

Chapter 6

A Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Phenomena

S. D. Reicher

University of Exeter

R. Spears and T. Postmes

University of Amsterdam

ABSTRACT

This chapter challenges traditional models of deindividuation. These are based on the assumption that such factors as immersion in a group and anonymity lead to a loss of selfhood and hence of control over behaviour. We argue that such models depend upon an individualistic conception of the self, viewed as a unitary construct referring to that which makes individuals unique. This is rejected in favour of the idea that self can be defined at various different levels including the categorical self as well as the personal self. Hence a social identity model of deindividuation (SIDE) is outlined. Evidence is presented to show that deindividuation manipulations gain effect, firstly, through the ways in which they affect the salience of social identity (and hence conformity to categorical norms) and, secondly, through their effects upon strategic considerations relating to the expression of social identities. We conclude that the classic deindividuation paradigm of anonymity within a social group, far from leading to uncontrolled behaviour, maximizes the opportunity of group members to give full voice to their collective identities.

THE ROOTS OF DEINDIVIDUATION THEORY

If the term 'deindividuation' belongs to the era of modern experimental social psychology, the concept itself has a far longer history. Zimbardo traces it back

to primal cultural concepts, claiming that: 'mythically, deindividuation is the ageless life force, the cycle of nature, the blood ties, the tribe, the female principle, the irrational, the impulsive, the anonymous chorus, the vengeful furies' (1969, p. 249). However, within the domain of psychology, it is possible to identify a more specific point of origin. As Cannavale, Scarr, and Pepitone (1970) acknowledge, the idea of deindividuation is taken straight from Le Bon's concept of submergence.

Gustave Le Bon's text on crowd psychology was first published in France in 1895. It was a period in which the French state appeared particularly vulnerable to mass agitation—in particular to a rising tide of syndicalist and socialist protests. Le Bon, in common with other theorists of the time, wrote not as a dispassionate observer but with the express aim of taming the challenge that crowd action represented to the social order. This is clearly apparent in the overwhelming negativism through which crowds and crowd members are characterized: according to Le Bon, crowds are only powerful for destruction and the individual who enters the crowd descends several rungs on the ladder of civilization. The perspective is also reflected, in more subtle terms, in the concepts through which he seeks to explain how crowds behave.

For Le Bon, becoming submerged in a throng leads individuals to lose both external and internal constraints upon their behaviour. The sense of power derived from strength in numbers leads individuals to express instincts that would otherwise be kept under restraint. Being indistinguishable from others in the crowd leads individuals to lose all sense of individuality and hence the sense of individual responsibility that normally controls behaviour. This loss of individuality has two consequences. Firstly, crowd members are unable to make conscious discriminations. Consequently they are liable to contagion—automatically echoing the emotions and actions of others. Secondly, the conscious personality is replaced by a collective unconscious which is the primitive racial substrate of the group. Consequently crowd members are liable to suggestion—uncritically following impulses emanating from their common unconscious. The atavistic characteristics which Le Bon ascribes to crowd behaviour—intellectual inferiority, fickleness, excessive emotionality and so on—are merely reflections of the atavism of the racial unconscious. By this account the crowd is, at best, incoherent and, at worst, generically destructive. It sits uneasily with successive ways of historical research showing not only that crowd action is patterned, but also that it is sensitive to structural, cultural and ideological aspects of the precise historical setting (e.g. Davis, 1978; Lefebvre, 1954; Reddy, 1977; Thompson, 1971, 1991).

As we have argued elsewhere (Reicher, 1987; Reicher & Potter, 1985) this inability to acknowledge the social form of action derives from the way in which crowd behaviour is abstracted from its social context. The events with which Le Bon was concerned were primarily encounters between groups, where crowds of strikers or of political factions clashed with the forces of 'law and order'.

However, in Le Bon's account, the crowd is lifted from this setting and analysed as if it were acting in isolation. The political consequence of this is that no responsibility for any violence can be ascribed to either the general social background or to the immediate actions of state forces. The crowd alone bears responsibility for violence and therefore repression rather than social change is the appropriate response. The intellectual consequence is that violence cannot be explained by reference to the dynamics of inter-group relations, but only by reference to the inherent characteristics of the crowd. This is underpinned by a particular conceptualization of the human subject. Rationality and the control of behaviour are seen as deriving solely from a unique and sovereign personal identity. Anything which obscures this identity undermines rationality and behavioural control. Thus only two states of being are possible: on the one hand there is the individuated subject who acts in a reasoned and discriminating manner, on the other there is the subject whose individuality is submerged and who acts without thought or restraint. The crowd serves as the gateway from one state to the other. Thus social setting, and social factors in general, may be of importance in determining the operation of individuality. However, what is excluded in this perspective is that social factors in general and the social group in particular may enter into the constitution of a person's identity and hence that there may be a social basis to behavioural control. Ultimately, then, the desocialized description which Le Bon gives of crowd events has its psychological concomitant a desocialized model of the self.

At one level, such issues may concern us a little more than objects of historical curiosity. After all, Le Bon's overt political bias, his journalistic style, his cavalier usage of evidence and his ideas of group mind and racial unconscious have all subsequently been largely discarded (Allport, 1924). Nonetheless, his broader conceptual legacy still influences even those who stand in traditions that overtly reject his ideas. Yet the clearest connection is with deindividuation theory which, as already stated, derives directly from Le Bon's ideas about submergence. As we shall see, however, the theory focuses predominantly on that aspect of submergence relating to the loss of internal constraints and largely ignores the effects of submergence on the perceived ability to ignore external constraints.

In the following section we shall review the successive waves of deindividuation research. We then argue that, for all the rigour and sophistication with which deindividuation researchers have pursued their enquiries, their research remains conceptually and empirically limited both by retaining Le Bon's desocialized conceptual constructs and also by ignoring his concern with the impact of crowd involvement upon perceived empowerment. Unless individualism is replaced by a socialized conception of the self, unless behaviour is analysed within its full social context and unless consideration is given to the impact of deindividuation procedures upon power relations between actors as well as the psychological state of actors, then deindividuation

theory will continue to be incapable of accounting for the results of its own procedures, let alone proving a basis for explaining how crowds behave. Our aim, set out in the fourth and fifth sections of this chapter, is to show how deindividuation manipulations simultaneously affect both the social nature of selfhood and the strategic relations between self and other. By combining these two dimensions, we hope to unravel the complex consequences of such manipulations. In so doing, we also hope to contribute to the demise of a traditional and pathologizing conception of collective action.

MODERN THEORIES OF DEINDIVIDUATION

The term 'deindividuation' was introduced into the psychological lexicon by Festinger, Pepitone, and Newcomb (1952). They found that males in a group who remembered less individuating information were more likely to express hostility towards their parents. These results were explained as being due to the fact that 'under conditions where the member is not individuated in the group, there is likely to occur for the member a reduction of inner restraints against doing various things' (p. 382). The conceptual debt to Le Bon is quite apparent in this. As in all subsequent deindividuation research, it is assumed that individual identity is lost in the mass and that this results in a loss of behavioural control. Yet, in this first instance of the tradition, there is considerable vagueness as to antecedents of the deindividuated state, what constitutes it and what behaviours will result from it. What is more, insofar as the authors employ a correlational method, deindividuation is almost treated as an individual difference variable rather than arising as a general consequence of immersion in a group. This last issue was addressed by Singer, Brush, and Lublin (1965) who manipulated immersion by either getting a group of women to dress in old undistinguishing clothes or in a highly personalized and identifiable manner. In the former state, subjects were much freer in discussing the 'taboo' subject of pornography. It was Zimbardo, however, who provided the impetus for a flourishing of deindividuation research by providing a more exact conceptual specification.

It is important to note that Zimbardo's underlying concerns matched those of Le Bon. Writing in the late 1960s when the United States was witnessing an upsurge of urban disturbances and mass protests, Zimbardo felt that society was in the grip of 'Dionysiac forces' leading to 'motiveless murders, senseless destruction and uncontrolled mob violence' (1969, p. 248). Deindividuation was invoked as the explanation of these threatening phenomena. Moreover, deindividuation was equated with atavism much in the same way as Le Bon invoked the racial unconscious to explain crowds.

Within this general framework, Zimbardo (1969) proposed a model in which a series of antecedent variables lead to a state of deindividuation. Such

variables include anonymity, arousal, sensory overload, novel or unstructured situations, involvement in the act, and the taking of consciousness-altering substances such as alcohol or drugs. Underlying this deindividuated state are minimization of self-observation and self-evaluation, and hence a lowered concern for social evaluation. The outcome of this is a weakening of controls based on guilt, shame, fear and commitment. This in turn leads to a lowered threshold for exhibiting inhibited behaviours. Thus, from a social perspective, deindividuated behaviour is characterized as being 'in violation of established norms of appropriateness' (1969, p. 251). From the actor's perspective, deindividuated behaviour is atypical and irrational. Moreover, insofar as contextual sensitivity is lost, the behaviours must be self-reinforcing and thus hard to terminate short of a dramatic change in conditions.

Two developments in this model are worth stressing. Firstly, although many of the antecedents of deindividuation are related to group membership, it is not exclusively a group phenomenon. Indeed, it may arise out of many factors from sensory overload to individual drug-taking. Similarly, it explains not only collective behaviour, but also individual acts such as suicide, murder and personal hostility. Secondly, while Zimbardo acknowledges that the deindividuated state need not necessarily lead to anti-social action, he does focus upon its negative aspects—both psychological and behavioural. Thus, on the one hand, deindividuation is associated with perceptual distortion, memory impairment, hyper-responsiveness to proximal others and unresponsiveness to distal others. On the other hand, deindividuation is equated with ritual destruction of traditional forms and structures. Not surprisingly, then, most of the supportive evidence comes in the form of showing how supposed antecedents of deindividuation are associated with anti-social acts.

Zimbardo (1969) himself asked subjects to deliver electric shocks to confederates allegedly in order to get 'actively involved' with them! Deindividuated subjects gave electric shocks of an average 0.90 seconds duration as opposed to 0.47 for individuated subjects. Zimbardo complemented this with a field study showing how a car was far more likely to be vandalized and stripped in more anonymous areas of a city (pp. 283–93). In similar vein, Donnerstein, Donnerstein, and Evans (1972) found that white subjects were willing to give higher levels of shock to a black victim who could neither see nor identify them, while Milgram (1974) found that—irrespective of race—level of shock rises as identifiability of victim to the subject falls. Watson (1973) complemented these findings with cross-cultural evidence that warriors who lower personal identifiability through such devices as war paint are far more likely to indulge in violent killings than those who do not.

The first cracks in this apparently consistent picture came with evidence that deindividuating circumstances can lead to lowered aggressivity (Diener, 1976; Zabrick & Miller, 1972) or even increased affection (Gergen, Gergen, & Barton, 1973). While the latter is not explicitly contrary to Zimbardo's

model—he does, after all, claim only that behaviour is ‘inappropriate’, not necessarily negative—such findings do raise the question of what determines which of various possible behaviours will emerge when subjects are deindividuated. More problematic for Zimbardo was evidence showing that situational factors, far from being rendered irrelevant by deindividuation, are actually crucial to determining its behavioural consequences. Carver (1975), Diener and Wallbom (1976) and Scheier, Fenigstein, and Buss (1974) all showed that manipulating contextual features affects what subjects do when self-awareness is lowered. Thus Johnson and Downing (1979) argue that the reason for Zimbardo’s classic association between deindividuation and aggressive behaviour is that subjects are typically rendered anonymous in costumes reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan—a source of negative cues. Indeed using such a manipulation they replicated the findings. However, when subjects were made anonymous through wearing nurses’ uniforms (a source of positive cues) aggression decreased.

According to Diener (1977, 1979, 1980) this failure to find a consistent relationship between manipulations and actions not only reflects a problem in conceptualizing the relationship between deindividuation and behaviour, there are two further problems. Firstly there is a lack of clarity concerning the psychological changes that constitute the state of deindividuation. Secondly, there is no evidence as to which factors bring this state about. As Diener puts it: ‘no study has found that subjective experiences such as lack of self-awareness or feelings of group unity follow deindividuating conditions and covary together’ (1979, p. 1161). Moreover, as he subsequently showed, supposed antecedents of deindividuation such as anonymity and diffusion of responsibility may alter levels of aggressive behaviour, without having any effect upon reported levels of self-consciousness (Diener, 1980).

In response to these conceptual and empirical difficulties, Diener (1979, 1980) reformulated deindividuation theory using the concept of objective self-awareness (Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Wicklund, 1975). High objective self-awareness is a state where individuals’ attention is drawn inward towards the self such that active monitoring and self-regulation of behaviour takes place. Where objective self-awareness is low, attention is drawn outward, monitoring of behaviour comes to a halt, and behaviour falls under the control of external factors. For Diener, the factors which cause a lowering of objective self-awareness include perceptual immersion in a group, overloading of processing capacities, outward focus of attention, conceiving of the group as a united whole and relegating decision making to the group. Thus there are various causes of self-directed attention being blocked, not all of them to do with the group. However, immersion in a group has the particular consequence that not only do we cease self-monitoring, but also novel factors or situations do not restore self-monitoring. Thus Diener defines deindividuation as people in a group who are ‘blocked from awareness of themselves as individuals and from monitoring

their own behaviour' (1979, p. 210). The consequences of deindividuation include an inability to retrieve personal or social standards, a lack of planning and foresight and a lack of ego inhibitions concerning future punishments. However, in contrast to Zimbardo, this is not equivalent to a release of anti-social tendencies but rather an inability to respond selectively to stimuli.

For Prentice-Dunn and Rogers (1982, 1989), this reformulation still fails to account for the complex behavioural consequences of deindividuation measures. While behaviour may sometimes appear to be explicable in terms of the domination of environmental cues this does not explain all the findings in the literature. They therefore propose a two-factor model based on the distinction between public and private self-awareness (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Festinger, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). Public self-awareness has to do with the subject's concern with the evaluation of others. In the group, 'accountability cues' such as anonymity and diffusion of responsibility give subjects the feeling that they can safely ignore what others think. The result of lowered public self-awareness is therefore anti-normative behaviour akin to that predicted by Festinger and Zimbardo. On the other hand, the processes surrounding the dimension of private self-awareness are much the same as those suggested by Diener. In this case immersion in the group can draw attention away from the self and lead to an internal deindividuated state whereby loss of self-regulation leads to a decreased reliance upon internal standards and an increased responsiveness to environmental cues.

By specifying the precise antecedents and the intervening mechanisms that lead to the different effects found in the literature, such recent developments have given a new lease of life to deindividuation theory. It is certainly quoted in most introductory social psychology texts as one of the discipline's basic discoveries. It has also been accepted as fact in courtrooms and been used as grounds for extenuation (Colman, 1991). Certainly Prentice-Dunn himself considers that the theory, almost knocked from its apparently secure position in the early 1970s, has been firmly placed back on its pedestal. He asserts that 'two decades of research have now demonstrated the validity of the deindividuation construct. These results illustrate the potentially volatile effects of situations characterised by high degrees of group cohesiveness and physiological arousal' (1991, p. 16).

A CRITIQUE OF DEINDIVIDUATION THEORY

Conceptual Issues

For all the differences between the successive variants of deindividuation theory, there is common conceptual core. It has a number of key elements. The first has to do with the conceptualization of deindividuation as a loss, or

else blocking, of the self. While authors may differ slightly in which antecedents and which consequences they stress, all concur in suggesting that the deindividuated individual is one who is acting in the absence of self-regulation. What is more, insofar as the self is the sole source of values, norms and standards, the implication is that deindividuated behaviour is out of the individual's control—or 'generically volatile' to use Prentice-Dunn's term. There are, however, two variants of this position. Those (such as Le Bon and Zimbardo) who tend towards a group-mind position, whereby some common atavistic substrate lies below conscious individuality, see individuation as the re-emergence of primitive urges normally kept hidden. The behaviour is not only wild but also characteristically destructive. Others (including Diener and Prentice-Dunn & Rogers) have no truck with group-mind concepts. They simply see internal control replaced by external control. Deindividuated behaviour may as easily be positive as negative. It simply blows with the wind.

This notion of deindividuation as loss of selfhood, and hence loss of control over one's own behaviour, depends upon a particular way of conceptualizing the construct. The self is regarded as unitary, and refers to the unique set of dispositions and characteristics that mark the person as distinct from all other individuals. It is also the sole source of rational action. To put it slightly differently, rational action is equated with the self and the self is equated with personal identity. The loss of personal identity is therefore equated with the loss of identity and the loss of rationality.

This equation is made quite explicit by Diener who states that 'people who are deindividuated have lost self-awareness and their personal identity in a group situation' (1979, p. 210). But the supposition is not only conceptual, it is also reflected in experimental manipulations and measures. For instance Diener and Srull (1979) seek to make individuals self-aware by portraying them on a television screen and playing a tape which says of the subject: 'My name is _____. I am from _____. They then test for self-awareness by asking firstly, 'How self-conscious or embarrassed were you?', and then administering Fenigstein's self-consciousness scale (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). This scale has three subscales referring to private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness and social anxiety. The following examples, one from each sub-scale in respective order, give a flavour of the items: 'I reflect about myself a lot'; 'I'm self-conscious about the way I look'; 'It takes me time to overcome my shyness in new situations'. They all clearly refer to idiosyncratic aspects of the self.

The second common feature is that all the variants of deindividuation theory regard the group as an antecedent of deindividuation. This is not to say that groups are the only route to a deindividuated state. Indeed, from Zimbardo onwards, a multiplicity of antecedents were invoked and this was reflected in the diverse manipulations of deindividuation employed in experimental studies—ranging from dimmed lighting to the use of mirrors. Nonetheless, no one went so far as to remove groups from the list and most

saw it as more than simply one amongst equals. Thus, in Diener's formulation, not only are certain precursors collective by definition (such as perceptual immersion in the group) but even those that are not may be brought about by collective involvement (such as overloading of processing capacity).

The implication of deindividuation theory is that the group is uniquely subversive of selfhood, of intellect and of behavioural control. The picture of groups is of people who, literally, cannot help what they are doing. Certainly it is a vain enterprise to look for meaning or direction in group behaviour. In a phrase, the presence of others induces the absence of reason. Or else, to quote Gabriel Tarde, a crowd theorist and contemporary of Le Bon: '*La societe, c'est l'imitation, et l'imitation, c'est une espece de somnambulisme*' (society is imitation and imitation is a sort of somnambulism; 1901, p. 95). The one exception to this, at least in part, might seem to be the position of Prentice-Dunn and Rogers. Their use of the concept of public self-awareness implies that the presence of others—or, to be more accurate, awareness of the presence of others—may lead people to adhere more closely to social norms. In this sense, they could be interpreted as arguing that co-presence increases behavioural control.

However, as Abrams (1990) notes, the concept of public self-awareness is not a matter of individuals being aware of themselves as members of a public and acting in terms of the associated ingroup standards. Rather, it means that individuals are aware of external public standards and will act so as to gain the approval of that public. Furthermore, the public as a generalized other is clearly differentiated from the actual presence of a group because Prentice-Dunn and Rogers explicitly argue that the latter excludes awareness of the former. It might be expected that, once anonymity within the group has removed accountability to the external audience it might increase accountability to fellow group members and hence to group standards. However, this possibility is not even considered. First of all it seems to be assumed that anonymity to the external audience is equated with total anonymity. Thus anonymity becomes a quality of the individual rather than being treated as a relational term: with respect to whom is one anonymous? This is a point we shall return to later. Secondly, it is presupposed that the group can only act to block standards. The apparent exception provided by Prentice-Dunn and Rogers is actually an extension of this principle from internal standards to external standards. They provide no departure from the vision of groups as necessarily anomic. We shall argue that this vision is unable to explain even the findings within deindividuation literature. It is certainly insufficient for an understanding of the wider phenomena of group and crowd action.

Empirical Issues: Accounting for the Deindividuation Literature

As a number of reviewers have noted (Diener, 1977; Lindsold & Propst, 1980), one of the most striking things about the deindividuation literature is

its complexity. The success of the theory in accounting for diverse findings has, as we have seen in the previous section, come at the expense of constant refinement and respecification so that almost every contingency is covered (Spears, 1995).

Some Classic Studies Revisited

These problems are illustrated by reconsidering the three 'electric shock' studies reported by Zimbardo in his classic 1969 paper. The first study, using groups of four young women who were either identifiable to each other or else made anonymous by wearing baggy cloaks and hoods, found the latter to deliver higher levels of shock. As expected, anonymity increases 'transgression'. However the second study, which used identical manipulations of deindividuation but involved soldiers rather than young women, found exactly the opposite. This time the anonymous subjects delivered lower levels of shock. As Zimbardo puts it: 'the supposedly deindividuated subjects were behaving in a most individuated manner' (1969, p. 275). Indeed, he explains these apparently discrepant results by arguing that those alone in the cubicles, wearing hoods, without name tags, were actually more self-conscious, suspicious and anxious than those sitting together in their everyday uniforms. Zimbardo seeks to support this explanation through a further study, which reverts to employing young women but, instead of having them in groups, isolates subjects in individual booths and then either has them identifiable or anonymous. On the assumption that being the only person in an experimental setting who is wearing a hood will increase self-centred concern, it is hypothesized that those in the 'anonymous' conditions will be more individuated and hence deliver lower levels of shock than those wearing ordinary clothes. This prediction was upheld.

The problem with this line of reasoning is that it does not explain why, between the first and second studies, women subjects and soldiers should respond so differently to identical deindividuation manipulations (Zimbardo suggests that the soldiers, being in uniform, were already deindividuated in the identifiable conditions, but this does not explain why they should become less deindividuated when made anonymous). Nor is it fully explained why, between the first and third studies, women subjects should respond so differently to deindividuation manipulations as a function of whether they are alone or in groups. Both the groups to which people belong and the context in which they are made anonymous—or, to be precise, with respect to whom they are made anonymous—therefore seem to be crucial. Whereas Zimbardo's reaction is to cast around for post hoc explanations relating to the effects of these variables upon level of self-focus, there is a much simpler approach. It is reasonable to assume that young women and soldiers have very different norms regarding the acceptability of physical aggression: the former

may be expected to be anti-aggression with the latter pro-aggression. It is further reasonable to assume that the experimenter is seen as regarding the administration of shocks as acceptable and indeed situationally appropriate, given his definition of the task. It is then plausible that procedures that isolate women from each other should increase levels of electric shock (acceptable to the observing experimenter) while isolating soldiers from their group should decrease shock levels. The sense of group and its respective norm is undermined in each case. Moreover, rendering the women anonymous in separate booths also isolates them from the observing experimenter (compared to the collective situation of the first study) allowing them more freedom to act in terms of their preferred group norm.

To adopt this line of reasoning, however, is to break with two fundamental tenets of deindividuation theory. In the first place it suggests that the group is a source of behavioural standards rather than their nemesis. These should be understood, not as general social standards with which people comply under duress, but rather in the sense of specific norms associated with the membership of specific groups. Secondly, it suggests that deindividuation manipulations should not be seen as inducing a unitary internal state but rather depend upon the ways in which they alter the relationship of subjects to others.

The normative basis of supposedly deindividuated behaviour is equally apparent in what is possibly Zimbardo's most famous study: the Stanford prison experiment. In line with traditional deindividuation theory, those allocated to both the positions of prisoner and of guard do exhibit extreme behaviour that is atypical of the ordinary student. However, the two groups also behave very differently—which is hard to explain if they are similarly deindividuated. These differences become more explicable if one considers that all the subjects are acting in ways that are consonant with the norms of the groups to which they have been allocated. In this regard, it is worth recalling Gergen, Gergen and Barton's (1973) finding that, when members of a liberal college are deindividuated as students as opposed to the groups invoked by Zimbardo, rather than acting aggressively or punitively they hugged and kissed each other—very reminiscent of the undergraduate ethos of the era!

It may be argued that such objections are only possible where the relationship between antecedents and deindividuation are loosely specified and hence it is impossible to know the psychological state of subjects in any given condition. However, the problems remain even where self-awareness is more directly addressed. Froming, Walker, and Lopyan (1982) showed that the effects of private and public self-awareness manipulations (a mirror and an evaluating audience) were moderated by subject's norms and expectations of other's norms. Thus subjects who were low in private self-awareness shocked more when they felt other people favoured it, and less when they felt others were

against it. Similarly, the presence of an audience induced compliance to the perceived norm of the audience when the audience was present, whereas the individual norm was applied without an audience. Hence, direct manipulations of the mediating process once more point at the importance of the normative context, and undermine the idea that these deindividuating manipulations have uniform effects on individual functioning.

Meta-analytic Evidence

Thus far our empirical evidence has been somewhat piecemeal and anecdotal. In order to give this argument a more systematic grounding Postmes and Spears (1993) carried out a series of meta-analytic integrations on 59 deindividuation studies. For ease of interpretation, the terms were defined such that our prediction that deindividuating circumstances should produce an increase in normative behaviour would be reflected in a significant positive relation. Conversely, the prediction of classical deindividuation theory that deindividuating conditions should result in anti-normative behaviour would be reflected in a significant negative relation. Overall results give no clear support for the hypothesis that deindividuating manipulations of anonymity, group size and reduced self-awareness lead to an increase in anti-normative behaviour. There was a significant but weak negative overall effect size indicating a marginal support for deindividuation theory, but this effect is qualified by the extreme heterogeneity of results. The same near-zero effect sizes and great heterogeneity were obtained when this group of studies was split up into smaller meta-analyses investigating studies with similar manipulations. There appeared to be no clear effects for either manipulations of anonymity towards ingroup, or outgroup, or combined manipulations. Nor were large effects found for manipulations of group size, or private or public self-awareness.

In an attempt to explain this heterogeneity, a number of theoretically plausible moderators were tested. For instance, deindividuation theory would predict there to be an effect of group size such that larger groups lead to more deindividuation and consequently more anti-normative behaviour (Zimbardo, 1969). Also, more prolonged deindividuation manipulations should be more effective (Prentice-Dunn & Spivey, 1986). No support was found for either prediction.

Independent raters also judged to what extent the 'deindividuated' behaviour (the dependent variable) under observation was normative with regard to a general (pro)social norm. It appeared that, if anything, there is a reverse effect to the one predicted by deindividuation theory, namely a small positive correlation between effect size and the general social norm estimate. This indicates that, overall, deindividuated subjects behave more in line with the general social norm. However, the notion of general social norms is itself problematic given that, as we have been arguing, one must look at the norms

and rules that apply to a specific group or situation (see also Lindsfold & Propst, 1980; Singer, Brush, & Lublin, 1965). We therefore required raters to judge what they thought the specific situational norm or expectation was for each study. These ratings explain a large amount of the variance in results. Overall there is a strong positive relation between effect size and the situational-norm-rating indicating that people who display deindividuating behaviour conform more to group specific or situational norms.

In summary, both our analysis of individual studies and our meta-analyses of the general literature indicate that deindividuation manipulations (group immersion, group size, anonymity, lack of self-awareness) are not associated with an increase in anti-normative behaviour. In fact the precise opposite appears to be the case: deindividuation manipulations are associated with an increase in normative behaviour. Yet, if deindividuation theorists have difficulties in making sense of their own data, the problems become even more acute when one turns to the general group and crowd phenomena to which the theory claims to have relevance.

Accounting for Collective Phenomena

In a piece of considerable understatement, Rupert Brown begins his text on 'Group Processes' (1988) with the observation that 'For some years now, at least in the industrialized West, groups have received rather a bad press' (p. vii). He goes on to show that this attitude is not confined to the media but is also to be found in the psychological literature as exemplified in Buys' (1978) semi-ironic article entitled 'Humans would do better without groups'. Of particular note is the tendency for explanations of deviance to invoke group processes. Whether it be the psychology of delinquency, of drug-taking, of smoking or of drinking there is a continuous recourse to the logic of deindividuation theory; individuals, especially those with unformed or damaged selves, lose all sense of standards in the group and become liable to negative and dangerous influences (Hopkins, 1994; Reicher & Emler, 1987). The problem with such reasoning is that, while it is true that delinquency, say, is characteristically a group phenomenon, it is also true that non-delinquents have a rich collective life. Moreover, while being in some groups may increase the probability of delinquent action, being in other groups will decrease it. In other words, there is no generic group effect. The effect of groups on delinquency depends upon the normative structure of the groups in question (Emler & Reicher, 1995). More generally, a whole literature has grown up which shows how group behaviour observes clear norms and limits (Turner, 1991). In other words, the assumption that individuals are deindividuated in the group and hence become at best volatile and at worst anti-social is in opposition to most of what we know about group processes.

The deindividuation theorist could respond by arguing that there are groups and groups. Those employed in most psychological studies are relatively small, uncrowded and easily observable. Hence their lack of volatility simply reflects the fact that they are not deindividuated. On the other hand where the groups are large and dense such that individuals become anonymous in the mass, then deindividuated behaviour will be observed. The prototypical example of such groups, indeed the example from which deindividuation theory itself derives, is the crowd. The notion of the crowd as generically uncontrolled fits well with popular portrayals of collective phenomena. Thus [Waddington \(1992\)](#) talks of the way in which crowds tend to be represented in the press as: 'a rampaging mob, victim to primitive urges or the machinations of conspirators' (p. 177). Similarly, crowd members are described as roaring, maniacal and dangerous. Schickel (quoted in [Jenson, 1992](#)) equates deranged fans with serial killers and [Jenson \(1992\)](#) herself argues that the image of the frenzied fan predominates in discussions of music fans and sports fans.

One oft-cited example which seems to exemplify such frenzy occurred at a concert given in 1979 by *The Who* at Cincinnati's Riverfront Coliseum where 11 teenagers were crushed to death. Contemporary accounts described the crowd members as barbarians who were out of control and who, in the words of one columnist: 'stomped 11 persons to death (after) having numbed their brains on weeds, chemicals and Southern Comfort' (quoted in [Jenson, 1992](#), p. 12). However, closer examination reveals a very different picture. The crush arose as too few doors to the arena were opened in order to accommodate those seeking to get in. Those pressing at the back had no idea of what was going on at the front and amongst those who were aware, most made strenuous attempts to save each other from the crush. This is far from the popular image of fans, hypnotized by the music, clambering over dead bodies in order to get closer to the stage ([Johnson, 1987](#)).

This tendency for images of the rampaging mob to disintegrate under closer scrutiny is not limited to fan culture. In recent years, one of the most startling images of disorder has been the urban riot. Indeed, deindividuation theory gained popularity partly in response to the wave of black protest that swept the United States in the 1960s and 70s. However, it is worth noting that studies of other riots show that the targets of crowd violence were largely restricted to the property of outsiders and in particular, of noted white racists ([Berk & Aldrich, 1972](#); [Brink & Harris, 1969](#); [Caplan & Paige, 1968](#); [Cohen, 1970](#); [Marx, 1967](#); [Tomlinson, 1970](#)). [Fogelson](#) summed up the evidence by stating that: 'restraint and selectivity were among the most crucial features of the riots' (1971, p. 17).

But perhaps most disturbing of all is the revolutionary crowd. [Le Bon](#) originally formulated his concepts of submergence and crowd inferiority in response to the threats to his contemporary social order, but his illustrations mainly related to the French revolution of 1789 ([Barrows, 1981](#); [Nye, 1975](#)).

However, after conducting a detailed study of the revolutionary crowds, Lefebvre (1954) argues that Le Bon had no direct knowledge of the social or political history of the revolution and hence that he completely misrepresents how the crowds behaved. Lefebvre himself concluded that only if one understands the collective ideologies associated with differing social groups will their mass action become comprehensible. He also argues that crowd leaders will only be listened to if what they say is in accord with the collective mentality. Finally, he asserts that perhaps only in the crowd will individuals, escaping from the petty concerns of daily life, become more sensitive to the ideas and emotions that stem from the larger collectivities to which they also belong.

What Lefebvre is arguing is that the tenets that became translated into deindividuation theory were only possible by obscuring the empirical reality of crowd phenomena and that these phenomena actually reveal the opposite to that implied by the theory. People immersed in crowds act in ways that are controlled and meaningful, even if the standards that guide them relate to social rather than idiosyncratic beliefs and values. However, in invoking revolutionary crowds there is one element of Le Bon's theory that does gain credibility. In revolutions, the powerless become powerful through combination and are able to act in unprecedented ways: attack their enemies, seize their goods, open the prisons. However, this collective power does not operate to the exclusion of reason, but rather its usage must—as Lefebvre insists—be linked to collective understanding.

If the accusation of volatility applies neither to the findings of deindividuation research, nor to the broader phenomena that it purports to explain, the validity of the deindividuation construct must at the very least be placed in doubt. If, on the other hand, one wishes to start from the empirical evidence—both experimental and historical—relating to the consequences of immersion in groups, then any theory must meet at least two criteria. It must explain the distinctive forms of behavioural control operating at the collective level and it must take account of the consequences of collective participation for empowerment in the face of a dominant outgroup or authority. We now turn to consider these issues from our own social identity perspective.

DEINDIVIDUATION MANIPULATIONS AND THE SALIENCE OF SOCIAL IDENTITIES

The Social Identity/Deindividuation (SIDE) Model: A Preliminary Outline and an Initial Study

Deindividuation theory depends upon the twin assumptions that a unique personal self is the basis of all rational action and that the group serves to impede the operation of such selfhood. European social psychology emerged

largely in opposition to such individualistic and anti-collectivistic approaches (e.g. Israel & Tajfel, 1972). In particular the tradition of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978, 1982) and, more recently, self-categorization theory (Turner *et al.*, 1987; Turner, 1991) is explicitly concerned with the social nature of selfhood and its relationship to group behaviour.

Social identity theory originates from research into inter-group relations. More specifically, it was developed in relation to a series of studies known as the 'minimal group experiments' (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel *et al.*, 1971). In these studies, subjects are allocated to two groups according to trivial criteria or, later, even on a random basis (Billig & Tajfel, 1973). They are then asked to distribute points between another member of the ingroup and a member of the outgroup—in other words they stand to neither gain nor lose personally from their own distribution. In addition there is no interaction between groups either in the past, the present or the future, subjects do not even know who is in which group and therefore they do not know the identity of the individuals between whom points are allocated. This allocation is operationalized using specially designed points matrices which allow one to separate out the different distribution strategies used by subjects. The reliable finding is that subjects show a tendency to ensure that ingroup members are given more points than outgroup members even where this is at the cost of absolute reward to ingroup.

For social identity theory, these results are to be explained as follows. First of all, subjects define themselves in terms of the groups to which they are allocated: this is the act of social identification. Secondly, the group only has meaning in terms of how it relates to other groups. Hence, group definition depends upon social comparison between groups. If one assumes that people are motivated to achieve positive social identity through a positive definition of their group, this entails a third step. Group members will endeavour to make their group come out better on valued dimensions than the other group. In the minimal group paradigm such social differentiation can only be achieved by allocating more points to ingroup members than outgroup members.

For present purposes, the key aspect of this theory is the concept of *social identification*. To start with, the concept departs from a notion of self as a unitary construct. Rather it is conceived of as a complex system consisting of at least two major sub-systems. The first is personal identity which corresponds to the classic notion of those attributes that uniquely define the individual. The second is social identity which relates to the groups to which the individual belongs. Of course we may all belong to several social categories and therefore may have a series of social identifications which are salient at different times. Any specific social identification is defined as our knowledge of our membership of a social group along with the emotional significance that membership entails for us. In replacing a unitary with a multiple concept of selfhood, social identity theory also proposes that groups confer rather than

destroy selfhood. Thus, in becoming part of a group, individuals do not *lose* all sense of self, rather they *shift* from the personal to the social level of identification. It follows that, in becoming a group member, individuals do not necessarily lose all bases for the control of behaviour. Rather, the criteria for action may shift from the personal to the social categorical level.

This last point is addressed more closely within self-categorization theory, which both develops the concepts of social identity theory and applies them beyond the limits of intergroup phenomena to a range of pivotal processes in social psychology, including group formation, social influence and stereotyping. To start with, instead of positing a simple dichotomy between personal and social identity, it is argued that selfhood can be conceptualized on a number of levels of inclusiveness: the subordinate or personal (I vs. you), the intermediate or categorical (we vs. they) and the superordinate whereby all people are conceptualized as a single whole. The level at which the self is defined therefore determines how one relates to others, but it also determines how one makes sense of the world. Conversely, whether one acts as an individual, as a group member or as representative of a common humanity will be a function of the level of cognitive self-definition.

To be a group member, then, is to define oneself as a member of the social category and for members of groups perception operates at the social categorical level. This is not only a matter of characterizing outgroup members in terms of an outgroup stereotype, it is also a matter of self-stereotyping such that individuals adopt the understandings and characteristics associated with the ingroup category. Thus the values and beliefs that underpin behavioural choice, the norms which are held as relevant, who will be influential and what messages will gain influence are all dependent upon the definition of the social category in question.

Turner (Turner *et al.*, 1987; Turner, 1991) refers to this shift from relating to others on an individual level to relating on a higher level of inclusiveness as a process of depersonalization. The difference between deindividuation and depersonalization is that once the self may be defined at more than the personal level then loss of the personal is not to be equated with loss of self. For self-categorization theory it results in enhanced salience of the social self. This means that behaviour in groups will be regulated by reference to social standards and hence will show social shape. According to the analysis presented above, these are precisely the characteristics of behaviour in deindividuation studies and of supposedly deindividuated groups. This approach promises to provide a theoretical basis for explaining the results of deindividuation manipulations. It remains to specify how.

Perhaps the prototypical deindividuation manipulation is to immerse individuals within a group and to reinforce this by anonymity as operationalized by dressing participants in masks and baggy overalls (cf. Diener, 1980; Zimbardo, 1969). From the perspective of self-categorization theory, such

procedures might be expected to have a range of effects depending on the salient self-category, and the details of the deindividuating manipulation. Firstly, immersion in the group should reinforce the salience of the corresponding social identity at the expense of personal identity, assuming of course that it is at least a potential membership group for the individuals concerned. Secondly, anonymity may either enhance or attenuate social identity as a function of the context in which it occurs. If the group level of identity is already emphasized, then anonymity is likely to enhance the salience of social identity still further by emphasizing the interchangeability of group members and obscuring interpersonal differences. However, anonymity is likely to have rather different effects if it is not accompanied by explicit group immersion. Where group salience is low and where group boundaries are indistinct, anonymity may undermine the process of depersonalization, by emphasizing one's isolation from the group or by further obscuring group boundaries. Hence the salience of social identity should decrease.

In sum, we are suggesting that deindividuation manipulations may work through their effects upon the level of self-categorization and the salience of particular social identities. These effects will be complex, depending both upon the manipulation that is used and the context in which it is used. What is more, in order to predict the behavioural consequences of these manipulations it is necessary to add a further factor. If deindividuation affects self-categorization and hence the level of adherence to categorical standards, the actual outcomes will depend upon the definition of the particular categories in question. For instance, to make identity as a soldier more or less salient will affect the expression of very different norms to those affected by altering the salience of a female college student identity.

These ideas were tested in our first formative study designed to examine the role of self-categorization in a classical deindividuation paradigm (Reicher, 1984). In contrast to classical deindividuation studies, however, this experiment was modelled on an intergroup context rather than focusing on a single group. This intergroup dimension reinforces the importance of social identity given that group identity only becomes meaningful through comparison with a relevant outgroup in the intergroup context (Turner *et al.*, 1987). It is also more representative of the intergroup nature of crowd behaviour neglected by classical deindividuation research (Reicher, 1987; Spears, 1995). This study employed a group of science and a group of social science students and the design manipulated both group immersion (group versus individual) and anonymity (anonymous vs. identifiable). In the group conditions, the two groups were seated at separate tables in the same room, and subjects were told they were being tested as members of their group, not as individuals. They were referred to by group code numbers throughout. In the individual conditions the scientists and the social scientists were mixed together and sat in rows facing the front of the laboratory. Subjects in these conditions were informed that they were being

tested as individuals and were referred to by individual code numbers. This manipulation of identity was crossed with an anonymity manipulation in which subjects were either dressed normally (identifiable) or in baggy overalls and masks, so that others were not identifiable to them (anonymous). However, in the group-anonymous condition one group wore red masks, whereas the group at the other table wore white, reinforcing the group distinction. In the individual-anonymous condition everyone wore white masks, so that any intergroup distinctions were further obscured.

The study was presented as a test of attitude-behaviour consistency. Subjects were presented with a videotape of arguments concerning vivisection where the scientists were depicted as consistently pro-vivisection, and social scientists consistently anti-vivisection. The main prediction was that subjects would show greater conformity to their own group norm when immersed in a group. It was further predicted, in line with the preceding analysis, that the effects of anonymity would depend on the social context and salient identity. Where group identity was salient and group boundaries were distinct, anonymity within the group should serve to further depersonalize perception by decreasing intragroup differences, increasing intergroup differences, and thereby increasing group salience and adherence to group norms. By contrast, anonymity amongst the two intermingled groups within individual conditions, should make it even less possible to distinguish intergroup and outgroup, undermining the group boundary and effectively isolating individuals from their group. In these circumstances, anonymity is predicted to decrease the salience of social identity and decrease adherence to group norms.

The results showed strong support for the predicted effects of group immersion. Scientists in a group were considerably more pro-vivisection than when isolated while social scientists were considerably more anti-vivisection in the group conditions. The effects of the anonymity manipulations were more mixed. The predicted three-way interaction between faculty and group immersion and deindividuation manipulations was only significant on the attitude measure and not on two behavioural. Further inspection of the significant interaction revealed the predicted two-way interaction between the group immersion and deindividuation factors for the science students only. Figure 6.1 depicts this interaction and reveals the anticipated effect, namely that science students express significantly greater pro-vivisection attitudes (in line with their group norm) if deindividuated when group identity is salient than when individual identity is salient, whereas this difference disappears when subjects are individuated.

In overall terms this study supports our approach over traditional deindividuation accounts. In the first place the effects of the group immersion variable are inexplicable in terms of loss of constraints, submission to environmental cues or even public self-awareness, given that the two groups behaved in entirely different ways despite being within the same context. Secondly, the

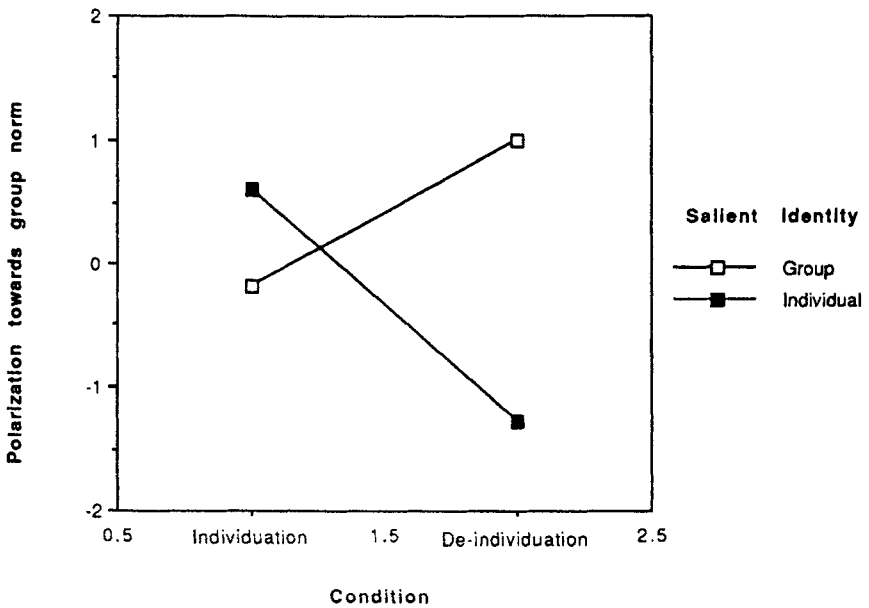


Figure 6.1 Pro-vivisection attitudes for science students as a function of salient identity and deindividuation

mixed effects of the anonymity variable can be accounted for from a social identity/deindividuation perspective by arguing that social identity was made so salient by the group manipulation that anonymity was unlikely to have any further effects upon salience at least in the group conditions (cf. [Spears, Lea, & Lee, 1990](#)). Conversely, the differing effects of anonymity for scientists in the group and individual conditions are very difficult to explain from a traditional perspective. This initial study can therefore be said at least to point to the potential fruitfulness of our approach.

Extending the Social Identity/Deindividuation Approach to New Domains: Computer-Mediated Communication and the Minimal Group Paradigm

In this section we extend our analysis of the enhanced role of social identity under ‘deindividuating’ conditions of anonymity in the group to other domains in which such conditions prevail. These are respectively the field of computer-mediated communication and the minimal group paradigm.

Computer-Mediated Communication

In recent years the concept of deindividuation has resurfaced in a line of research concerned with computer-mediated communication. It has been

used to help explain evidence of uninhibited behaviour in this medium (so called 'flaming') and the fact that group discussion by means of computers can lead to more extreme or polarized decisions (cf. Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984; Siegel *et al.*, 1986). These researchers have argued that certain features of computer-mediated communication, such as anonymity and immersion in the medium, produce the classic deindividuating conditions of reduced self-awareness and disinhibition, leading to the expression of more extreme arguments. They assume that polarization is a function of the extremity of novel arguments exchanged as predicted by the 'persuasive arguments' theory of Burnstein and Vinokur (1977).

An alternative interpretation of these findings can be offered, starting from a self-categorization perspective (Lea & Spears, 1991; Spears & Lea, 1992; Spears, Lea, & Lee, 1990) such that group polarization is conceptualized as a process of conformity to the 'prototypical' position of the group (Turner, 1987; 1991; Wetherell, 1987). However, this prototypical position is not simply defined as the group mean, but also takes into account the position of the relevant outgroup. Once again this is consistent with the self-categorization argument that group identity only becomes salient or meaningful through comparison with a relevant outgroup (Turner *et al.*, 1987). Polarization therefore reflects not simply conformity to the ingroup 'in a vacuum', but also contrast from an implicit outgroup. Because there is often no explicit outgroup in the group polarization paradigm, outgroup positions are implicitly represented by the scale positions avoided by the discussion group. Thus, where there is already a general preference for one or other scale pole, people will tend to contrast their own positions away from the opposite scale pole in the process of conforming to the group. Combining this element of intergroup contrast with ingroup conformity (the so-called metacontrast principle) results in a prototypical position which is more extreme than the ingroup mean in the favoured direction, producing polarization (Turner, 1987, 1991; Wetherell, 1987). Contrary to the persuasive arguments explanation, this explanation takes into account the information available in context but relates it to the normative positions of the group or groups involved. In so doing, it resolves the apparent contradiction between conformity and polarization (cf. Turner, 1987, 1991).

Our first computer-based study was designed to test this interpretation of the polarization phenomenon. It examined (a) whether the deindividuating conditions of computer-mediated communication (anonymity in the group) actually result in more polarization, and (b) whether this was due to the enhanced conformity to group norms rather than being due to deregulated and anti-normative behaviours as suggested by the earlier work. The study involved the use of computers for group discussion on a series of attitude issues (Lea & Spears, 1991; Spears, Lea, & Lee, 1990). The design was similar to the earlier study of Reicher (1984) described above, and involved

manipulations of group salience and anonymity in a 2×2 design (group vs. individual; anonymous vs. identifiable). However, the operationalization differed in important ways. Firstly, instead of having two groups, this experiment employed only single discussion groups. This is more in line with both the classical group polarization paradigm and also the classical deindividuation studies. Secondly, the effects of psychological group salience and of anonymity within the group were more clearly separated out through the ways in which both variables were manipulated.

Group identity is conceptualized in self-categorization theory as involving a cognitive identification with a social category without being dependent upon interactions between individual group members (Hogg, 1992; Turner, 1982). We therefore manipulated group membership by simply referring either to subjects through individual code numbers or through group code numbers (as psychology students). For the deindividuation manipulation, instead of using overalls and hoods we took advantage of the facility under computer-mediated communication for allowing people to communicate even when physically separated. Thus subjects were isolated in different rooms (anonymous) or they were seated in the same room in full view of each other (identifiable). It is important to note that the critical factor here is the visibility of the other group members in highlighting the individual differences and undermining group salience, rather than the ability to match responses to individuals (response identifiability is, however, of critical importance for the strategic aspects of behaviour expression in the intergroup context that we consider in the following section).

All discussion took place by means of computer in three-person groups. Prior to discussing the issues, participants were presented with booklets containing graphs indicating the distribution of views among first-year psychology students, supposedly to help them get thinking about the discussion issue. The real aim of this information was to provide (genuine) normative feedback reinforcing the generally left-wing norm on the discussion topics and to ensure that subjects were aware of the general direction of this norm for their group. The main dependent measure was the degree of norm-directed polarization resulting from group discussion (cf. [Lea & Spears, 1991](#); [Spears, Lea, & Lee, 1990](#)).

As in the earlier study by [Reicher \(1984\)](#), and following the same logic, it was predicted that there would be an interaction between group salience and deindividuation factors such that visual anonymity would produce greater polarization in the direction of the pre-established group norm under conditions of high group salience but, under conditions of low group salience, anonymity would decrease polarization. These predictions were fully upheld (see Figure 6.2). Norm-directed polarization was greatest in the deindividuated group identity condition and least in the deindividuated individual identity condition where, in fact, depolarization occurred. There was no difference

between the two individuated conditions. These results provide further experimental support for our analysis of the effects of deindividuation manipulations upon the level of cognitive self-categorizations and replicate the pattern for the science students in the earlier study (Reicher, 1984). As with the earlier study, they directly contradict classical deindividuation theory by showing that the combination of psychological group membership and anonymity in the group result in enhanced conformity to group norms, rather than anti-normative behaviour. We have now also replicated these findings in an intergroup context, obtaining greater intergroup differentiation or bipolarization under conditions of anonymity compared to identifiability (Postmes *et al.*, in press).

The deindividuation explanation, as it refers specifically to the computer context is further undermined by the repeated finding that communication in this medium is not associated with a loss of self-awareness, but if anything an increase in (private) self-awareness (cf. Matheson, 1992; Matheson & Zanna, 1989; Siegel *et al.*, 1986). From our perspective, just as the self can no longer be viewed as a unitary construct, so it is insufficient to ask simply whether self-awareness is high or low. Rather, it becomes necessary to ask which level of self-categorization is operative and what are the norms associated with it? It thereby also becomes necessary to ask how differing computer contexts affect

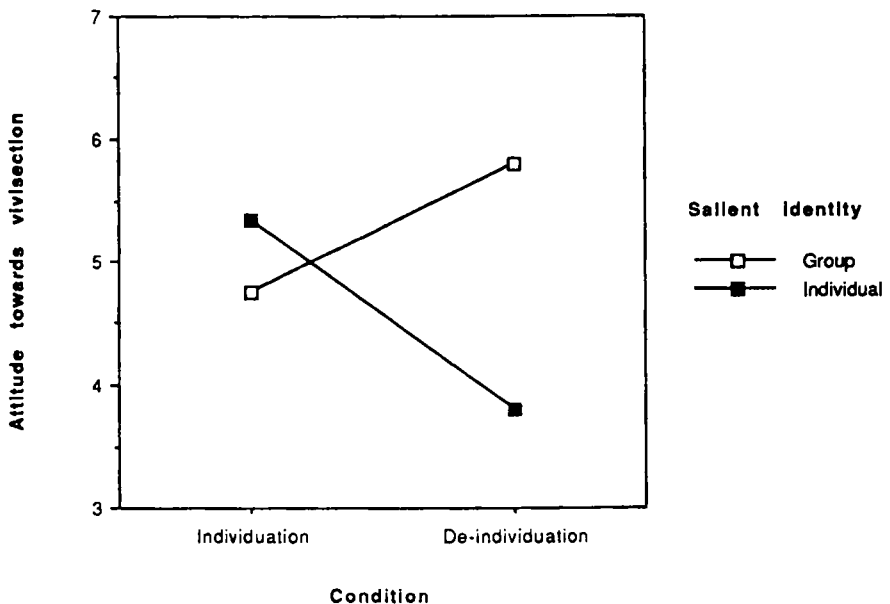


Figure 6.2 Polarization of attitudes as a function of salient identity and de-individuation

these several variables (Spears & Lea, 1992; Spears, Lea, & Lee, 1990). Indeed, by addressing these questions it is possible to make sense of a broad range of findings relating to social influence and group behaviour in various domains involving anonymity (see Spears & Lea, 1992, 1994, for reviews).

However, it is not just that self-categorization theory helps us understand deindividuation phenomena in general and computer-mediated communication in particular. Our results also serve to reinforce and extend self-categorization theory itself. Of special relevance is the seemingly paradoxical finding that isolation can actually serve to reinforce the salience of group identity and enhance conformity to group norms under appropriate conditions (Spears, 1994b; Spears & Lea, 1992). This provides perhaps the most compelling evidence yet for the definition of the group in cognitive rather than interactional terms (Hogg, 1992; Turner, 1982). In so doing it challenges all those models that either make the group dependent upon interactions between individuals (e.g. Asch, 1952; Homans, 1961; Shaw, 1976; Zander, 1979) or else argue that conformity to social norms depends upon the surveillance and co-presence of others (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Latané, 1980; Latané & Nida, 1980). None of this is to suggest that social interaction is irrelevant to group formation and group cohesion. Indeed there may be many situations in which such interactions increase the sense which members have of common fate and of being part of a common category. However, we propose that it is not co-presence and interaction *per se* but rather their effect upon category salience that is the key psychological mechanism underpinning group behaviour. This is demonstrated precisely by finding those limiting conditions where co-presence, as opposed to isolation, decreases category salience and hence attenuates conformity phenomena. In a phrase, physical isolation is not the same as psychological isolation. On the contrary, our analysis suggests that the social self can actually come to the fore when isolated (Spears, 1994a, 1994b).

The Minimal Group Paradigm

This observation takes us back to the minimal group experiments which lie behind the development of the whole social identity tradition. It will be recalled that the theoretical importance of these studies lay in the fact that they found strong and consistent evidence of intergroup differentiation without involving the forms of interdependence that were previously thought to be essential for such phenomena to occur. The groups are based on trivial or random criteria, they have no history and no future, there is no personal interest involved and members do not interact with fellow group members, who are unknown to them (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel *et al.*, 1971). Yet, following our line of argument, these very features that supposedly render the context minimal actually provide its psychological power. By stripping the group of its

history, of interaction and of personal interest, the social context is also stripped of all its interpersonal and individuating characteristics. Participants who do not know who is in their group or the outgroup can only treat them purely in terms of their social category membership. What is more, the response dimension of the reward matrices also forces subjects to respond in group terms if they are to make sense of an otherwise meaningless task. All in all, the features of anonymity and high social categorization are akin to the prototypical deindividuation study in which individuals are made anonymous within a social group. In the same way that we suggest that such conditions are designed to maximize the salience of social identity, so there seems to be a case for arguing that the minimal group is actually a 'maximal' group. Indeed, Tajfel himself makes this very point (1978, p. 42; see also Diehl, 1990).

In some unpublished work we have gleaned support for this idea (Spears & Oyen, 1992, reported in Spears, 1994b). In this study subjects were allocated either to an anonymous or 'deindividuated' condition or to an 'individuated' condition where group membership was publicly identified. Once again the purpose of the latter manipulation was to individuate subjects (cf. Wilder, 1978) rather than to manipulate *response* identifiability (cf. the following section). In line with predictions, subjects displayed greater ingroup bias in the deindividuated condition, and a similar difference between anonymous and identifiable conditions was also found when subjects received explicit feedback, supposedly from an earlier experimental session, suggesting the presence of a group norm to discriminate in favour of the ingroup. However, when subjects received feedback suggesting that people in both groups displayed a fairness or an equal reward allocation strategy, subjects in the deindividuated condition showed significantly less ingroup bias (they were actually fair) than in the comparable individuated condition. These results suggest that group behaviour is not necessarily generically selfish or biased towards the ingroup under the depersonalizing conditions of anonymity, but can also reflect conformity to more benign group norms under depersonalizing conditions. These results confirm our suggestion that differentiation occurs because of and not despite the lack of interaction in context. They also show that whether the process of differentiation reflects itself in discriminatory behaviour depends upon the norms operating in the situation.¹

In terms of deindividuation theory, the results demonstrate in yet another domain that manipulations of group involvement and anonymity may gain their effects through the ways in which they alter the focus of cognitive self-definition. To the extent that such manipulations increase the salience of social identity, they can lead to more socially regulated behaviour that is

¹ This is important in terms of discouraging those interpretations of social identity theory that see it as implying that discrimination between groups is inevitable—an argument easily misused to racist ends (Barker, 1981).

sensitive to the content of group norms. If we assume, as is consonant with our own studies, that the classic deindividuation paradigm does indeed lead to enhanced group salience, then our social identity/deindividuation model provides an explanation not only for our own experimental results, but also for the finding of our meta-analysis that most deindividuation studies do in fact reveal an increase in normative behaviour (Postmes & Spears, 1993). What is more, this model also accounts for the socially meaningful shape of crowd action itself.

DEINDIVIDUATION MANIPULATIONS AND THE STRATEGIC EXPRESSION OF SOCIAL IDENTITIES

Identifiability and Power Relations between Groups

The whole thrust of the previous section was to argue that the increased impact of norms in deindividuating circumstances can be explained through the hypothesized effects of deindividuation manipulations upon the salience of social identity. However, it has been pointed out that the cognitive salience of category membership may be necessary but is not sufficient for the expression of group behaviour (Ng, 1980). In particular, if group members are to translate predispositions into actions they must be able to do so irrespective of the opposition of others: they must have the usable power to act. Thus it has been shown that ingroup favouritism is openly expressed towards other groups of equal or lesser power but not towards groups of greater power than the ingroup (Ng, 1982a; 1982b; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1985).

While this argument and the accompanying studies, have hitherto been directed towards the general process of differentiation between groups, it can be applied equally to all aspects of group behaviour—including, as is our interest, the expression of ingroup stereotypes associated with specific social categories. To be more explicit, we would propose that group members will express those behaviours that are consonant with their social identity but which are disapproved of by the outgroup, only to the extent that they have the power to overcome any anticipated or actual resistance and/or retaliation by that outgroup. Any variable that increases the power of the outgroup in relation to the ingroup will decrease the expression of such behaviours. Any variable which increases the power of the ingroup in relation to the outgroup will increase the expression of such behaviours.

This suggests a second level upon which individuation manipulations—particularly manipulations of anonymity—may be effective. We would argue that variations of identifiability will affect not only self-definition within the group but also power relations between groups. However, in order to understand how, it is necessary to examine the various ways in which identifiability is operationalized: who, precisely, is made identifiable in relationship to whom?

On the one hand, when ingroup members are made more identifiable with respect to the outgroup, the relative power of outgroup over ingroup will be increased by increasing their ability to hold ingroup members to account for their actions. On the other hand, when ingroup members are made more identifiable with respect to ingroup members, the relative power of outgroup over ingroup will be decreased by increasing the ability of ingroup members to support each other in resisting the outgroup.² Bearing in mind our outline of the consequences of power relations for the expression of social identity, and assuming that social identity is salient, this means that increasing identifiability to the outgroup should decrease the incidence of behaviours which are consonant with ingroup identity but disapproved of by the outgroup. Conversely, increasing identifiability to the ingroup should increase the incidence of behaviours which are consonant with ingroup identity but disapproved of by the outgroup.

At one level this argument marks a return to Le Bon. It reintroduces the dimension of power which was largely lost when the notion of submergence was translated into the concept of deindividuation. Like Le Bon, we complement an analysis of the effects of identifiability upon self-perception with an analysis of the effects of identifiability upon power. However, the way in which we do this differs from Le Bon's account in two crucial ways. Firstly, we do not treat identifiability as a singular attribute but rather as a relationship which may take differing forms. Secondly, we do not see power as being used indiscriminately. Rather, empowering the ingroup over the outgroup only affects the expression of ingroup identity in the face of potential or actual outgroup resistance. It will not lead group members to act in ways that are incompatible with their identity. It will not affect the expression of behaviours which would not invoke outgroup sanctions. In a nutshell, by suggesting that power be brought into the equation, we are proposing that the cognitive analysis of identity salience be complemented by a strategic analysis of the factors affecting identity expression. We are not suggesting that the strategic analysis should usurp the cognitive.

Studies on the Strategic Effects of Identifiability to the Outgroup

The seeds of our analysis were sown by a study (Reicher, 1987; [Reicher & Levine, 1994a](#), study 1) in which subjects were divided into groups according

² It is possible to argue that greater co-presence of or identifiability to the ingroup may also enhance pressure within the ingroup to conform to ingroup norms. However, in line with self-categorization theory (Turner, 1991) we would argue that behaviour in line with group norms for genuine ingroup members (i.e. people who genuinely categorize themselves as members of the ingroup and identify strongly with it), does not reflect group pressure, but rather the willing and authentic expression of self. Nevertheless, it is quite possible that this may play an important role for group members who are less committed to the group. We are grateful to Bernd Simon for raising this issue.

to their support for or opposition to the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (pro- or anti-CND), a unilateralist campaigning organization. Subjects watched a debate between pro- and anti-unilateralists and then were asked to allocate points between speakers on the two sides for the standard as opposed to the content of their debating. Subjects were also asked to fill in an 'orientation to nuclear disarmament' scale. According to the cover story, at the end of the study outgroup members would divide the total number of points allocated to the ingroup in the 'debate' task amongst the ingroup members. This was to ensure that the outgroup was perceived as having control over the fate of ingroup members. However, for half the subjects (anonymous condition) ingroup members compiled their responses internally before the aggregate was passed over to the outgroup. The other half (identifiable condition) read their scores to the outgroup who calculated the total themselves. Thus identifiability of responses to outgroup was manipulated (low or high) while identifiability of responses to the ingroup was kept uniformly high.

If it is assumed that power of sanction by the outgroup over the ingroup depends upon the identifiability of ingroup members to the outgroup, then those responses that are unacceptable to the outgroup should decrease under identifiable conditions. Given that the scale was scored by marking the number of points given to the pro-CND position, this means that pro-CND group scores should be high but lower in the identifiable conditions, whereas anti-CND group scores should be low, but higher in the identifiable conditions. As expected, ingroup bias in the points allocation task followed this pattern and was lower when subjects were identifiable to the outgroup (see Table 6.1).

The results on the 'orientation' scale were more complicated. Overall, the manipulation of identifiability had no effects. However, closer analysis showed the expected decrease in expression of the ingroup norm occurred for only one item. This addressed the willingness of subjects to participate in non-violent civil disobedience to nuclear weapons. All the other items, which asked either for attitudes or willingness to express dissent (sign a petition, gather signatures for a petition etc.), lie within the consensus of acceptable political difference. The acceptability of civil disobedience, however, is a mat-

Table 6.1 Scale scores (point allocation) and overall impression scores on the 'debate evaluation' measure

	Scale score		Overall impression score	
	Unidentifiable	Identifiable	Unidentifiable	Identifiable
Pro-CND	174.84	142.75	22.24	19.00
Anti-CND	38.00	62.35	5.00	9.53

Note: Higher scores are more pro-CND.

ter of considerable controversy where some deem that it has no place in British political life while others strenuously contest attempts to outlaw such action. Hence the item addressing this issue is the only one where adherence to this norm is not only expressing difference from the outgroup but also expressing support for something the outgroup is likely to find unacceptable. It is therefore consonant with our predictions that this should be the one item where expression of the ingroup position is rendered less likely by identifiability to the outgroup.

Due, in large part, to the small scale of this study, we designed a second experiment (Reicher & Levine, 1994a, study 2) to address the issue. This time, instead of taking two groups and manipulating their identifiability to each other, we manipulated the identifiability of subjects to ourselves, academic psychology staff, as an outgroup. Moreover, we explicitly built in a distinction between items where difference would attract outgroup sanctions ('punishable' items) and items where the expression of difference is legitimate ('unpunishable' items). Students from the Science faculty who were studying psychology as an ancillary subject were defined either in terms of a 'scientist' identity or else a 'student' identity. They were then asked to complete a questionnaire about the psychology course which contained items where dissent would be either punishable or unpunishable by academic staff. Punishable items had to do with issues of academic commitment: willingness to plagiarize course work, willingness to cheat on experimental reports and so on. Unpunishable items had to do with moral attitudes towards psychology on issues such as animal experimentation. Subjects were either made identifiable to the experimenters, who were psychology staff members, by writing their name on the questionnaire, or else they wrote down a confidential code and were therefore unidentifiable.

On the basis of prior interviews, it was expected that the ingroup stereotype for 'scientists' would be compatible with that of staff members for the punishable items. However, the ingroup stereotype for 'students' would be incompatible with that of staff members. Consequently, it was hypothesized that, in the case of the punishable items, decreased identifiability to the staff outgroup should decrease the expression of academic commitment for 'student' subjects but have no effect upon 'science' subjects. Conversely, for the unpunishable items, it was hypothesized that the identifiability manipulations should have no effect for either group since, even if ingroup norms differ from those of staff, the expression of such norms will receive no sanction.

The pattern of results for the punishable items was exactly as predicted (see Table 6.2, top row). Insofar as a manipulation check showed that the identifiability variable had no effect on identity salience, the results cannot be explained in cognitive terms. They therefore confirm the argument that lowered identifiability to outgroup strategically enables ingroup members to express those aspects of their identity which would attract outgroup sanction.

Table 6.2 Item means for the 'punishable' and 'unpunishable' attitude questions

	Student identity		Scientist identity	
	Unidentifiable	Identifiable	Unidentifiable	Identifiable
Punishable	4.42	4.02	4.14	4.34
Unpunishable	4.20	5.12	4.58	3.64

Note: Higher scores = lower academic commitment and more anti-experimentation.

However, contrary to our prediction, the visibility manipulation also had a significant effect for the unpunishable items (Table 6.2, bottom row). Thus 'scientist' subjects became more pro-animal experimentation when visible and 'student' subjects became more anti-animal experimentation when visible.

One way of explaining these latter findings is to assume that the 'scientist' norm is more pro- and the 'student' norm is more anti-animal experimentation than that of psychology staff. If that is the case, then these results reflect a tendency for subjects to accentuate normative difference from the outgroup on unpunishable items when identifiable to them. This may be explained as a presentational phenomenon: where group members may do so without fear, they take advantage of identifiability in order publicly to express their difference from the outgroup and hence their adherence to the ingroup. One further study (Reicher & Levine, 1994b) was designed to investigate this possibility.

The study involved students who were training to be physical education teachers and defined them in terms of their 'PE student' identity. They were given a questionnaire which contained both 'punishable' items (relating to academic commitment) and 'unpunishable' items. For the latter, pilot interviews were used to determine how PE student norms differed from those of their lecturers on a number of different dimensions. The students were either made identifiable or unidentifiable to these lecturers as in the previous experiment. It was predicted that identifiability to outgroup should decrease expression of group identity for the punishable items and increase expression of group identity for the unpunishable items.

This predicted interaction between item type and visibility conditions was highly significant. What is more, on each of the various unpunishable dimensions, subjects significantly accentuated the difference between ingroup and outgroup norms—even though, on a behavioural level, this led to seemingly paradoxical results. For instance students had a more conservative educational philosophy than staff and this led them to be more disciplinarian under identifiable conditions. However, they also laid more stress on the social aspects of university life than staff and, in this domain, they were less disciplinarian under identifiable conditions.

Once again, the visibility manipulation had no effect on identity salience and therefore the results cannot be explained as deriving from differences in

the nature of the relevant identity between conditions. Rather it lends credence to the argument that, instead of identifiability to the outgroup having strategic implications for the expression of social identity only in the case of punishable items, there are different strategic processes operative for punishable and unpunishable item types. Whereas enhanced identifiability to outgroup decreases the expression of punishable aspects of ingroup identity, it increases the presentation of unpunishable aspects of ingroup identity. Our unexpected findings for the unpunishable items therefore extend rather than undermine the strategic dimension of our analysis.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this chapter has been to challenge traditional deindividuation theory and with it the assumptions that such factors as lowered identifiability and immersion in the group lead to a loss of identity and hence to uncontrolled behaviour. We have sought to replace this approach with a social identity model of deindividuation (SIDE) which consists of two elements. On the one hand we argue that deindividuation manipulations affect the cognitive salience of social identity. In particular, immersion in the social group and lack of personalizing cues can enhance social identity and thus adherence to the standards associated with the relevant social category. On the other hand, we argue that the self-same deindividuation manipulations also have strategic effects upon the ability of group members to express their social identity in face of outgroup opposition. In particular, where subjects are non-identifiable to the outgroup but identifiable to the ingroup their ability to over-ride the outgroup will be maximized.

Three general points emerge from this analysis. Firstly, while it can be seen as a specific application of self-categorization theory, our position provides unprecedented support for the basic tenets of the approach. In particular it makes the point that social psychological processes in general and group processes in particular are not to be equated with the presence of others. Individuals may act as social subjects just as much if not more when isolated than when together. Indeed, we have repeatedly found that isolation may enhance the collective self (e.g., Spears, 1994b). To Allport's aphorism that 'the individual in the crowd behaves just as he would behave alone only more so' (1924, p. 295) we might retort that 'the crowd is in the individual just as much when alone, if not more so'.

However, it is not only that we provide support for self-categorization theory as it stands, it is also that our position marks an extension of the theory. This takes us to our second point. Self-categorization theory can be criticized for being overly cognitive. While it addresses the way in which self arises in particular social contexts (Turner *et al.*, 1987; Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994) it does not look at the way in which social identities are actively

deployed and presented in specific sets of social relations. Conversely, models of self-presentation tend to beg the question of what self is being presented, what standards are underlying behaviour and so on: self-presentation is simply a matter of complying with others in order to maximize the rewards coming from them (Baumeister, 1982; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). We suggest an integration of the two approaches whereby strategic considerations surrounding the presentation of self are combined with an analysis of which self is salient, the standards associated with that self and the implications for how subjects behave.

As it applies specifically to deindividuation, we have shown that the same manipulations of group involvement, and anonymity may simultaneously affect both which aspect of the self-concept is operative and the presentational concerns that govern its expression. However, such a finding was largely fortuitous. In order to isolate the cognitive and strategic elements of our analysis we largely attempted to control the one while manipulating the other. The obvious next step is to examine how they work together. Clearly this is essential if we are to understand the complex effects of seemingly simple manipulations such as identifiability as they operate in the social world.

Our final point takes us back to the roots of deindividuation theory. If the complexities of deindividuation manipulations remain to be fully unravelled, we have, nevertheless, some indications of which conditions maximize the salience and the expression of social identity: immersion in a group, lack of personalizing cues, identifiability to ingroup, lack of identifiability to outgroup. In other words, precisely those conditions that result from being part of a large crowd. Crowds not only have the inclination but also the ability to act upon it. To the extent that this is so, crowd action should be the one place where groups can express their full understanding of the world without having to censor themselves for fear of others. As Reddy (1977) has concluded from his studies of mass action amongst French workers: 'the targets of these crowds thus glitter in the eye of history as signs of the labourers' conception of the nature of society' (p. 84). If a misrepresentation of crowds in history has propagated psychological theories that only see volatility in collective action, then time for change is long overdue. Such change promises not only to give us a better understanding of societal phenomena but also to resocialize the basic categories of the human psyche.

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