-role norms of men helping women did not collapse when confronted with a threat.

Altruistic behavior, either generally or specifically toward women, was not universal; there *was* selfish competition. For instance, a young woman, interviewed in her hospital room late on the evening of the concert with the horror still fresh in her memory, complained that no one would move back:

They just kept pushin' forward and they would just walk right on top of you, just trample over ya like you were a piece of the ground. They wouldn't even help ya; people were just screamin' "help me" and nobody cared (Police Division, II, Mc).

And referring to another person who fell alongside her, she said,

I knew she was unconscious or something. And then everybody just trampled her like she wasn't even there; they just standin' on her (Police Division, II, Mc).

Another hospitalized woman reported a similar experience:

And there was a big group of people in front of me that had fallen down and people just went mad. They kept, you know, shovin' over me; they wouldn't help them get up; they wanted inside. . . . I fell down with them and no one helped me up and I—there was no way I could get up—and they just

kept—there was people fallin' on me and then people walkin' over my legs tryin' ta get through the door (Police Division, II, P).

Similar reports are included in the interviews with arena employees. But both women quoted above as having been trampled also reported receiving help. That they recognized the difficulty of helping is evident in the second woman's remark that "there was really no way they could help me because there were so many people tryin' ta shove over the top of me that they would have to clear all them out just even to see me" (Police Division, II, P).

Overall, these data seem to confirm the continuing importance of normative expectations. Even with the possibility of self-serving statements and the possibility that men are likely to *say* they gave help to women, the evidence is compelling.

Distinctions between Panics of Acquisition and of Escape

Popular accounts of The Who Concert incident have generally characterized it as an acquisitive panic, implying that persons were competing for the most desirable locations in the arena in total disregard of others. Analysis of the transcripts reveals that the competition that did develop—recalling the extent of cooperative behavior—was for an escape from the crush rather than access to the concert.

A letter to the editor of a local newspaper presented this position in the assertion that, "To us, the door to the Coliseum was no longer to a concert, but to survival and safety" (*Cincinnati Post*, 1979). That interpretation was also evident in most of the interviews coded for this research. Only four of the 38 did not make some statement indicating that either they or others around them were trying to get "out" of the crush. A preferred location within the arena disappeared as a motive for those in the area where the crush was most severe. No interviews were available for those more distant from the entrances, but it is likely that the pushing in the rear was still to gain entry. Thus, there apparently were two forms of competition existing simultaneously—efforts to escape near the entrances and competition among those in the rear for entry into the concert.

For people nearest the doors, entering the Coliseum was the only likely escape from the danger. According to one of the transcripts, "everyone was scared for their own lives [and] the only way to go was in the doors, an' there was just that one door on the side where we were at" (Police Division, II, T). In the words of another, "It was a hysterical scene. People upon people trying to escape" (Police Division, III, M). Some reported unsuccessful efforts to escape by moving out toward the rear (see, e.g., Police Division, III, M; II, V).

People were struggling to avoid falling, recognizing the danger; but, according to one interview, those who did walk over other people to avoid falling "weren't animals just trying to get in to see the show [but] were fighting for their lives and trying to get on the inside. . . . They were fighting to stay alive together" (Police Division, II, U). This statement came from a person who saw someone die lying alongside him on the concrete and who was himself revived only after rescue workers arrived.

Those who continued to push forward from the rear were unaware of events near the front. A typical report stated: "A major problem was that except for those right on the perimeter, nobody knew what was happening, and they just kept pressing forward still only wanting to see the concert" (*Louisville Courier-Journal*, 1979).

Difficulty of communication within the crowd, a typical contributing factor in panic, was compounded by its high density. Patrons faced an additional communication problem in redefining the crowd situation for the police and other officials. Although most patrons who were interviewed defined the efforts to get through the doors as flights to safety, police officers and security guards continued to see them as gate-crashing efforts after the surge had begun. For instance, two officers reported trying to secure a door (Location E, Figure 1) forced open by gate-crashers (Police Division, I, N; I, O), but a 27-year-old male patron described in detail how

the door was opened from the inside by two men trying to prevent injury to "two young girls [who] had been banging on that door for 20 minutes" (Police Division, II, M). Similarly, a couple referred to a friend who, once inside,

tried to shove open some more doors with his foot and immediately two ushers came up, one of them grabbed him, shoved him back in line and told him to either get in line or get back out. He then began to beg and plead with the usher, he said, "people are getting hurt, people were down" (Police I, YZ).

The actual motives of those trying to open the doors are not as relevant as the fact that definitions of the situation differed markedly among patrons, police, and Coliseum workers.

If the crowd was in fact, a panic of escape, while police continued to see it as an "acquisitive mob," officers' experiences at other concerts surely influenced their interpretations and actions. A patron who said she was pleading with the ushers to let her enter recognized this. She understood that the officials might not believe her pleas because they "might have heard it before at other concerts and figured it was just people pretending or whatever, just to try to get in early, but this is one time . . ." (Police Division, I, YZ).

Discussion

In sum, these data provide little support for the collective behavior theories which postulate undifferentiated competitive responses in their treatment of panic. Unregulated competition, which is crucial to most explanations of panic, did not occur; on the contrary, cooperative behavior continued throughout the course of the event. Behavior within the crowd continued to reflect both a social structure comprising the small groups in which people arrived and to conform to sex-role norms. Neither is it accurate to characterize the surge as an acquisitive panic created by competition for a scarce resource—seats at the concert. While those near the rear of the crowd did continue to push forward in order to enter the concert, the only behavior that resembled panic occurred nearer the front among those who were trying to escape an entrapping situation.

The lack of unanimity in crowd responses also reflects the absence of a common definition of the situation. All participants initially viewed the situation in essentially the same way. To patrons and policemen like, the situation was not unusual prior to a rock concert. The young people expected generally uninhibited behavior, including pushing (Radel, 1979; Stevens, 1979). Even the crowd density, almost unbelievable to the uninitiated, was routine for the aficionado. One unbelieving patron was told by others around him that the crush was to be expected, and that "if you think this is bad, you should have been at the Led Zeppelin concert; this is nothing" (Police Division, III, M). A security guard said of the crush, "we always have that. . . . [W]e have handled a lot of shows, concerts, and I thought that some of them was worse than this one" (Police Division, II, H). At an earlier concert at the same location, an "angry mob" threw rocks and bottles at police and windows (Chute, 1979).

The making of waves by pushing into the crowd also was routine. An entertainment reporter in the back of the crowd reported, "Five boys next to me . . . kept yelling 'shove, shove'" and pushing on the crowd (Stevens, 1979), unaware that people were dying just ahead, and a patron saw people going to the back of the crowd to shove into it just to see the waves (Police Division, II, L). At the same time, the police—some of whom thought that "hard rock" groups drew particularly threatening crowds (see, e.g., Police Division, II, R)—saw it as the usual rowdy concert crowd, potentially troublesome because of drinking and drugs, but not life-threatening. Even when nearly unconscious people stumbled into the Coliseum, security guards were not unduly concerned ". . . 'cause a lot of times they come in and they pass out from drinking or drugs or whatever" (Police Division, II, K). Consistent with this situational definition, police officers continued to carry out their rule-enforcement roles in a

routine fashion, arresting patrons for shouting obscenities and attempting to open a door almost simultaneously with the deaths (Police Division, I, Q; I, R).

Those patrons nearest the doors were the first to redefine the situation as life-threatening, and then began to fight for entry into the Coliseum, trying to escape the crush. The policemen who were arresting gate-crashers and barring the broken doors and the ushers who were demanding tickets of those entering and insisting that they stay in line did so because they held to their initial interpretations of the crowd's behavior. Those nearer the crowd fringes also continued to define the situation as routine for the concert and to press forward to obtain choice seats.

The concept "definition of the situation" is central to Turner and Killian's (1987) emergent norm approach to collective behavior, and to symbolic interactionist theories generally. Social psychologists use this concept to refer to the fact that individuals organize in some coherent way their perception of the context in which activities take place (e.g., Hewitt, 1979). Specifically, Turner and Killian refer to panics, or the individualistic tendencies in crowds, as resulting from a definition of the situation in which norms of cooperation no longer apply and selfish pursuit of individual ends is viewed as legitimate. Their model captures more of the complexity of such situations than do other theories of panic. However, their emergent norm approach fails to give adequate consideration to differing or conflicting definitions of the situation which emerge within different segments of the crowd. And, like other approaches to panic, their model fails to recognize the strength and endurance of the social bonds which inhibit individualistic behavior.

Conclusion

We cannot conclude from one study that there are *no* situations in which competition for some valued commodity occurs without regard for social obligations. Perhaps there are situations such as a fire in a crowded theater in which people totally ignore others as they try to escape from danger. However, documented cases of either form of panic are surprisingly scarce in the literature.

One possible reason for the lack of evidence of unregulated competition in The Who concert incident is that the appropriate conditions did not exist. Perhaps the people in this situation did not place such a high value on a preferred location for the concert that they would do harm to others in order to get inside; perhaps those trying to escape the crush did not actually perceive a serious threat to their lives. Kelley et al. (1965) have noted that panic-like responses are less likely when there is variation in perception of the danger; those who define the situation as less urgent are more willing to wait their turns. In this case, those who placed less value on their concert location would be less likely to compete with others. Many did try to leave the crush, giving up their valued locations nearer the entrance. Mann et al. (1976) reached a similar conclusion in their study of the bank run.

But the repeated failure of researchers to find examples of ruthless competition suggests another conclusion. Most crowds are comprised not of unattached individuals but of small, often primary, groups (Aveni, 1977; Smith, 1976). Group bonds constrain totally selfish behavior, even when the situation seems life threatening; thus, the type of unregulated competition generally labeled as panic occurs very infrequently. More case studies of such infrequent and irregularly occurring social forms must accumulate before general conclusions can be drawn with confidence. However, the evidence from this study is more than sufficient to discount popular interpretations of "The Who Concert Stampede" which focus on the hedonistic attributes of young people and the hypnotic effects of rock music.

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