

# SOCI 324

# GROUPS, ORGANISATIONS AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Session 8 – Social Influence-Deindividuation and Mob  
Behaviour

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# Session Overview

- We are all so very familiar with many incidents of peaceful demonstrations that have got out of hand. There are also many stories of how people have been lynched by a mob because they are suspected to be thieves or witches. The question that often arises is why do these things happen?
- How do individuals come to act as group beings capable of engaging in acts that they ordinarily would not do if they alone? How does the presence of others in a group context influence the psyche of an individual to make him or her behave in a way they ordinarily would not behave like?
- In this session, we shall answer these question by looking at the phenomenon of deindividuation. We shall explore why it happens, the implications and effects of it and the ways we can control its negative effects on the group.

# Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Definition of Deindividuation
- The incidence of Deindividuation
- The implications of Deindividuation
- Controlling Deindividuation
- Sample Question
- Session Summary
- References

# Reading List

- Read chapter eight of the required text and the article on this chapter posted on Sakai.



Topic One

# DEFINING DEINDIVIDUATION



# What is Deindividuation

- Deindividuation refers to the loss of individual identity and a loosening of normal inhibition against engaging in behavior that is inconsistent with internal standards.
- Aronson et al (2007) define deindividuation as “The loosening of normal constraints on behavior when people cannot be identified, leading to an increase in impulse and deviant acts”. The term can also refer to a temporary loss of self awareness and becoming a kind of group being, resulting in a reduction of inner restraints within the individual.



# What is Deindividuation?

- Zimbardo (1969) has described a deindividuated behavior to be highly emotional and impulsive self reinforcing and therefore difficult to terminate, highly influenced by what others in the situation are doing and in general every destructive”.
- It is explained that when individuals come together in a group, they tend to lose their distinctive personalities and become a homogenous and highly emotional mass, one that operates collectively and is manipulated by a group mind (Le bon 1896). Often in group situations, emotions are highly charged, inhibitions are lowered and self awareness is lost leading to deindividuation. But what exactly causes deindividuation?

Topic Two

# THE INCIDENCE OF DEINDIVIDUATION





# The Incidence of Deindividuation

- **Obedience to Group Norms:** in a meta-analysis of over 60 studies, (Postmes and Spears, 1998) found that deindividuation leads to increases in the extent to which people obey group norms. In cases where the group's norms clash with other social norms, group members tend to obey their groups norms. If the group's norms conflict with social norms, deindividuated people may engage in anti-social acts because their own responsibility for such acts may be greatly diminished.
- However, if the group's norms are positive, deindividuated people will go along and follow these norms to engage in positive behavior. Thus, deindividuation leads to involvement in group activity. Many of the acts crowds engage in are involving and these actions often preclude critical thought. The common experience (whatever task is being done) unifies the group and absorbs the mind. Simply, people get involved because they do not want to be seen as antisocial.
- **Large group size:** the noise, excitement and arousal produced crowd leads to low self awareness and deindividuation.



# The Incidence of Deindividuation

- **Anonymity:** often in crowd settings, it is difficult to identify people and hold them responsible for their actions. People tend to look like other members in the group because they most likely are dressed like them, or their face cannot be seen, or simply that they are not known in a particular area. For instance the supporters at the Ohene Djan sports stadium on the 9th of May 2001 felt truly individuated when they pulled out and hurled chairs at each other leading to stampede and the death of about a hundred and twenty people. Another example could be a group of students on a demonstration; they often engage in violent destructive acts because of anonymity.
- **Diffused Responsibility:** Deindividuation makes people feel less accountable because the group or crowd provides protection from possible identification and punishment for wrongdoing. For instance, a student can risk making derogatory comments in a lecture because s/he know that s/he cannot be identified and solely punished for the offence because out of solidarity other students may not give him up.

# The Incidence of Deindividuation

- **Sensory Overload:** this refers to the situation where one is overwhelmed with information or things in his environment that require his attention. Sensory overload leads to deindividuation and the suspension of independent thinking processes and judgment. Much like a hypnotic subject and the individual is carried along by what others do. There also are no counter pressures to make you aware of what you are doing to help you appraise your actions.

Topic Three

# THE IMPLICATIONS OF DEINDIVIDUATION



# Implications of Deindividuation-Mob Behaviour

- Deindividuation has both positive and negative outcomes though people often tend to do negative things in a deindividuated state. Often the individual tends to become irresponsible and irrational.
- However, the norms in a group ultimately determine the actions and behavior that will be encouraged in a group.



Topic Four

# DEINDIVIDUATION AND CYBERSPACE



# Deindividuation and Cyberspace

- A recent development in contemporary times is the internet. The internet has provided new and amazing ways in which people can communicate with each other. This is helped particularly by the anonymity it provides which allows people to freely express themselves.
- However, as we said about anonymity, people know they cannot be noticed and thus use the internet to say things they would never dream of saying if they could be identified. Recently in Ghana, we have heard reports of people using the internet to engage in fraudulent activities.



# Sample Question





# Session Summary

- This section has provided another view of how the presence of others influences the behavior of others. The group provides anonymity and protection for the individual which often leads to behavior which an individual would not engage in if he were alone. Deindividuation can be checked by putting in measures to ensure that individuals can be identified even in a group setting.

# References

- Robert, B. and Branscombe, N. (2012). Social Psychology. 13<sup>th</sup> Edition. Pearson Education, Inc.
- Aronson, E., Wilson, T. & Akert, R. (2007) Social Psychology. 6<sup>th</sup> Edition. Pearson Education Inc.
- Aronson, E., Wilson, T. & Akert, R. (2010) Social Psychology. 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. Pearson Education Inc.

