

INVESTIGATION INTO DEINDIVIDUATION USING A CROSS-CULTURAL SURVEY TECHNIQUE

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Zimbardo's hypothesis that the process of deindividuation leads to aggressive behavior was tested using a worldwide sample selected from the cultures found in the Human Relations Area files. The variable of aggression was determined using Slater's code on "killing, torturing, or mutilating the enemy," which produced 37 cultures coded as high and medium and 47 coded as low. This sample was then reduced to avoid contamination. A comparison of linguistic groups and geographic locations was made, and those cultures that were too similar were eliminated. A code for deindividuation before going into battle was written and applied to the remaining 27 cultures. A significant positive relationship was found between deindividuation and aggressiveness in this sample.

Zimbardo's (1969) work on deindividuation has aroused a growing interest in this complex process. An early study by Festinger, Pepitone, and Newcomb (1952) emphasized the reduction of restraint for individuals "submerged in a group" and the attractiveness of such a group. In a more recent work, Singer, Brush, and Lublin (1965) emphasized the loss of self consciousness and a reduction in distinctiveness as essential elements in deindividuation, while Ziller (1964) stressed the importance of ego identity. Combining and enlarging these thoughts on deindividuation, Zimbardo formulated a model for the process of deindividuation and the behavior that it elicits from individuals. He postulated an institutionalized system of control, based on the ego identity of the individual and aided by such concepts as time, history, and law. One of the most important ways in which this control may be lost is through deindividuation—a feeling of anonymity and a consequent lack of concern over social evaluation which allows the individual to act aggressively. Zimbardo (1969) thus described a few of the ways in which the loss of one's socially identifiable characteristics may result in deindividuation: "The loss of identity can be conferred by being submerged in a crowd, disguised, masked or dressed in a uniform like everyone else, or by darkness [p. 255]."

atTo test the relationship between deindividuation and aggression, Zimbardo (1969) de-

signed an experiment which enabled him to observe the behavior of subjects in both an individuation and a deindividuation situation. The setting was a controlled laboratory experiment supposedly involving a study of empathy. Each of the female subjects was led to believe that she was administering shocks to another subject. Aggression was measured by the duration and number of these shocks. The basic between-group variable was the state of individuation or deindividuation of the subject administering the shocks. The deindividuation condition was accompanied by a number of manipulations: No names were used, the experiment took place in the dark, and each subject wore a large lab coat with a hood over her head. In the individuation situation, identifiability and individuality were emphasized through such manipulations as the use of the subjects' names and a constant stress placed on the uniqueness of reactions. A within-group manipulation was also attempted. It was hypothesized that differences between victims would be of no real importance to the deindividuated subjects and that the duration of shocks would be similar for any victim. Accordingly, one victim was portrayed as nice and the other as obnoxious. As hypothesized, Zimbardo found that the deindividuated group was both more aggressive and did not discriminate between victims. Therefore, the process of deindividuation appeared to result in more aggressive behavior.

It was felt that this hypothesis on deindividuation and its relationship to aggression could be usefully researched using the Human

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Relations Area files. The files are a tool for cross-cultural survey work (Murdock, Ford, Hudson, Kennedy, Simmons, & Whiting, 1965). Basically, they are the information assembled by hundreds of ethnographers on over 200 cultures. There is a file for each culture or distinct subculture, arranged in general interest categories, such as housing, clothing, or warfare. All of the information collected on a specific topic by the various ethnographers is placed under the appropriate category within each culture, thereby giving a researcher all of the data compiled on a specific topic for a specific group. The process of deindividuation could be investigated using this technique since certain physical changes accompanying the psychological change of deindividuation would have been observed by ethnographers. Not only should these changes have been noted, but they also would have been of the type that would at least have received mention in a report. In addition, it was believed that incidents of aggression would be found in the files' literature on warfare and the already existing codes dealing with aggression.

METHOD

The first step was the choice of a precoded variable involving aggression. For this, an extreme form of aggression in warfare was selected using Slater's code for "killing, torturing, or mutilating the enemy" (Textor, 1967). Scoring high on this code are cultures that engage in such practices as taking prisoners specifically for torture, sacrificing prisoners under torturelike conditions, and prolonged torture. Cultures in the medium category, which Slater combines with those scoring high, are noted for killing all enemies on the spot, headhunting on a wide scale, and fighting to the death in all battles. Low on this code are cultures with either none of the characteristics of high or medium cultures or those with reports of such things as prisoners being kept as slaves, or a battle or raid being stopped before all of the enemy are killed. Slater's code produced a total sample of 84 cultures, including 37 scored as high and medium and 47 scored as low.

The sample was recoded and randomized by someone else so that the deindividuation factor could be coded blindly. The subsample used in this study was selected first using linguistic groups from Murdock's (1967) *Ethnographic Atlas*. It was then further reduced using geographic location as indicated by the Human Relations Area files map. To avoid contamination of the sample by similar cultures, no societies that were in the same linguistic group or had any contiguous borders with another society within the sample were used. The result was a sample of 27 societies to which the investigator applied his code involving deindividuation.

Since the precoded material involved aggression in warfare, the code was developed to examine deindividuation before battle. The code is as follows:

Presence. Scored whenever there is a specific change in appearance of the individual before battle. This change of appearance can be accomplished in many ways—body painting, face painting, wearing of special garments worn only in times of war, masks, hair cutting, etc. What would *not* be scored is armor worn for protection or the wearing of a symbol of rank or status.

Definite absence. Scored whenever all of the above are not present in the ethnographer's report, and there is a specific mention of absence of any of the above, that is, "no cases of face painting have ever been reported."

Inferred absence. Scored whenever the items of the Presence Code are absent and there is an adequate amount of material reported by the ethnographer on the preparation for warfare to make a judgment.

Non-ascertainable. Ethnographer does not report adequate information on preparation for warfare. The sample of 27 societies was then coded. Using the Human Relations Area files, the reports on each society under the categories of war and uniforms were read; or, if neither of these proved fruitful, the general category for clothing for that society was consulted.

RESULTS

The results obtained from the cultures included in this study are summarized in Table 1. There was no ascertainable basis for judgment in 4 cases, while 15 cultures were reported to go through some process before entering into battle which was coded as being deindividuating. Only 2 cultures proved to be coded as having definite absence of deindividuation, but there was an adequate amount of material in 6 cultures to infer the absence of deindividuation. Accordingly, the definite and inferred absence categories were combined to produce the chi-square presented in Table 2. These findings suggest that there is a significant relationship between the process of deindividuation and aggression in warfare.

DISCUSSION

Zimbardo's (1969) original hypothesis was based on observation and experimentation with modern western man. By using the Human Relations Area file, it has been extended, at least on the level of observation, to a worldwide sample. Certainly, the results of the present study lend weight to Zimbardo's idea of deindividuation aiding aggression. The

TABLE 1

ARRAY OF CULTURES ACCORDING TO ASSIGNED CATEGORY OF DEINDIVIDUATION PREPARATORY TO BATTLE AND LEVEL OF AGGRESSION IN WARFARE

Deindividuation category			
Presence	Absence		No basis for judgment
	Definite	Inferred	
Aggressive ^a Ojiwaba Abipon Araucanians Inca Comanche Aztec Jivaro Navaho Azande Masai Creek Crow Nonaggressive ^b Cuna Papago Ganda	Nonaggressive ^b Tanala Pukapuka	Nonaggressive ^b Tapirape Tallensi Chuckchee Marngin Timbira Aggressive ^a Somali	Aggressive ^a Tiv Kazak Nonaggressive ^b Wolof Trumai

^a Aggressive = Cultural emphasis on killing, mutilating, or torturing enemies is strong or moderate.
^b Nonaggressive = Cultural emphasis is negligible.

wearing of war paint or any other physical change may have meaning in terms of quick identification of fellow warriors and enemies, but there also appears to be a link between the change and the aggression or ferocity of the individuals who take part in the change. Of course, alternate explanations not involving deindividuation are possible. For example, physical appearance may be a symbol to which an individual and others respond, or the expectations of others with regard to the individual's behavior or appearance may change. Furthermore, nothing definite about the direction of the deindividuation-aggression sequence

can be determined from this data since it is possible that the extremely aggressive groups acted aggressively first and later began to change their appearance before battle to be consistent with their own behavior. As in other studies where the presence or absence of some observable fact is being coded, it was difficult to find cases of definite absence mentioned. It would make for a stronger study if sufficient information could be obtained on the inferred absence group to move its members into the definite absence group. When such a factor as the present one is absent in a culture, however, it is really only chance that would make an ethnographer note and comment on the point of absence. It is encouraging that both cases of definite absence are societies low on Slater's code for aggression. Zimbardo's hypothesis has survived the test of the Human Relations Area file, and it appears not to be bound to any one cultural sphere.

TABLE 2
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHANGES IN PHYSICAL APPEARANCE PRIOR TO BATTLE AND EXTREMITY OF AGGRESSION IN WARFARE AMONG 23 INDEPENDENT (LINGUISTICALLY AND GEOGRAPHICALLY) CULTURES

Item	Deindividuation	
	Changed appearance	Unchanged appearance
Aggressive	12	1
Nonaggressive	3	7

Note. $N = 23$; $\chi^2 = 7.12$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$.

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