Research Article

Review of Deindividuation (Loss of Self-Awareness and Self-Identity) and Its Effects

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ABSTRACT

Individuation is the process by which an individual becomes distinct. Individuation distinguishes you from everybody else in contrast deindividuation is mostly unconscious and more likely to lead to mischief as it is a sort of self-delusion. Deindividuation theory was developed to explain the violence and irrationality of the crowd. According to deindividuation theory, the anonymity and excitement of the crowd make individuals lose a sense of individual identity. But, despite a large amount of research, there is little support for deindividuation theory. As person moves into a group, results in a loss of individual identity and gaining the social identity of the group. When two groups argue (and crowd problems are often between groups), it is like two people arguing. Immersion in a group to the point that one loses a sense of self-awareness and feels lessened responsibility for one's actions. This article discusses the theoretical background of deindividuation and its effects on individual, group and society and also its application in daily life.

Have you even experienced or seen students in class shouting and murmuring on their teacher together in one time but, if teacher asks to speak one by one, no one even speak a word! Have you even seen demonstrations, in which demonstrators destruct public and governmental properties and football viewers throwing drinking materials to the field of opponent team and disturbing stadium and city! Senates or audiences of any political meetings to agreed even to less rational points! Religious preaches and congregations in which members come to say accepted or amen and singing loudly following their leader without analyzing what the leader intended to say! What about a very mean man becoming generous in front of crowd or associations and budgeted money from his or her capital to humanitarian aids! And such other state of changes in individual's behavior in which an individual won't do, or agreed alone, but super (main) actor on the presence of groups or

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crowds! This is the result of losing sense of self awareness and analyzing of individuals behavior, diffusion of accountability and responsibility, being anonymous and holding sense of group identity than personal or individual identity.

This alteration of behavior and individual identity of a person to group behavior is term "deindividuation" by social psychologists. This theory was first introduced by Gustav Le Bon (1937) in his book, "The crowd: a study of popular mind", which discussed how the collective mind takes possession of the individual. The main question he investigated was how and why crowds produce uncharacteristic behaviors in an individual. Le Bon's observation were eventually followed by Fetinger, Pepitone and Newcomb (1952), who conducted research on 'what individuals do in a group when they are treated as individuals'. They were the first to postulate the idea of deindividuation. Deindividuation increases exhibition of behavior to a sense of group, and it decreases inhibition and analysis of individual self in any cues.

Deindividuated people never inhibits their current behaviors, rather they increase actions of doing pro-social and or anti-social behaviors. Moreover, a deindividuated person may exhibit risky behaviors too. In some celebrations or snack bars people may promise to offer or to pay all expense of the party, if they get enough attention from the crowds. On the other hand a person may drink more alcohol that provided by other person, when he or she assure that no one identifies him or her. This state is called anonymity. Unrecognized and unidentified people may exhibit their behavior neither by analysis nor afraid of any responsibility to their action. Anonymity activates deindividuation. It's a fuel to fire antisocial behavior of the individuals. This kind of anonymous behaviors are more seen in Computed Mediated Communication's (CMC), by making or creating fake accounts on internet and posting masked pictures on that, individuals freely insult and harass other users.

WHAT IS DEINDIVIDUATION?

The following are different definitions of deindividuation which gives same meaning with different perspectives.
  1. Deindividuation is a sense of losing self-evaluation and criticism or reducing of ego's personal analysis to the real thing or situations, in which Id satisfied its demand.
  2. Deindividuation is exhibition of any behavior (anti-social or pro-social) in which individual's identity, responsibility and behavior in general submerged to the group or crowd.
  3. Deindividuation is the loss of one's sense of individuality and actions committed by individuals after they assure that they are anonymous.
  4. Deindividuation refers to the process of decreased self-assessment and awareness in situation where identification of individual is difficult if not impossible. (Brain Kester Li, 2010)

Why People Deindividuate?
The possible leading causes of deindividuation are -

Sense of belonging or gaining acceptance from group – in such case individuals lose their individuality and gain group identity.

Culture and religion – mostly collective cultures and religions are initial cause of deindividuation, but they create both positive and negative influences. In religion members should be deindividuated to have one religious identity. Some cultures celebrated by mask, and painted colored faces in which celebrations become anonymous and their anonymity leads to deindividuation.

Fear and peer pressure - our entire life is tracked by fear. Fear not to lose others, fear of being alone and challenge things alone, fear of accountability and responsibility to our actions leads to have group identity, than celebrating our individuality. Peers have their own role to have group identity. To be alike your age mates, work mates, class mates and group, you follow in which individuality is evaporated from the individual and submerged to the group identity.

Persuaded states and created mob mentality – scholars and intelligent speakers used their power to convince and persuade the mass to their own ideology. Renaissance and enlightenment movements, religious movements, civil wars, I and II world wars, (national and continental wars in general), different liberty movements etc., were started by few scholars and religious and political leaders by deindividuating people to their own ideologies and philosophies.

Group competition – in group competition games individuals lose their sense of individuality, but only feel as if they are inseparable from the group and have hatred towards opponents.

Theories of Deindividuation

Deindividuation theory is based on a large extent, on the classic crowd theory of G. L. Bon (1995). In this influential book "The crowd: A study of popular mind", Le Bon vividly described the transformation of individual in the crowd. According to Le Bon, the psychological mechanisms of anonymity, suggestibility, and contagion combine to change an assembly into a "psychological crowd". In the crowd the "collective mind" takes possession of the individual, who as a consequence is reduced to an "inferior form of evolution" (p.40). Thus, the individual submerged in the crowd loses self-control and becomes a mindless puppet of violating personal or social norms.

A variety of circumstances can lead to deindividuated states. According to this theory; the most important are anonymity, loss of individual responsibility, arousal, sensory overload, novel or unstructured situations and conscious altering substances such as drugs and alcohol. These circumstances lead to deindividuated behaviors that can be broadly described as "behaviors in violation of established norms of appropriateness" (Zimbardo, 1969, p.251). More specifically Zimbardo referred to emotional, impulsive, irrational, regressive and intense behavior. This behavior is no longer under "stimulus control", is self-reinforcing and as a consequence is difficult to terminate (Postmes and Spears, 1998).

Theory of Crowd

Gustave Le Bon (1960) created the theory of how a collective mind can take possession of the individual. He observed how an individual in a crowd could lose self-control and become a mindless puppet. Le Bon defined psychological crowd as a group that under giving circumstances, and only "under those circumstances, an agglomeration of men presents new characteristics very different from those of the individual composing it". In this crowd or group context, all the feeling of social responsibility and free of being addressed for doing prescribed acts are removed. Le Bon believed that collective mind reached when people lose their individual emotion, thoughts and actions. During this state of mind the individual thinks, feels and acts the same way as the crowd, adopting quite a different behavior to his or her original self (Brain Li, 2010).

Le Bon identified three components contribute to crowd behavior.
1. Anonymity
2. Contagion
3. Suggestibility

First, he argued that member of crowd become universally irrational because of the anonymity that accompanies crowd membership. This encourages people to no longer feel responsible for their actions. Second, he observed that ideas spread rapidly through crowds, and like many other therapists form of contagion. Third, he claimed that crowd is suggestive because of the way permit the release of antisocial motives.

Psychoanalysis has been used to understand the irrational and unpredictable aspects of crowd behavior. For instance, Freud suggested that when someone becomes part of a crowd, the superego, which in normal circumstances help to maintain society's moral standard and civilized conventions, is displaced by the leader of the crowd (Hogg, 1996). The leader symbolizes the 'primal father' to whom people regress in crowd situations and individual's unconscious behavior is effectively "unlocked" in ways that unleash uncivilized, primordial behavior.

Pro-Social Behavior and Deindividuation

Most researches were focused on the antisocial effect of deindividuation. But deindividuation is increment of exhibition to different cues (both for anti-social and pro-social actions). Donations (group donations), demonstrations and social actions against dictators, protests against dogmas and different dynamic group works in the new science are pro-social behaviors which are resulted from deindividuation. Deindividuation helps to reduce inhibition mainly inhibition to help society, inhibition to share personal skills and knowledge, inhibition to help victims and inhibitions and reluctance to save the world. Additionally, unities and agreements are resulted from deindividuated state. But if individuals celebrate only their individuality, no teams and team spirits will be there and no associations (scientific, humanitarian associations) and developmental companies will work on. In

general, social identity in its lesser level creates our new world, but they should be aware of their actions.

Bowman believed that when in a true psychological states of deindividuation, the individual is easily influenced by situational cues. His research reveals that, if the situation calls for it an increase in pro-social behavior can result from deindividuation. Bowman found that subjects with clear cues in the deindividuated condition had a higher likelihood of helping (80%) compared to the subjects with clear cues in the non-deindividuated condition (40%). Subjects with the ambiguous cues in the deindividuated condition had a higher likelihood of helping (40%) compared to subjects with ambigious cues in the non-deindividuated conditions (20%). Bowman found that "relatively to non-deindividuated subjects, deindividuated subjects were more likely to help, provided higher amounts of help and tended to provide help more quickly" (1986, Bowman, 34 - Brain Li).

SOCIAL IDENTITY MODEL OF DEINDIVIDUATION EFFECT (SIDE)

The Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effect (SIDE) is a theory developed by Reicher (1987). Accordingly to this model, anonymity within a group decreases awareness of their, distinct individuals and shifts this awareness to the group identity, a process they call social-identity based on depersonalization. Once the individual identity lost or submerged to the group, no personal view and action will followed. Anonymity is the greater result of social identity which leads to deindividuation. Anonymity is a dark situation in which light bulbs are turned off and no one can see and recognize you as a human even. Masks, uniforms (dress code), and large groups social identical forms are served as a switch to turned off the lights bulbs on the area and create anonymity which results in deindividuation.

Unlike research based on deindividuation theory, studies founded on the SIDE approach focus more on how anonymity may increase social influence (Postmes et al, 2001). Instead of explaining the relationship between anonymity and deindividuation by exploring aggressive or antisocial behavior, SIDE research seek to determine that relationship by focusing on the identification of the individual both within and outside of the group (undergraduate journal of Baylor university).

Effect of Deindividuation

Different positive and negative effects of groups, crowds and associations are result of deindividuation, but, studies on deindividuation did not draw firm conclusions and its presumed effects. Following are some of the effects of deindiviuation on individuals, groups and on society.

1. Formation of group behavior and social identity - mind is complex in nature, but deindividuation leads to much complex states. Psychologists study the behavior of the individual not behavior of the group. But a deindividuated person don't have individual behavior and individual identity, in such case counselors and other specialized psychologists will not understand the behavior of the individual from the group mind he/she holds. Drawing treatment plans without understanding the identity and behavior of the individual is meaningless.

2. Reducing sense of self awareness, self-criticism and analyzing of own current action. Deindividuated individuals are less likely to evaluate and stop their illegal and inhumanly actions. They are rivers to flow until they are dried.

3. Religious and political dogmas are the result of deindividuation. There are few gifted persuasive leaders who convenience the mass to follow and carry their philosophy or ideology. Once individuals are deindividuated they only become material, and followers of their deindividuators.

4. Deindividuation facilitates racism and group thinking. Deindividuated people are racist to other race, ethnic, religion, nation, and group. They only assert freedom (belongingness) to their own group. Their mind alarmed not to receive other, and accept diversity as beauty.

5. Wars are the result of deindividuation. Never a non-deindividuated human could hold gun and bombs against their species (mankind). A continental, national, civil and simple war has been resulted from deindividuated state of the mind. Deindividuated mind never afraid to torture and kill others. National anthems, songs (political songs), uniforms and some persuasive speeches are triggering soldier to the deindividuated stare and exhibit their power to kill human beings without any humane feelings.

6. Violence and aggressions - researches proved that deindividuated people are more aggressive and violent than the non-deindividuated people. Deindividuation decreases the ego and opens a gate for the Id's in which violence and aggression or antisocial behavior satisfied the repressed unconscious mind.

7. Deindividuation increases and also decreases sense of humanity. Humanitarian associations, securities against terrorists and other prosocial behaviors are the result of deindividuation. But genocides, human trafficking, terrorism and other antisocial behaviors are result of deindividuation.

8. Deindividuation reduces creativity, generativity, responsibility and accountability of the individual. Creative individuals will never deindividuate and deindividuated individuals will never be creative. The reason is creativity and generativity of new things needs responsibility and accountability for every action. But deindividuation paralyzed the responsibility of the individual.

Application

Our most daily activities are based on social behaviors an identities are holds
1. In politics and political parties
2. In religious and religious churches
3. Military forces
4. Football games
5. Demonstrations and social actions
6. In cultures and cultural celebrations
7. Funds or charities
8. Associations and institutions
9. In computer mediated communications (CMC)

CONCLUSION

Anyone is susceptible to deindividuation, but a strong desire to belong ad strong group identity can increase a person's likelihood of deindividuating. A highly religious person, for example is much more likely to deindividuate in a religious setting than an avowed atheist. Highly stimulating groups – such as sports games with lots of action or military missions can increase the likelihood of deindividuation, and some research indicates that large groups are more likely to cause members to deindividuate. People are deindividuated trough their race, ethnicity, gender, team, crowd or groups they have. Geographical and political situations also have its own influence on creating group identity. The practical examples are the II world wars and other civil wars between two countries were activated on behest of politicians by creating mob mentality. Persuading their people that as if they are superior race and other people are not deserved and allowed to live on the world. Infact, deindividuated people are quick to respond to any cues. Research suggests that when people are submerged in a group. They become impulsive, aroused and wrapped up in the cues of moment (Spivey and Dunn, 1990). Their action is determined by whatever the group does. There is evidence also that the larger a group is the more deindividuation will occur.

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