

the term Conformity, its applications, and types

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Historical Origins of Conformity

It is said that the first burial in human history was when a man saw a crow bury another crow. He learned the method and did the same to his fellow humans. I believe we can date conformity from the beginning of humanity. The human brain functions in the warmth of conformity.

Meaning and Social Function of Conformity

Conformity describes how our brain follows similar traits in a group. The term conformity is used to agree with the majority because people either want to fit in a group or want to be correct. It is something we do and see on a daily basis. A larger group can easily influence a person or couple. There are some customs and standards that no one understands as to why they were introduced or their purpose; however, we follow them unquestionably. For example, pink is associated with girls, and blue is associated with boys. It doesn't make sense, but is a fine example of conformity. (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955)

Desire for Acceptance and Belonging

Relatable people are always more liked; therefore, some people can be targeted by conformity when they wish to be liked by a certain group. It requires confidence and the audacity to stand out and be wrong or different.

Internal Conflict Under Group Pressure

Conformity pressure usually results in an internal conflict in our brains. We might oppose the beliefs and attitudes of others but follow and agree with them without question since we are afraid of being ostracized. (Asch, 1956)

Unconscious Adoption of Group Behaviour

Conformity might not always be controlled or deliberate. People often adopt opinions and behaviors

from groups of friends without realizing it. For example, we might feel the urge to smoke when in a group of smokers develop a music taste similar to our friends', or mimic the accents of the opposite person. This explains that social behavior can be copied without consciousness. The human brain is designed to follow.

Compliance as a Form of Conformity

There are three types of conformity including compliance: when an individual chooses to follow the group to receive a good reaction or be liked and avoid rejection. However, in private he might not believe in their way of living. A general example of this is dressing according to the culture of the local people. Compliance is a temporary state of conformity that ends without peer pressure. (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004)

Internalization of Group Beliefs

The second type of conformity is internalization, which involves an individual accepting the influence publicly and privately. This happens when a group becomes a part of an individual's personality and opinions. Internalization is often the case when the majority has more knowledge and can't be challenged. For example, the conversation about religion.

Identification With Social Roles

Identification is the third type of conformity. It occurs when a person wants to develop a relationship with the group. Police officers following their code of conduct is an example of identification.

Language Culture and Social Conformity

We develop our literal and figurative language with conformity as well. Our family and upbringing adapt how we speak in our comfort zone. How we say something and what we mean is a literal language that we pick from our neighborhood and community. Figurative language is what we create over time from our experience and surroundings. It is an example of a compliance type of conformity. We might follow a particular way of expression with a specific group but not use it outside the group such as creating sign language with our friends etc.

Negative Consequences of Crowd Behaviour

Conformity has adverse effects on humanity. In recent times, 350 deaths occurred on a bridge in Cambodia due to a panic created by the rural people who were uninformed about the swaying of a

hanging bridge. People who were scarred spread their fear in conformity to the rest of the crowd and caused chaos.

Personal Experience of Social Conformity

During my junior year in high school, my best friend left school, and I was forced to socialize with the rest of the class. I had ignored them for all these years because they all thought the same, like the same TV shows, sports, etc., and each of them lacked the quality of building their unique personality. My attempts to fit in with them failed several times until I decided to give their preference a chance. So, I watched every episode of “F.R.I.E.N.D.S” (the TV show) and tried again with some Chandler jokes. It seemed to work since I got along with them. Watching the show wasn’t the worst decision I had ever made.

It was an example of an internalized state of conformity because I liked the show and agreed with my classmates’ opinions. I never gave up on my personal preference, but I also approved theirs. Even though I did object to following mainstream TV shows that don’t help you develop, I liked the show.

This is not the only time I was targeted by conformity. The process is very natural and can have both positive and negative impacts. I once cheated on a test that I knew very well due to a fear of failing because everyone was copying each other’s answers. I scored the lowest on that test because I doubted myself. My peers influenced me to change my answers and copy what everyone else was doing. I didn’t hesitate once before losing faith in my knowledge; however, I regret that decision.

Informational and Normative Social Cues

When we are comfortable with conformity, we depend on two social cues. Firstly, we seek information on the actions of others which is called informational cues. Secondly, we look at others to determine what to do with the information, which is called normative cues. We learn this at a very early age. When a child falls, he first looks at his parent’s reaction to determine how he should respond. If the parents show fear, the child bursts into tears; however, if they joke about it, the child follows.

People are often reluctant to break stereotypes or a group norm even if it has little significance. Conformity can be very strong when it is created because of close friends and loved ones. We are always greatly influenced by people we respect and value their opinions. If we ever want to know a person’s preferences and habits, we should look into who they spend the most time with, who they listen to, and who inspires them.

Psychological Evidence and Causes of Conformity

Psychologists have conducted many experiments to prove conformity, its types, and its reasons. The major reasons are social acceptance and the desire to be liked. Other reasons include a lack of knowledge and self-confidence in individuals. Sticking with the larger group is easier than standing out alone, disliked by everyone, and most possibly incorrect. (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004)

Conclusion on Conformity and Survival

Hence, it is proven that conformity facilitates survival and comforts us because we don't feel lonely and left out.

References

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