
The Social Impact of Conformity and the Reasons Why People Conform

The process or act of changing our behaviour to fit into or even go along with the people around us is what is referred to as conformity. It is some collective sway which involves agreeing with what is happening or being done by the people around us. It also involves carrying out our activities just like the rest of the people. It involves copying what the other individuals are doing for one to be considered normal. In psychological studies, various definitions have been brought up to entail the social impact employed by conformity

Firstly, a change in a persons' or groups' behaviour as a result of the influence of another person or group can be referred to as conformity. Here, the group or the person will act in a specific way due to an influence impacted on him by another person or group. Conformity can also refer to a behavioral change in a person(s) instigated by other individuals(s) but does not refer to the internal changes in belief or attitude. Conformity is subject to obedience and compliance since it is as a result of a change in behaviour caused by other individuals regardless of the type of the stimulus. (Breckler, Olson and Wiggins, 2006). Secondly, conformity can be referred to as the giving in to pressure from a group. For example, going with friends to watch a movie. The friends might have felt that the movie was good, but according to you, it was not. Therefore, you are forced to pretend that it was also superb to you so that you cannot be the odd one out (Eysenck, 2004).

Why We Conform

There are a variety of reasons as to why people conform. It might be due to the idea of looking up to a group to know how we should behave (Deutsch and Gerald, 1955). This is because other individuals are a rich source of knowledge and experience which might be of so much help to us. Other times, we conform to a certain group to eliminate the aspect of us looking foolish especially when the way we should act remains a mystery and when we are dealing with ambiguous phenomenon

Types of Conformity

According to Deutsch and Gerald (1955), people tend to conform to others due to normative and informative influence. Normative influence involves conforming to things like rules to avoid being punished and gain a reward, for example being liked by the others. Informative influence involves the change of behaviour as a corrective measure. In cases that present themselves

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with uncertainty about our response, individuals tend to depend on other more intelligent individuals to guide their actions. For example, a student in a classroom can agree with the judgment of another student because he is intelligent. Identification is another form of conformity which involves conforming to the things that a person is expected to do grounded in their societal roles and responsibilities. For example being in prison involves people varying their conduct allowing them to fit into their expected roles.

Influential Factors

Conformity can be influenced by some factors. Firstly complexity of the task is an influential factor (Asch, 1951). Increased or decreased conformity can emanate from the complexity of the task. When people are faced with a difficult task, they are inclined to conform more. However, more difficulty can make the people accept various retorts which can be projected to less conformity. Personal differences is another factor. It depends on personal physiognomies such as the desire to achieve something, motivation and robust leadership capabilities. Such tendencies are characterised by minimal conformity. The third influential factor is the size of the group. Individual's conformity can be enhanced by the existence of a large group than a small one. The fourth factor is the characteristics of the situation. The ambiguity of a situation increases the tendency to conform since such unclear cases tend to confuse people. In such a case, individuals will tend to conform to the idea of the majority. Cultural differences are the least influential factor. It has been found that individuals mostly tend to conform if they are from Marxist culture.

Research and Experiments

Conformity is a pervasive issue which happens many times in our day to day life. Most of the times, we conform to situations without even being aware. Some experiments have been done to prove the existence of conformity. An experiment carried out in 1932 by Jenness involved asking the partakers to make an approximation of the capacity of beans placed in a flask. Each was told to give his view and then the general group's view was collected. The results showed that the participants dropped their guess and moved closer to the whole groups guess when they were asked as a group. Another experiment was done by Sherif on autokinetic. The experiment involved the distance that a light spot can travel within a dusky chamber. The spot was. The spot was, however, the spot was sessile but autokinetic effect on the eyes seemed to show depict otherwise. When enquiries were made on individuals, they gave various answers, but when asked as a group, the individuals were conforming to a common thing which shows that individuals tend to conform to a group's idea when faced with an ambiguous situation

The change in behaviour to fit the people or group around us is what is referred to as conformity. People tend to conform to situations due to various reasons such as cultural

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differences, the size of the group, the degree of difficulty of a task, personal differences and characteristics of the situation. Individuals will then tend to have three forms of conformity which involves informative conformity, normative conformity and identification form of conformity.

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