Outline and evaluation deindividuation an explanation of aggression (24)

Reber and Reber (2001) states that deindividuation is the 'loss of one’s identity' and it is a process where people may lead to antisocial, unsocial and aggressive behaviour. The deindividuation theory, as a whole, is based on the ‘classic crowd theory’ by Gustave Le Bon. He claimed that a combination of anonymity, suggestibility and contagion can take over the mind of the individual and cause them to lose their identity which can cause a loss of control which can inevitably lead to aggression. A well-known example of the loss of identity and anonymity are the KKK; this is a famous example because this group uses masks and costumes to hide their identity to kill and destroy, there identity is masked and that increases their anonymity and that causes aggression. The London riots are also an example, people masked their identity to cause damage and that caused aggression as they lose a sense of themselves during the riots; it’s a loss of identity. Deindividuation is a loss of someone’s individuality and identity and it can occur in two ways which are becoming a part of a crowd or identifying yourself in a particular role.

To support how deindividuation can cause aggression, Silke (2003) found that 206 out of 500 attacks in Northern Island was caused by people who wore disguises. This research was based over a 30 month period and the information was gathered through media reports, newspapers, files from victim support groups and press files. The people who used masks to hide their identity were more aggressive and had more punitive behaviours before and after the attacks, they also inflicted more physical injuries on their victims. This links to deindividuation and aggression as it shows a loss of identity through masks which caused a different type of behaviour which is aggression; providing an explanation of deindividuation and aggressive behaviour.

However, a meta-analysis by Postmes et al. 2005 can dispute research support for deindividuation and aggression. They found that disinhibition and antisocial behaviour (which can lead to the loss of identity and aggression) is not the key feature amongst groups and anonymous settings. They also pointed out that deindividuation is not really associated with reduced self-awareness or that reduced self-awareness increases aggressive behaviour. This shows that aggressive behaviour and deindividuation are not associated as the key features which an explanation to cause aggression through the loss of identity are not really common through deindividuation itself.

The nature of deindividuation comes from lower self-evaluation and decreased concerns from the evaluation of others; this can then lead to an increase in behaviour which goes against social or personal norms; like aggression. Deindividuation happens when people are in crowds or large groups and that can lead to anonymity (which is when people wear masks or uniform, for example, a police officer) and altered consciousness which can be caused by alcohol and drugs. This can cause aggressive behaviour because the idea of being in a crowd or a large group can cause you to lose your identity.

Mullen can offer support to the nature of deindividuation because he analysed newspaper cuttings of sixty lynchings in the US between 1899 and 1946. He found that the more people who were in the mob, the greater the aggression and savagery there was amongst the mobs victims. This supports the nature of deindividuation because it shows that the anonymity of being in the mob led to the