

## **Introduction**

I agree with the theory of deindividuation, as there are enough empirical data and many credible researches that prove the validity of its main tenets.

When our action is not identifiable, we tend to behave more aggressively. In large groups, we lose our identity, become anonymous and rely upon the actions of other group members to determine how to behave ourselves. Our actions are not readily identifiable and hence no immediate evaluation can be made.

The theory of deindividuation attempts to describe the causes and consequences of the negativity of group behavior, along with presenting empirical data supporting the link between anonymity and extent of aggressiveness.

In this paper, we review the extant literature on the theory of deindividuation in a chronological order with the aim of finding out the link between anonymity and aggressiveness in a group action.

## **Definition of Deindividuation**

Festinger, Pepitone and Newcomb (1952) define deindividuation as “a state of affairs in a group where members do not pay attention to other individuals qua individuals” (Wasik, 2006). Festinger et al. believed that in a group there is a “reduction in inner restraints” towards actions which are normally unacceptable and contrary to social norms (Zimbardo, 1969).

Fraser and Burchel (2001) describe deindividuation as “a process whereby moral constraints on behavior are weakened as persons lose their sense of individuality” (Wasik, 2006). “When a man exercises his volition, chooses to commit himself to a course of action, and accepts personal responsibility for its consequences”, he is more likely to act in line with social norms (Zimbardo, 1969).

## **The Origins of the Theory**

In 1931, Gustave le Bon wrote his famous book “The Crowd a Study of Popular Mind”. Le Bon believes that we have entered an era of crowd action and “the substitution of the unconscious action of crowds for the conscious activity of individuals is one of the principal characteristics of the present age” (Le Bon, 1931). According to Le Bon, crowds are always unconscious and “this very unconsciousness is perhaps one of the secrets of their strength” (Le Bon, 1931). Individuals change the manner of their action being in a group and are in fact “descends several rungs of the ladder of the civilization” (Le Bon, 1931). There are a number of psychological factors that influence the way of how individuals behave in a group and the most important of them is anonymity (Le Bon, 1931). Le Bon calls anonymity the factor that breeds “collective mindset” (Le Bon, 1931).

### **Philip G. Zimbardo (1969). The Human Choice: Individuation, Reason, and Order versus Deindividuation, Impulse, and Chaos.**

Zimbardo built upon Le Bon’s theory of crowd. He described deindividuation as a more complex phenomenon with other factors alongside the anonymity being involved. The other factors are, according to Zimbardo, increased arousal, reduced responsibility, sensory overload, and altered conscious. Zimbardo believes that deindividuation results in a “lowering of the threshold for expressing inhibited behaviors” and therefore, if individual “has been inhibiting a certain pleasurable behavior because of social norms, a lowering of that inhibition could trigger the start of the behavior which would continue until some other outside force acted on it” (Zimbardo, 1969). Anonymity or lack of criticisms is one of the factors that reduce the inhibition of individual’s behavior. Individual is no longer directly responsible for his actions, as the action is prescribed to the group as a single unit (Zimbardo, 1969). Another factor Zimbardo points out

is the preparatory arousal with war dances being an example of it (Zimbardo, 1969). Preparatory arousal can also reduce behavior inhibitions and “propel a group to action” (Zimberdo, 1969).

People are emotionally overloaded in a crowd and “become absorbed by the action itself”. They completely lose their self-awareness (Zimberdo, 1969). For example, football fans are so absorbed by the game itself that can lose self-awareness and behave in a violent manner. “Novel or unstructured situations also can reduce constraints” and drugs can alter conscious and trigger aggressiveness of the group (Zimberdo, 1969).

Deindividuated behavior has certain common characteristics, like emotionality, irrationality, impulsiveness, repressiveness and atypicality for each of the person taken separately (Zimberdo, 1969).

**Diener, E., Fraser, S. C., Beaman, A. L. and Kelem, R. T. (1976). Effects of deindividuation variables on stealing among Halloween trick-or-treaters.**

According to Diener et al. crowds block an individual’s capacity for self-awareness and make them deindividuated (Diener et al., 1976). People lose contact with their personal values and moral norms in a crowd. They do not feel responsible for the group actions and rely on the way others behave to determine their own conduct (Diener et al., 1976). According to Diener et al., the main factor that leads to the loss of self-awareness is anonymity (Diener et. al., 1976). A person is afforded a sufficient level of anonymity when acting in a crowd to be unnoticed for the evaluators and become “a face in the crowd” (Diener et. al., 1976). However, Diener et al believe that the group has not necessarily to be large to ensure anonymity of its members. Sometimes wearing a disguise will suffice for “instilling feelings of anonymity” (Diener et. al., 1976).

**Prentice-Dunn S., and Rogers S. W. (1982). Effects of public and private self-awareness on deindividuation and aggression.**

According to the authors, individuals' both public and private self-awareness is reduced in a crowd, which results in an aggressiveness on their part (Prentice-Dunn, et. al, 1982). Public self-awareness is the "concern for impression" and it can be reduced by anonymity. As a result of a loss of public self-awareness, we abandon public standards of behavior and lower our inhibitions (Prentice-Dunn et. al, 1982), not fearing condemnation of us as individuals.

Private self-awareness includes our own thoughts and standards of behavior. We tend to abandon our internal standards as well when acting in a group. According to Prentice-Dunn et al., loss of private self-awareness rather than anonymity leads to deindividuation and aggressiveness in crowd actions (Prentice-Dunn et. al, 1982).

### **Conclusion**

The review of the extant literature on the theory of deindividuation shows that I have been right to agree with the theory and endorse its validity. First of all, people behave differently when acting in a group, as they feel they are not watched and could not be held accountable for most of the things they do. Second, they tend to forget about common standards of behavior and rely more upon what others do. Third, as researches show, people lose their self-awareness and become too absorbed by the action to be conscious of what they do. These factors, alongside increased arousal, reduced accountability, and altered consciousness, result in aggressiveness of the group's actions. However, I would like to note that group action is not necessarily something bad or aggressive. In many situations, like post natural disaster assistance, large groups volunteer to do something good for the public.

## References

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