

fulfil some psychological need for either identification or vicarious punishment. Such 'news' as Erikson and others have argued, is a main source of information about the normative contours of a society. It informs us about right and wrong, about the boundaries beyond which one should not venture and about the shapes that the devil can assume. The gallery of folk types – heroes and saints, as well as fools, villains and devils – is publicized not just in oral-tradition and face-to-face contact but to much larger audiences and with much greater dramatic resources.

Much of this study will be devoted to understanding the role of the mass media in creating moral panics and folk devils. A potentially useful link between these two notions – and one that places central stress on the mass media – is the process of deviation amplification as described by Wilkins.²³ The key variable in this attempt to understand how the societal reaction may in fact increase rather than decrease or keep in check the amount of deviance, is the nature of the information about deviance. As I pointed out earlier, this information characteristically is not received at first hand, it tends to be processed in such a form that the action or actors concerned are pictured in a highly stereotypical way. We react to an episode of, say, sexual deviance, drug-taking or violence in terms of our information about that particular class of phenomenon (how typical is it), our tolerance level for that type of behaviour and our direct experience – which in a segregated urban society is often nil. Wilkins describes – in highly mechanistic language derived from cybernetic theory – a typical reaction sequence which might take place at this point, one which has a spiralling or snowballing effect.

An initial act of deviance, or normative diversity (for example, in dress) is defined as being worthy of attention and is responded to punitively. The deviant or group of deviants is segregated or isolated and this operates to alienate them from conventional society. They perceive themselves as more deviant, group themselves with others in a similar position, and this leads to more

deviance. This, in turn, exposes the group to further punitive sanctions and other forceful action by the conformists – and the system starts going round again. There is no assumption in this model that amplification has to occur: in the same way – as I pointed out earlier – that there is no automatic transition from primary to secondary deviation or to the incorporation of deviant labels. The system or the actor can and does react in quite opposite directions. What one is merely drawing attention to is a set of sequential typifications: under X conditions, A will be followed by A1, A2, etc. All these links have to be explained – as Wilkins does not do – in terms of other generalizations. For example, it is more likely that if the deviant group is vulnerable and its actions highly visible, it will be forced to take on its identities from structurally and ideologically more powerful groups. Such generalizations and an attempt to specify various specialized modes of amplification or alternatives to the process have been spelt out by Young²⁴ in the case of drug-taking. I intend using this model here simply as one viable way in which the ‘social control leads to deviation’ chain can be conceptualized and also because of its particular emphasis upon the ‘information about deviance’ variable and its dependence on the mass media.

THE CASE OF THE MODS AND ROCKERS

I have already given some indication of the general framework which I think suitable for the study of moral panics and folk devils. Further perspectives suggest themselves because of the special characteristics of the Mods and Rockers phenomenon, as compared with, say, the rise of student militancy or the appearance of underground newspaper editors on obscenity charges. The first and most obvious one derives from the literature on subcultural delinquency. This would provide the structural setting for explaining the Mods and Rockers phenomenon as a form of adolescent deviance among working-class youth in Britain.

Downes's variant of subcultural theory is most relevant and I would substantially agree with his remarks (in the preface of his book) about the Mods and Rockers events intervening between writing and the book going to press: 'No mention is made of these occurrences in what follows, largely because – in the absence of evidence to the contrary – I take them to corroborate, rather than negate, the main sociological argument of the book.'²⁵ At various points in these chapters, the relevance of subcultural theory will be commented on, although my stress on the definitional rather than behavioural questions precludes an extended analysis along these lines.

Another less obvious orientation derives from the field of **collective behaviour**. I have already suggested that social types can be seen as the products of the same processes that go into the creation of symbolic collective styles in fashion, dress and public identities. The Mods and Rockers, though, were initially registered in the public consciousness not just as the appearance of new social types, but as actors in a particular episode of collective behaviour. The phenomenon took its subsequent shape in terms of these episodes: the regular series of disturbances which took place at English seaside resorts between 1964 and 1966. The **public image of** these **folk devils** was invariably tied up to a number of highly visual scenarios associated with their appearance: youths chasing across the beach, brandishing deckchairs over their heads, running along the pavements, riding on scooters or bikes down the streets, sleeping on the beaches and so on.

Each of these episodes – as I will describe – contained all the elements of the **classic crowd situation** which has long been the prototype for the study of collective behaviour. Crowds, riots, mobs and disturbances on occasions ranging from pop concerts to political demonstrations have all been seen in a similar way to *The Crowd* described by Le Bon in 1896. Later formulations by Tarde, Freud, McDougall and F. H. Allport made little lasting contribution and often just elaborated on Le Bon's **contagion**

hypothesis. A more useful recent theory – for all its deficiencies from a sociological viewpoint – is Smelser's 'value added schema'.²⁶ In the sequence he suggests, each of the following determinants of collective behaviour must appear: (i) structural conduciveness; (ii) structural strain; (iii) growth and spread of a generalized belief; (iv) precipitating factors; (v) mobilization of the participants for action; (vi) operation of social control.

Structural conduciveness creates conditions of permissiveness under which collective behaviour is seen as legitimate. Together with structural strain (e.g. economic deprivation, population invasion) this factor creates the opening for race riots, sects, panics and other examples of collective behaviour. In the case of the Mods and Rockers, conduciveness and strain correspond to the structural sources of strain posited in subcultural theory: anomie, status frustration, blocked leisure opportunities and so on. The growth and spread of a generalized belief is important because the situation of strain must be made meaningful to the potential participants. For the most part these generalized beliefs are spread through the mass media. I have already indicated the importance of media imagery for studying deviance as a whole; in dealing with crowd behaviour, this importance is heightened because of the ways in which such phenomena develop and spread. As will be shown, sociological and social psychological work on mass hysteria, delusions and rumours are of direct relevance here.

Precipitating factors are specific events which might confirm a generalized belief, initiate strain or redefine conduciveness. Like the other factors in Smelser's schema, it is not a determinant of anything in itself – for example, a fight will not start a race riot unless it occurs in or is interpreted as an 'explosive situation'. While not spelling out in detail the precipitating factors in the Mods and Rockers events, I will show how the social reaction contributed to the definition and creation of these factors. Mobilization of participants for action again refers to a sequence

present in the Mods and Rockers events which will only be dealt with in terms of the other determinants.

It is Smelser's sixth determinant – the operation of social control – which, together with the generalized belief factors, will concern us most. This factor, which 'in certain respects ... arches over all others'²⁷ refers to the counter forces set up by society to prevent and inhibit the previous determinants: 'Once an episode of collective behaviour has appeared, its duration and severity are determined by the response of the agencies of social control.'²⁸ So from a somewhat different theoretical perspective – Parsonian functionalism – Smelser attaches the same crucial importance to the social control factors stressed in the transactional model.

A special – and at first sight somewhat esoteric – area of collective behaviour which is of peculiar relevance, is the field known as 'disaster research'.²⁹ This consists of a body of findings about the social and psychological impact of disasters, particularly physical disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes and floods but also man-made disasters such as bombing attacks. Theoretical models have also been produced, and Merton argues that the study of disasters can extend sociological theory beyond the confines of the immediate subject-matter. Disaster situations can be looked at as strategic research sites for theory-building: 'Conditions of collective stress bring out in bold relief aspects of social systems that are not as readily visible in the stressful conditions of everyday life.'³⁰ The value of disaster studies is that by compressing social processes into a brief time span, a disaster makes usually private behaviour, public and immediate and therefore more amenable to study.³¹

I came across the writings in this field towards the end of carrying out the Mods and Rockers research and was immediately struck by the parallels between what I was then beginning to think of as 'moral panics' and the reactions to physical disasters. Disaster researchers have constructed one of the few models in sociology for considering the reaction of the social system to something stressful, disturbing or threatening. The happenings at