**Deindividuation**

**Theory**

Deindividuation is the process by which people *lose* their sense of individuality and self-awareness. This means that in crowds we may become ‘**disinhibited**’ when we feel anonymous – essentially feeling *less* personal responsibility and *less* fear of public disapproval as part of a larger group. This **anonymity** encourages displays of aggressive behaviour.

People are usually inhibited from acting aggressively because they can be identified – therefore they fear they can be punished and judged. When people are aware that someone is watching them they monitor and self-assess their behaviour and act according to a **moral code** they have learned throughout their lives.

When deindividuation happens in **large crowds** people lose any fear of being judged or punished and so levels of aggression increase.

Deindividuation can also happen when wearing **masks or disguises** or when facial features are **hidden by darkness**.

**Zimbardo 1969 – Deindividuation Study**

Much like Milgram’s experiment on obedience, Zimbardo pretended that his experiment was a ‘study on learning’ using electric shocks. As with Milgram’s study, Zimbardo was actually testing the *‘teachers’ actions* (due to being **identifiable** or not) and not the ‘learners’ ability – the ‘learners’ were in fact confederates (stooges who are in on the experiments true aim), and no actual shocks were administered.

**Aim** –

To investigate the effects of Deindividuation on the amount of aggression shown (measured by the amount of shocks administered) towards a group of learners.

**Procedure** –

**Half** of the all-female participants (the teachers) **wore lab coats** and had **hoods** covering their faces – they were given their instructions on the ‘learning experiment’ in groups of four and were **never referred to by name** – they were the Deindividuated group.

**Half** of the female participants wore their **normal clothes**, were given **large name tags** and were **introduced to each other by name** in a formal way.

Both groups of ‘teachers’ could see the ‘learners’ and both groups were told that each of the ‘learners’ were either – **‘conceited and critical’** or were **‘honest’** people.

**Findings** –

Regardless of the descriptions given about the ‘learner’ the Deindividuated ‘teachers’ delivered twice as many shocks as the individuated ones.

Participants with the large name tags varied the shocks dependent on the description given – the ‘honest’ learners were given less shocks.

**Conclusions** –

This study shows dramatically the effect of reduced inhibitions when faces and identity are concealed using masks and anonymity.