**DEINDIVIDUATION THEORY**

* Being deindividuated means to lose ones sense of individuality and identity.
* When individuals feel less identifiable (e.g. being hidden by a uniform or being in a large group) they engage in less inhibited behaviour (i.e. their behaviour is not constrained by normal acceptable standards).
* Factors that enhance deindividuation:
* Shared responsibility, which reduces the sense of guilt if the action results in violent behaviour and harm to others or property
* Alcohol and drugs create an altered state of consciousness that can contribute to the lack of inhibition
* Uniforms where individuals identify with roles created by the uniform and lose their sense of individuality.

**Le Bon’s theory**

In 1896, Le Bon pointed out that when part of a large anonymous group, individuals are more likely to behave in an anti-social and aggressive manner because crowds create a ‘collective mindset’.

* In crowds a ‘collective mindset’ is created and the group acts as one; Le Bon termed this ‘a mob’.
* The individual becomes submerged in the group and feels less identifiable leading to less inhibited behaviour.
* Loss of inhibition means that individuals are not so constrained by internal standards of acceptable behaviour.
* Less identifiable = less risk of social disapproval for actions.

**Diener’s theory**

* Deindividuation occurs when self-awareness is blocked by environmental factors, such as increased arousal, strong group feelings, feelings of anonymity, and a focus on external rather than internal events.
* Because this reduces self-awareness, rational thinking and planning is affected.
* A focus on external events means that individuals are more impulsive and prone to aggressive behaviours.
* **Prentice-Dunn and Rogers (1982)** modified this theory to distinguish between two types of self-awareness. Reductions in public and private self-awareness can result in aggression, but only reductions in private self-awareness lead to genuine deindividuation.

**Evaluation of deindividuation theory**

* **Ellison et al (1995)** found that participants in a driving simulator who imagined they were in a top-up convertible car drove more aggressively than participants imagining they were in a top-down convertible car. Top-up drivers had greater anonymity leading to deindividuation.
* Zimbardo used deindividuation to explain the rapid increase of aggressive behaviour in his Stanford Prison experiment. The clothes of prisoners and guards increased both anonymity and a strong sense of role.
* **Zimbardo (1969)** found that hooded and anonymous (hence deindividuated) participants were more likely to shock other participants than those who were identifiable (with name tags and without hoods).
* In cross-cultural research, Watson found that in conflict situations warriors who wore face and body paint (so had anonymity) were more aggressive than those who were identifiable. Similarly, **Silke (2003)** found that the greatest aggression shown in violent assault was by those wearing masks. Both studies suggest anonymity contributes to deindividuation resulting in higher levels of aggression.
* Many crowds gather peacefully and induce a sense of belonging rather than aggression, e.g. religious and music festivals, so aggression is not an inevitable result of anonymity.