

Psychology: Social Psychology – Deindividuation

- Cannot explain individual aggression
- Seeks to explain development of aggression in crowds
- Deindividuation can be placed in group of concepts that are culturally bound

Origins of the concept

Le Bon – “Mob Psychology”

- Groups are fundamentally antisocial;
- Considered aggression to be a natural consequence of crowd behaviour. The more anonymous the crowds, the more likely aggression will occur;
- Interested in how deindividuation occurred.

Fromm - Why individuals would choose to join anonymous crowds

Festinger - Bought these two theories together

In 1952, Festinger bought these two theories together, combining them to form the concept of deindividuation:

“Deindividuation - a state of affairs in a group where members do not pay attention to other individuals *as* individuals and, correspondingly, the members do not feel that they are being singled out by others.”

Festinger, 1952



According to Festinger, membership of a group provides us with two things:

- A sense of social identity and belongingness;
- A means by which we can merge ourselves into the group, forgetting our own individuality and becoming

Theories of Deindividuation

- Diener – a deindividuated individual is prevented by situational factors in a group from becoming self-aware. Deindividuated people are blocked from an awareness of themselves as separate individuals and from monitoring their own behaviour. When we become immersed in a group, self awareness is reduced and there is a lack of concern about what others will think of us. There is also an increase in impulsive behaviour.
- Hugh Prentice-Dunn & Rogers – this theory differs to that of Diener’s in that they say there are two types of self awareness: public self awareness and private self awareness.
 - Public self awareness – anonymous to other people, any concern about what impression we may be giving to others is lost.
 - Private self awareness – the attention we pay to our *own* thoughts and feelings

Public self awareness is reduced by three factors leading to deindividuation:

- 1) Being in a crowd (becoming anonymous, difficult to identify).
- 2) If other members of the crowd are acting in an anti-social fashion, a diffusion of responsibility will occur because one person alone cannot be held accountable for the crowd’s behaviour.
- 3) The behaviour of other people sets down some kind of group norm and provides models to be imitated.

Private self awareness is also reduced by a number of factors:

- 1) Attention is directed outwards to what is going on and we can become so immersed in what is going on that we forget who we are.
- 2) Induced through drugs, alcohol, chanting etc.

Deviant behaviour can occur through a loss of either of these forms of self awareness. Note: reductions in public or private self awareness do not cause deviant behaviour in themselves; rather they make us more susceptible by behavioural cues, one of which is the behaviour of others in the crowd.

It is thought that it is the loss of private self awareness that leads to aggression rather than loss of public self awareness because the process involved in the loss of private self awareness results in a reduction in inhibition, altered states of consciousness, altered thinking and a loss of self identity.