

Discuss the deindividuation theory essay sample

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Deindividuation is a process whereby people lose their sense of socialised individual identity and engage in unsocialised and often antisocial behaviour. Generally, people refrain from acting in an aggressive and antisocial manner because they are easily identifiable. When a person is deindividuated, they lose their sense of self awareness and their sense of personal responsibility. For example, in a crowd, where a person is less likely to be identified and held responsible for their aggressive behaviour as they have anonymity. This explanation can be used to explain the behaviour that was seen in the riots in 2011. LeBon stated that an individual's behaviour changes in the presence of a large crowd. Watson found that 12 out of 13 societies that tortured and killed their victims changed prior to their battle. 7 out of 10 societies that were less brutal did not change their appearance before battle. This shows the role of deindividuation. Research from Zimbardo supports this idea. In Zimbardo's study, the Stanford prison experiment. In this experiment, participants were randomly allocated to either a prisoner or guard. The guards were told to do what was needed to maintain order in the prison. They were both given uniforms, including the guards given sunglasses to wear so that their eyes could not be seen (they cannot make eye contact). The guards were all dressed the same in a plain khaki shirt and trousers. The prisoners were given smocks to wear and a number to identify them with. They were not allowed underwear and were given rubber sandals. These uniforms were designed to deindividuate the prisoners by humiliating them, as well as having to refer to each other by their ID numbers and not their names. The guards showed aggressive behaviour to the prisoners, making them do humiliating tasks. This caused some of the prisoners to

have to be released early due to increased rage and anxiety. This study supports this approach because it shows how the guards were able to make the mock prisoners perform such outrageous tasks.

Similarly, the study a study by Milgram and Milgram's variation found that participants were most likely to administer shocks to a person when they're not in the same room as them. Another study by Rehm assigned either an orange uniform or normal clothes to German school children before a football match. This study found that the children who wore the orange uniforms acted more aggressively towards the other players than the children who wore their normal uniform. Supporting this approach, a study by Malamuth and Check questioned male students at an American university and found that almost one and out of three people admitted that they would rape if there was no chance that they would be caught. This approach is reductionist because it explains aggression in terms of being done because the individual loses a sense of self awareness, however it ignores biological factors which may cause aggression. It also ignores that role that mental disorders such as schizophrenia play in order to make a person act aggressively. It also ignores the influence of drugs and alcohol on aggression.

Empirical support for this theory comes from Zimbardo's study in which female students were asked to shock a confederate found that those who were deindividuated by wearing robes and large hoods gave more shocks than those who were identifiable by wearing name tags. However, a criticism of this study is that deindividuation doesn't always lead to aggression, and can sometimes make people behave more peacefully, e. g. at a peace rally

or when wearing a nurses uniform. It may be that deindividuation leads to conformity to group and situational norms. Also, Zimbardo's experiment was a naturalistic observation. This means that there is no control over the variables and there is no control over any extreneous variable that may influence results. This also means the behaviour shown may be one-off so the same behaviour may not be seen again in a replica.