


Social Order in Emergency Situations



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Societal influence

- ✓ From social to societal influence
 - People influence each other during their interactions (social influence)
 - People don't interact randomly; our actions are patterned by social structure
 - Social structure: social institutions, organizations, groups, statuses and roles, values, and norms that add order and predictability to our private lives (p. 287)

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Do social norms collapse?



- ✓ People's behavior is guided by elements of social structure, such as statuses, roles, and norms
 - Status: named position that people can occupy (p. 25)
 - Role: set of expectations—rights, obligations, behaviors, duties—associated with a particular social position (p. 25)
 - Norm: culturally defined standard or rule of conduct (p. 35)
- ✓ Many people believe that societal influence breaks down under extreme circumstances
 - Panic: a form of behavior that involves people reacting to a real or perceived threat with irrational, frantic, selfish, and often self-destructive behavior
 - Panic is also used to mean simply "run away"
- ✓ Three well-studied cases
 - 1977 Beverly Hills Supper Club fire & 1979 Who concert stampede (Norris Johnson)
 - 9/11 World Trade Center attacks (Kathleen Tierney)



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Crowd Behavior during 9/11

- ✓ Deaths determined by location
 - North tower: everyone on 92+ died, everyone below lived
 - South tower: all but four below 78th lived
- ✓ Pre-existing norms, statuses & roles continued to guide behavior
 - People followed procedures learned from drills
 - Cooperation, not competition, guided behavior
 - "Irrational" behavior should be seen from perspective of people in situation
 - Widespread altruistic behavior to provide assistance

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Emergency dispersal characteristics

- ✓ Two other examples
 - Who stampede: people died in pile (3-5 bodies deep) after doors opened; people behind pile were unaware of situation
 - B.H.S.C. fire: relaxed warning didn't give people time to evacuate before smoke was too thick for many to find way out
- ✓ People don't lose control of their minds
- ✓ People may lose control of their abilities to perceive, move or communicate
 - ✓ Smoke or crowding may make it difficult to see
 - ✓ Dense bodies may make it difficult to move
 - ✓ Noise may make it difficult to communicate
- ✓ Social structure continues to guide people's actions
 - ✓ People escape or die with their group
 - ✓ People continue to help others
 - ✓ Gender roles continue to guide action
 - ✓ People's occupational roles continue to guide action

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Policy implications of "panic"

- ✓ Researchers have found no evidence of panic
- ✓ Panic often used by people not in emergency situation (e.g., media, firefighters) to explain unfortunate outcome
- ✓ "Irrational" behavior may be completely rational for those in situation
- ✓ Negative policy implications for disaster safety
 - ✓ Victims blamed for their deaths or injuries
 - ✓ Leads to delayed warning systems when bigger problem is insufficient appreciation of danger
 - ✓ Leads to calls for central control instead of recognizing advantages of improvisation
- ✓ General lesson: Good research on "irrational" behavior reveals the continued influence of social structure
 - ✓ E.g., moral panic, crazes.

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