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Identity Dynamics, Needs, and Social Influences on Human Effects of Flashbang Grenades

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Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School

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Flashbang Grenades in Crowds

- FBGs deliver a bright flash and loud bang intended to stun individuals in the area and subsequently alter their behavior.
- FBGs are often used to manage crowds but unclear if the known physiological effect of FBGs directly translates into intended effects on crowds.
- FBGs can produce different results in different crowds but unclear as to why.



NICO BTV-1 Flash Bang Grenade, Joint Intermediate Force Capabilities Office Website, <https://jnlwp.defense.gov/Current-Intermediate-Force-Capabilities/NICO-BTV-1-Flash-Bang-Grenade/>



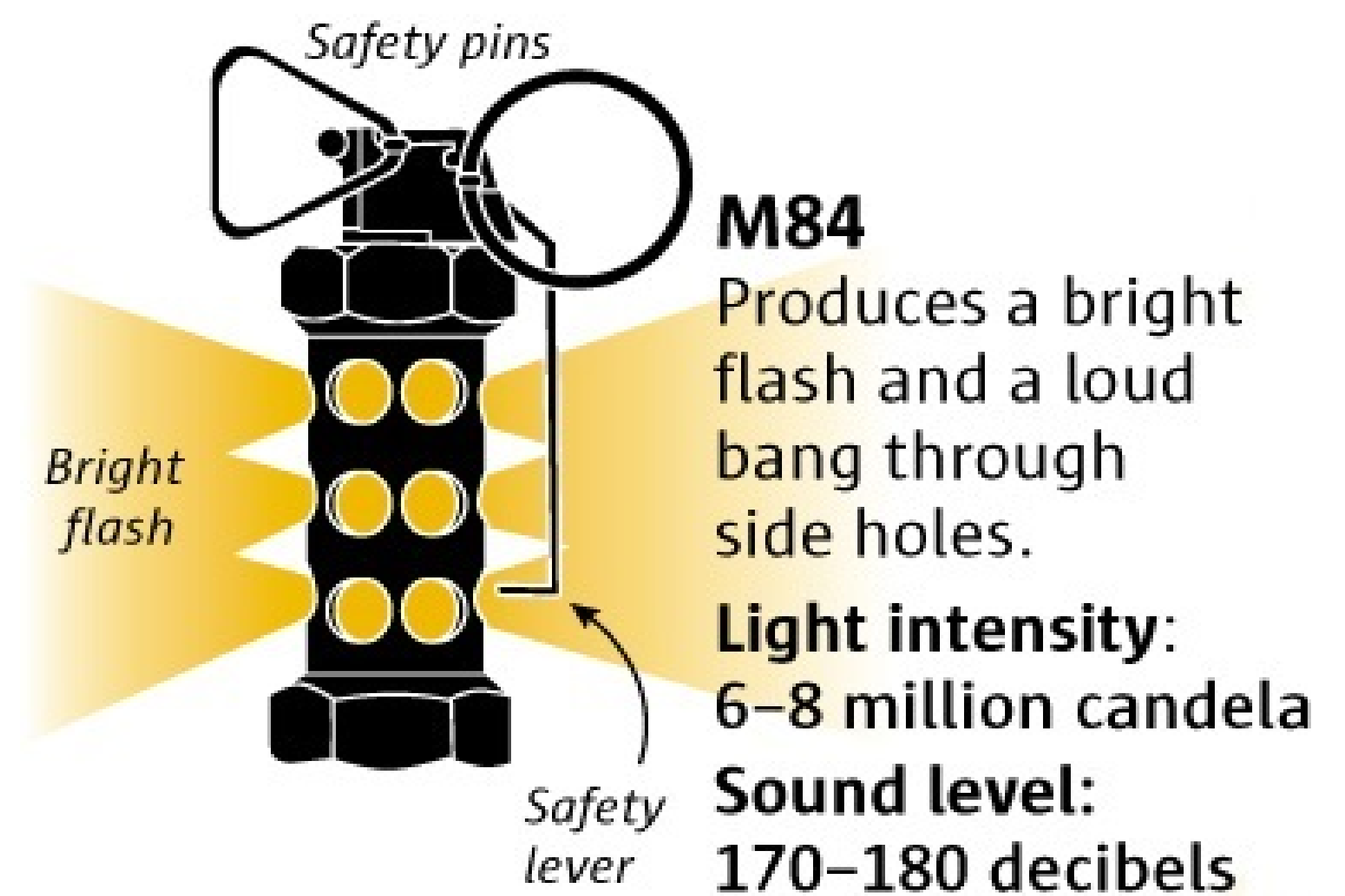
"Protesters react as police fire about half a dozen flash-bang grenades in downtown Seattle." *The Seattle Times*, June 2, 2020

Sample of Video Cases Reviewed

- Black Lives Matter protests
- Greek anti-austerity protests
- South Africa school protests
- Afghanistan airport crowds

Immediate versus Short-term Effects

- FBGs work through a negative (fear-induced) startle and stress response to alter a person's voluntary action.
- FBGs have an immediate disruption and stress impact but crowds do not disperse immediately.
- The stress effect differs by person, and solidarity and social identity can mitigate that effect.
- Video evidence suggests crowds move away and return in contexts with civil rights, where the expectation is that lethal force will not be used.
- In non-democratic contexts, where there is a reasonable expectation that lethal force may be used, less-lethal weapons generate chaos and crowds flee.
- FBG use can backfire as helping those affected by FBGs turns participants to confrontational activists



The Seattle Times, June 2, 2020, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattle-police-continue-to-use-flash-bang-grenades-during-protests-despite-recommendations/>

Future Directions:

- Leverage social media data and research to further study less-lethal weapon use in crowd settings.
- Incorporate insights on stress response and lethal expectations into existing Workbench for refining Rules of Engagement against Crowd Hostiles (WRENCH) simulation to see emergent effects on crowd behavior

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