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Verywell / Brianna Gilmartin Social pressure can sometimes lead us to change our behavior, a process known as conformity. This can sometimes be overt, like being pressured to behave in a certain way, or a more subtle influence that causes you go along with the rest of the group. Conformity is the act of changing your behaviors to fit in or go along with the people around you. In some cases, this social influence might involve agreeing with or acting like the majority of people in a specific group, or it might involve behaving in a particular way in order to be perceived as "normal" by the group. Essentially, conformity involves giving in to group pressure. Keep reading to learn more about how conformity works, how different types of conformity can influence your behavior, and what you can do to resist giving in to social pressure. Each situation is different, but researchers suggest that there are many reasons why people conform. It isn't always a bad thing. Consider this: in many cases, looking to the rest of the group for clues about how we should behave can be helpful. Other people might have greater knowledge or experience than we do, so following their lead can actually be instructive. In some instances, we conform to the group's expectations to avoid looking foolish. This tendency can become particularly strong in situations where we are not quite sure how to act or where the expectations are ambiguous. In 1955, Deutsch and Gerard identified two key reasons why people conform: informational influence and normative influence. Informational influence happens when people change their behavior to be correct. In situations where we are unsure of the correct response, we often look to others who are better informed and more knowledgeable and use their lead as a guide for our own behaviors. In a classroom setting, for example, this might involve agreeing with the judgments of another classmate you perceive as highly intelligent. Normative influence stems from a desire to avoid punishments (such as going along with the rules in class even though you don't agree with them) and gain rewards (such as behaving in a certain way in order to get people to like you). Conformity is something that happens regularly in our social worlds. Sometimes we are aware of our behavior, but in many cases, it happens without much thought or awareness on our parts. While conformity isn't always a negative influence, sometimes it causes us to go along with things that we disagree with or behave in ways that we know we shouldn't. Some of the best-known experiments on the psychology of conformity deal with people going along with the group, even when they know the group is wrong. In one of the earliest experiments on conformity, Jenness asked participants to estimate the number of beans in a bottle. They first estimated the number individually and then later as a group. After being asked as a group, they were asked again individually. The experimenter found that their estimates shifted from their original guess to closer to what other group members had guessed. In a series of experiments, Muzafer Sherif asked participants to estimate how far a dot of light in a dark room moved. In reality, the dot was static, but it appeared to move due to something known as the autokinetic effect. Essentially, tiny movements of the eyes make it appear that a small spot of light is moving in a dark room. When asked individually, the participants' answers varied considerably. When asked as part of a group, however, Sherif found that the responses converged toward a central mean. Sherif's results, published in 1935, demonstrated that in an ambiguous situation, people will conform to the group, an example of informational influence. In this series of famous experiments, conducted in the 1950s, psychologist Solomon Asch asked participants to complete what they believed was a simple perceptual task. They were asked to choose a line that matched the length of one of three different lines. When asked individually, participants would choose the correct line. When asked in the presence of confederates who were in on the experiment and who intentionally selected the wrong line, around 75% of participants conformed to the group at least once. This experiment is a good example of normative influence. Participants changed their answer and conformed to the group in order to fit in and avoid standing out. In this controversial experiment, conducted in 1971, Philip Zimbardo simulated a prison setting to see how people's behavior would change according to the role they were given (prisoner or prison guard). It showed that behavior was affected by the expectations of the role. While this is one of the most famous psychology experiments on conformity, it is important to note that it has been criticized extensively, and its results have been questioned. In addition to the ethical issues with the study, recent examination of the research methods and procedures has cast serious doubts on the study's findings, validity, and authenticity. Normative and informational influences are two important types of conformity, but there are also a number of other reasons why we conform. This type of conformity involves changing one's behavior in order to fit in with a group. For example, a teenager might dress in a certain style because they want to look like their peers who are members of a particular group. In this case, conformity is looking to the group for information and direction (this happens when a person lacks knowledge). Think of attending your first class at a new yoga studio. You would probably watch what others were doing to see where you should hang your coat, stow your shoes, unroll your mat, and so on. Identification is conforming based on social roles. In other words, a person might change their behavior to fit with what might be expected of a person in that specific role. The Stanford Prison Experiment is an example of this type of conformity. Compliance is changing one's behavior while still internally disagreeing with the group. For example, you might read a book for your book club and really enjoy it. But at your meeting, you learn that the other members all disliked the book. Rather than go against the group opinion, you might simply agree that the book was terrible. This type of conformity involves changing one's behavior to be like another person. You might notice this in a friend who's taste in music or movies shifts to match that of their romantic partner. Conformity doesn't happen in every situation. Some people might resist conformity while being more susceptible to these influences in others. It's important to remember that human behavior and psychology are complex. People may conform in some situations and not in others, depending on factors including: The difficulty of the task: Difficult tasks can lead to increased and decreased conformity. Not knowing how to perform a difficult task makes people more likely to conform, but increased difficulty can also make people more accepting of different responses, leading to less conformity. Individual differences: Personal characteristics, such as motivation to achieve and strong leadership abilities, are linked with a decreased tendency to conform. Group size: People are more likely to conform in situations that involve between three and five other people. Situation: People are more likely to conform in ambiguous situations where they are unclear about how they should respond. Cultural differences: People from collectivist cultures are more likely to conform. While fitting in with a group is often beneficial, conformity can sometimes have undesirable consequences. For example: Feeling like you have to change your appearance or personality to be a member of a group might lower your self-esteem. Succumbing to peer pressure could lead to risky or illegal behavior, such as underage drinking. Conformity might also lead to a bystander effect, in which going along with the group means failing to act when someone is in need. The desire to conform might also limit your openness to new ideas or arguments. And conforming with a group could even result in feelings or acts of prejudice. Understanding conformity can help you make sense of the reasons why some people go along with the crowd, even when their choices seem out of character for them. It can also help you see how other people's behavior may influence the choices you make. Frequently Asked Questions Compliance is changing one's behavior in response to a request to do so, such as a friend asking you to give them a ride. It's not the same as obedience (for example, a student following a school rule) because the request came from someone who doesn't have authority over you.Conformity is more subtle. It is when you change your behavior (consciously or unconsciously) not based on a request, but based on a perceived need to fit in with those around you. Research shows that conformity to peers peaks in mid-adolescence, around age 14. At this age, children spend more time with peers and their influence is strongest. In more individualistic cultures, people are less likely to conform. In collectivist cultures, conformity is more valued. Conformity bias is the tendency to make decisions or judgments based on other people's behavior. Once one person in a class cheats on a test, for example, others may be more willing to cheat because they see that it is acceptable to the group. August 9, 2024 Claire Anderson No comments yet Social conformity is a fascinating concept that touches every aspect of our lives. Whether we realize it or not, we often adjust our behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs to align with those of others around us. This phenomenon plays a crucial role in interpersonal relationships, workplace dynamics, and even our personal development. Understanding social conformity can empower you to navigate these influences while maintaining your individuality. Understanding Social Conformity At its core, social conformity refers to the adjustment of one’s behavior or beliefs to align with a group’s norms. This can occur in various forms and settings, from casual group interactions to formal organizations. The social and psychological aspects of conformity are deeply intertwined, influencing how we perceive ourselves and our relationships with others. Definition and Relevance Social conformity is often defined as the process through which individuals change their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to match those of a group. This change can occur due to a desire for acceptance, a need to avoid conflict, or the belief that the group possesses more accurate information. According to Verywell Mind, conformity is essentially about fitting in, which can have both positive and negative implications. Types of Social Conformity Understanding the different types of social conformity can help us grasp why and how we conform in various situations. The main types include: Compliance: This involves publicly conforming to a group’s standards while privately maintaining one’s personal beliefs. For instance, you might agree with your coworkers about a project but still prefer a different approach in your mind. Identification: Here, an individual adopts the beliefs or behaviors of a group they value, often to strengthen their sense of belonging. An example might be a teenager adopting the fashion style of their peer group. Internalization: This is the deepest level of conformity, where individuals genuinely accept the group’s beliefs as their own. This can happen when a person identifies with the group’s values and feels they align with their sense of self. These categories illustrate the complexity behind why we conform and how it influences our behavior in daily life. The Psychology Behind Social Conformity The mechanisms driving social conformity are rooted in both psychological and social needs. We often conform due to our innate desire for social acceptance and fear of rejection. Need for Social Acceptance Humans are inherently social creatures. The desire to fit in and be accepted by peers can lead to conformity, even at the expense of personal beliefs. Research indicates that people are more likely to conform when they feel they lack confidence in their own opinions or knowledge. Fear of Rejection The fear of being ostracized plays a significant role in conformity. Many individuals would rather go along with the group than face the repercussions of dissenting opinions. This fear can lead to situations where people suppress their true thoughts, resulting in a lack of authenticity. The Effects of Social Conformity Social conformity can yield both positive and negative outcomes, shaping individual and group dynamics in profound ways. Positive Outcomes of Conformity In many cases, conformity can promote social harmony and cohesion. When group members align their behaviors and attitudes, it can lead to: Increased Cooperation: Conformity fosters a sense of unity, making collaboration smoother and more effective. Enhanced Group Identity: When individuals align with group norms, it strengthens their connection and sense of belonging, which can boost morale and motivation. Negative Consequences of Conformity However, the darker side of conformity can be detrimental: Groupthink: A classic example of conformity’s pitfalls. Groupthink occurs when the desire for harmony leads to poor decision-making as dissenting opinions are suppressed. This can have serious implications in both workplace settings and societal decisions. Loss of Individuality: When people conform excessively, they may lose their unique perspectives and creativity. This is particularly concerning in environments that benefit from diverse viewpoints. Social Conformity in Practice Social conformity manifests differently across various settings, such as workplaces and educational institutions. Conformity in the Workplace In professional settings, conformity can significantly impact productivity and employee dynamics. While some level of conformity is necessary to maintain order and ensure teamwork, excessive conformity can stifle innovation and creativity. Research from Harvard Business Review suggests that allowing some degree of rebellion can lead to enhanced productivity and a more dynamic workplace culture. Conformity in Educational Settings Schools are another environment where social conformity is prevalent. Students often feel pressured to conform to peer behaviors, impacting their academic performance and social interactions. Studies indicate that conformity can lead to a lack of engagement and creativity in learning environments, hindering students’ ability to think critically and independently. For more insights into this issue, you can check out this analysis on conformity in education. Strategies to Manage Social Conformity Navigating the pressures of social conformity while maintaining personal identity can be challenging. Here are some effective strategies: Cultivating Critical Thinking Developing critical thinking skills is crucial for challenging conformist behavior. By questioning the status quo and evaluating the reasoning behind group norms, you can make more informed decisions that align with your values. Engaging with diverse perspectives can also enhance your critical thinking abilities, providing a broader understanding of issues. Balancing Conformity and Individuality Finding a balance between conforming to social norms and expressing your individuality is vital. Here are a few suggestions: Know Your Values: Understand what you stand for and be willing to voice your opinions, even if they differ from the group. Seek Support: Surround yourself with individuals who appreciate diversity of thought and encourage you to maintain your unique perspective. Practice Assertiveness: Developing assertiveness can empower you to express your views without fear of backlash. Conclusion Social conformity is a powerful force that shapes our behaviors and beliefs. While it can foster group cohesion and social harmony, it can also lead to conformity-induced challenges like groupthink and loss of individuality. By understanding the dynamics of social conformity and employing strategies to manage it, you can navigate social pressures effectively. Reflect on your own experiences with social conformity and consider how they have influenced your personal and professional life. Are there areas where you might benefit from asserting your individuality a bit more? Understanding this balance is key to personal growth and fulfilling relationships. Photo by Sanket Mishra Break free from social conformity and elevate your productivity with FocusKeeper today! Conformity is a type of social influence involving a change in belief or behavior in order to fit in with a group. This change is in response to real (involving the physical presence of others) or imagined (involving the pressure of social norms/expectations) group pressure. Conformity can also be simply defined as “ yielding to group pressures” (Crutchfield, 1955). Group pressure may take different forms, for example bullying, persuasion, teasing, criticism, etc. Conformity is also known as majority influence (or group pressure). The term conformity is often used to indicate an agreement to the majority position, brought about either by a desire to ‘ fit in ’ or be liked (normative) or because of a desire to be correct (informational), or simply to conform to a social role (identification). Jenness (1932) was the first psychologist to study conformity. His experiment was an ambiguous situation involving a glass bottle filled with beans. He asked participants individually to estimate how many beans the bottle contained. Jenness then put the group in a room with the bottle and asked them to provide a group estimate through discussion. Participants were then asked to estimate the number on their own again to find whether their initial estimates had altered based on the influence of the majority. Jenness then interviewed the participants individually again and asked if they would like to change their original estimates or stay with the group’s estimate. Almost all changed their individual guesses to be closer to the group estimate. However, perhaps the most famous conformity experiment was by Solomon Asch (1951) and his line judgment experiment. Types of Conformity Kelman (1958) distinguished between three different types of conformity: Compliance (or group acceptance) This occurs “when an individual accepts influence because he hopes to achieve a favorable reaction from another person or group. He adopts the induced behavior because….he expects to gain specific rewards or approval and avoid specific punishment or disapproval by conformity” (Kelman, 1958, p. 53). In other words, conforming to the majority (publicly) in spite of not really agreeing with them (privately). This is seen in Asch’s line experiment. Compliance stops when there are no group pressures to conform and is, therefore, a temporary behavior change. Internalization (genuine acceptance of group norms) This occurs “when an individual accepts influence because the content of the induced behavior – the ideas and actions of which it is composed – is intrinsically rewarding. He adopts the induced behavior because it is congruent [consistent] with his value system” (Kelman, 1958, p. 53). Internalization always involves public and private conformity. A person publicly changes their behavior to fit in with the group while also agreeing with them privately. This is the deepest level of conformity, where the beliefs of the group become part of the individual’s own belief system. This means the change in behavior is permanent. This is seen in Sherif’s autokinetic experiment. This is most likely to occur when the majority has greater knowledge and members of the minority have little knowledge to challenge the majority’s position. Identification (or group membership) This occurs “when an individual accepts influence because he wants to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship to another person or group” (Kelman, 1958, p. 53). Individuals conform to the expectations of a social role, e.g., nurses and police officers. It is similar to compliance as there does not have to be a change in private opinion. A good example is Zimbardo’s Prison Study. Man (1969) identified an additional type of conformity: Ingratiational This is when a person conforms to impress or gain favor/acceptance from other people. It is similar to normative influence but is motivated by the need for social rewards rather than the threat of rejection, i.e., group pressure does not enter the decision to conform. Why Do People Conform? Deutsch and Gerrard (1955) identified two reasons why people conform: Normative Conformity Yielding to group pressure because a person wants to fit in with the group. E.g., Asch Line Study. Conforming because the person is scared of being rejected by the group. This type of conformity usually involves compliance – where a person publicly accepts the views of a group but privately rejects them. Informational Conformity This usually occurs when a person lacks knowledge and looks to the group for guidance. Or when a person is in an ambiguous (i.e., unclear) situation and socially compares their behavior with the group. E.g., Sherif’s Study. This type of conformity usually involves internalization – where a person accepts the views of the groups and adopts them as an individual. Conformity Examples Sherif (1935) Autokinetic Effect Experiment Aim: Sherif (1935) conducted an experiment with the aim of demonstrating that people conform to group norms when they are put in an ambiguous (i.e., unclear) situation. Method: Sherif used a lab experiment to study conformity. He used the autokinetic effect – this is where a small spot of light (projected onto a screen) in a dark room will appear to move even though it is still (i.e., it is a visual illusion). It was discovered that when participants were individually tested, their estimates of how far the light moved varied considerably (e.g., from 20cm to 80cm). The participants were then tested in groups of three. Sherif manipulated the composition of the group by putting together two people whose estimate of the light movement when alone was very similar and one person whose estimate was very different. Each person in the group had to say aloud how far they thought the light had moved. Results: Sherif found that over numerous estimates (trials) of the movement of light, the group converged to a common estimate. The person whose estimate of movement was greatly different from the other two in the group conformed to the view of the other two. Sherif said that this showed that people would always tend to conform. Rather than make individual judgments, they tend to come to a group agreement. Conclusion : The results show that when in an ambiguous situation (such as the autokinetic effect), a person will look to others (who know more / better) for guidance (i.e., adopt the group norm). They want to do the right thing but may lack the appropriate information. Observing others can provide this information. This is known as informational conformity. Non Conformity Not everyone conforms to social pressure. Indeed, there are many factors that contribute to an individual’s desire to remain independent of the group. For example, Smith and Bond (1998) discovered cultural differences in conformity between western and eastern countries. People from Western cultures (such as America and the UK) are more likely to be individualistic and don’t want to be seen as being the same as everyone else. This means that they value being independent and self-sufficient (the individual is more important than the group) and, as such, are more likely to participate in non-conformity. In contrast, eastern cultures (such as Asian countries) are more likely to value the needs of the family and other social groups before their own. They are known as collectivist cultures and are more likely to conform. References Asch, S. E. (1951). Effects of group pressure upon the modification and distortion of judgments. In H. Guetzkow (Ed.), Groups, leadership and men. Pittsburg, PA: Carnegie Press. Crutchfield, R. (1955). Conformity and Character. American Psychologist, 10, 191-198. Deutsch, M., & Gerard, H. B. (1955). A study of normative and informational social influences upon individual judgment. The journal of abnormal and social psychology, 51(3), 629. Jenness, A. (1932). The role of discussion in changing opinion regarding a matter of fact. The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 27, 279-296. Kelman, H. C. (1958). Compliance, identification, and internalization: three processes of attitude change. Journal of Conflict Resolution, 2, 51–60. Mann, L (1969). Social Psychology. New York: Wiley. Sherif, M. (1935). A study of some social factors in perception. Archives of Psychology, 27(187) . Smith, P. B., & Bond, M. H. (1993). Social Psychology Across Cultures: Analysis and Perspectives. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf. Meaning of ConformityConformity and deviance are two responses to real or imagined pressure from others. Conformity means going along with one’s peers-individuals of a person’s own status. According to Robert Merton refers to the acceptance of cultural goals and the legitimate or approved means of achieving them.Deviance is a behaviour that violates the standards of conduct or expectations or social norms of a group or society. Alcoholics, compulsive gamblers, and the mentally ill would be classified as deviants. Being late for class is categorized as a deviant act: the same is true of wearing jeans to a formal wedding. On the basis of the sociological definition, we are all deviant from time to time.Factors Influencing Conformity1. In a face to face, group conformity is greater than when the individual gets a chance to express his view secretly. Such as open voting and secret voting. Conformity is more found in open voting than in secret voting.2. If a person expresses his feelings in writing before he joins group conformity is reduced to some extent.3. In a group feeling a sense of belongingness to the group and the feeling that he is a part of the group increases conformity with the group.4. A person having status influences another person’s behaviour and conformity and influence work together.Causes of conformity[1]Harry M. Johnson has spoken of a few causes of conformity to social norms. Some of them may be briefed here.1. Socialization: It is through the process of socialization that social norms are internalized by the individuals. Hence norms become an inseparable part of their personality. Proper social training always supports conformity.2. Insulation: Role conflict and conflict in the norms that apply to the same actor may contribute to deviance. But some built-in arrangements may serve to reduce normative conflict and thereby contribute to conformity.a. One such arrangement is that the norms that might conflict are prevented from doing so by applying to different times and places.b. Another kind of insulation is that a given actor carries out the activities of his various roles with or face-to-face with a different role- sets. For example, a bank manager may learn music through his own sub-ordinate during non-official working hours accepting him as his own teacher. He may give rewards and show respect to his sub-ordinate in this regard. But during the working hours, the sub-ordinate will have to accept his inferior status and obey the commands of the manager.Thus, even though the individuals remain the same in both the contexts their roles and role expectations differ markedly. The clarity with regard to the role expectations helps to reduce uncertainty and conflict and support conformity.3. Hierarchy of Norms: Norms that apply to the same actor are found to be in the form of a hierarchy. It means the norms are ranked in order of precedence. Hence if role expectations conflict with one another the actor has grounds for making a choice.The hierarchy of norms as well as their time and place aspect is part of the culture. For example, a soldier may be put to such a conflicting situation in which either he will have to attend to the needs of the ailing mother who is on the deathbed or rush to the battle-ground to attend to the urgent call of the army.The hierarchy of values and norms of his society help the soldier to take the appropriate decision. It is through socialisation the hierarchical aspects of the norms are learnt. If the different aspects of a cultural system are properly integrated and if socialisation helps the individual to understand this integration he will have no difficulty in following the expected forms of behaviour. The integration of the cultural system serves as a guide for individual behaviour.4. Social Control: Various formal, as well as informal means of social control, help the socialized actor to imagine and anticipate what would happen to him if he violated the norms. Thus, sanctions lead the conformity even though they are not actually applied.5. Ideology: People’s conformity to group norms depends to some extent upon the ideas and ideology that they hold. The norms partly express broader values that are more purely and precisely emphasized in ideology. Ideology strengthens faith in the existing system. Ideology adds to the norms themselves a kind of “intellectual” support. Hence it helps to motivate people to conform to its norms.6. Vested Interest: Conformity to social norms does not always depend upon idealistic motives alone. Sometimes, due to vested interest or self-interest also people conform to them. Norms define rights as well as obligations. They protect our rights also. Some of the rights protect the exclusion of other members.Those who enjoy such advantages are likely to be satisfied, with the norms that protect them. Hence, they support these norms with a greater sense of conviction than the disadvantaged persons. Property rights are a good example in this regard.The term ‘vested interest’ is used here in a neutral sense. Hence it may represent one’s genuine interests or purely selfish interests. Thus, landlord’s rents are vested interests for they are legitimate. Illicit liquor makers support prohibition laws with a vested interest that it would help them to make money.Other CausesRobert Bierstedt gives four causes for the question ‘Why we conform to the norms.’ They maybe briefly discussed here.1. Indoctrination: We conform to the norms simply because we have been indoctrinated to do so. Indoctrination refers to the process of injecting into the personality of the child the group norms. We are taught, for example, to take our bath at certain times, to wash our clothes, to respect our elders, to avoid vulgarity, to walk on the1 right side of the road, and so on./The norms are indoctrinated through the process of socialisation. As a result, they become a part and parcel of the personality of the individual. Conformity to the norms becomes very natural because of indoctrination.2. Habituation: We conform, to the worms because we become habituated to them. What is customary is likely to become in many cases habitual. Some of the norms are indoctrinated in the beginning, but they become habitual practices afterwards. We are taught to wash our hands and mouth after the meal but after a while, it becomes a matter of habit.Repetition makes a practice a habit and most of the folkways come to be rooted in the individual in this way. When one is habituated to practice, one observes it automatically, without thinking or putting forth deliberate attempts. Habituation reinforces the norms and guarantees the regularity of conformity.3. Utility: We appreciate the unity of norms and hence we conform to them. Norms help us to interact with others with much comfort and ease.For example, (i) we are asked to sell the tickets to a drama show for which only a limited number of seats are available. Then we prefer to sell them to those who come first to purchase them. We justify our action with the expression “first come first served” (ii) similarly we recognize that the flow of traffic at busy intersections is smoother and less dangerous when signal lights are installed.Thus, we stop at a red light and start at a green one. We find it reasonable to obey the traffic rule for it has the slogan “the life you save may be your own”. In many social situations, we realized the utility of the norms to which we conform.4. Group Identification: We conform to the norms of our own social groups rather than to those of groups to which we do not belong. We thus conform to the norms because conformity is a means of group identification. By conformity to the norms, we express our identification with the groups.Sometimes, we even conform to some irrational folkways because they are our own and they identify us with our own society and our own social groups. For example, a particular student tries to bring home-prepared lunch to the college to eat during the lunch interval (even though it is very difficult for him to bring it because of a particular domestic situation) just to be in the company of his fellow members of the ‘clique’.In some situations, we may try to conform to the norms of the group to which we would like to belong and to identify ourselves. Such groups are called by Merton ‘reference groups.’For example, a medical student or a law graduate may begin to observe and conform to the norms of doctors or lawyers. Even in this case group identification is significant.Why Confirmity is Important?Conformity can be important for several reasons:1. Social Acceptance: Conforming to social norms and expectations helps individuals gain acceptance and approval from others. Humans are inherently social beings, and being part of a group often provides a sense of security and belonging.2. Social Order: Conformity contributes to social order by establishing shared rules and behaviours. When people follow common norms, it helps maintain a cohesive and stable society, preventing chaos or conflict.3. Facilitates Communication: Shared norms and behaviours make communication more efficient. When individuals adhere to common expectations, it creates a shared understanding that simplifies interactions and reduces misunderstandings.4. Psychological Comfort: Conforming to societal norms can provide psychological comfort and reduce anxiety. Knowing that one's actions align with accepted standards can create a sense of reassurance and reduce the fear of social rejection.5. Group Cohesion: Conformity often enhances group cohesion. When individuals within a group behave similarly, it fosters unity and cooperation, which can be essential for achieving common goals.6. Cultural Transmission: Conformity helps transmit cultural values, traditions, and practices from one generation to the next. It plays a role in the continuity and preservation of cultural identity.7. Adaptation: Conforming to certain social behaviours allows individuals to adapt to their environment. It helps them navigate societal expectations and function effectively within their community.While conformity has its benefits, it's essential to note that blind conformity without critical thinking can also lead to negative outcomes. Striking a balance between conformity and individuality is crucial for a healthy and dynamic society.[1] Rao, C. N. (2012). Principles of Sociology. New Delhi: S. Chand. p 472-475 Tags Basic Concepts in Sociology Lifestyles & Social Issues Sociology & Society conformity, the process whereby people change their beliefs, attitudes, actions, or perceptions to more closely match those held by groups to which they belong or want to belong or by groups whose approval they desire. Conformity has important social implications and continues to be actively researched. Two lines of research have had a great impact on views of conformity. In one set of studies (1935), the Turkish-born social psychologist Muzafer Sherif demonstrated the power of social influence to change people’s perceptions of highly ambiguous stimuli. Sherif made use of the autokinetic effect, a perceptual illusion that occurs when people are asked to concentrate on a stationary point of light in a dark room. Under those circumstances, people perceive movement in the light. Some think it moves only a little; others think it moves a lot. Sherif found that when groups of three people were brought together and asked to say out loud how far a light moved, their judgments gradually converged. In other words, they developed a group norm about the distance the light moved. And that norm had a lasting impact on participants’ perceptions. Conformity to the group norm was still evident a year later. Participants created a norm through mutual social influence, which then influenced their private responses. In another series of experiments, the American psychologist Solomon Asch assembled groups of seven to nine people for a study on visual perception. The experimental task, which involved matching the length of a standard line against three comparison lines, was easy. Each group contained one naive participant who answered next to last. The remaining “members” were confederates of the experimenter and gave unanimously incorrect answers on 12 of 18 trials. Asch found that conformity occurred even in a situation where the majority gave clearly erroneous answers. Participants’ responses agreed with the erroneous majority approximately one-third of the time, and 27 percent of participants conformed on at least eight trials. Control participants (who made judgments privately) gave incorrect answers less than 1 percent of the time. Although the level of conformity that Asch obtained may seem surprising, it is worth noting that participants’ responses were correct approximately two-thirds of the time, and 24 percent of participants never conformed. Two categories of conformity have been distinguished: public agreement (compliance) and private agreement (acceptance). If conformity is defined as movement toward a group norm, then compliance refers to overt behavioral change in the direction of that norm, whereas acceptance refers to covert attitudinal or perceptual change. For example, if an individual initially refused to sign a petition advocating abortion rights, learned that a group advocated those rights, and then signed a petition favouring those rights, the person would be showing compliance. In contrast, if an individual privately believed that abortion should be outlawed, learned that a group advocated abortion rights, and then changed his private opinion about those rights, the person would be showing acceptance. Several forms of nonconformity have been distinguished, but two of the most important are independence and anticonformity. Independence occurs when a person initially disagrees with a group and exhibits neither compliance nor acceptance after being exposed to group pressure. In other words, the person stands fast when faced with disagreement. In contrast, anticonformity occurs when a person initially disagrees with a group and moves even farther away from its position (at the public or private level) after being exposed to pressure. (Ironically, anticonformers are just as responsive to group pressure as conformers, but they manifest their susceptibility by moving away from the group.) People conform to group pressure because they are dependent on the group for satisfying two important desires: the desire to have an accurate perception of reality and the desire to be accepted by other people. People want to hold accurate beliefs about the world because such beliefs usually lead to rewarding outcomes. Some beliefs about the world can be verified by using objective tests; others cannot be verified by using objective standards and hence must be verified by using social tests, namely comparing one’s beliefs to those of other people whose judgment one respects. If those others agree with one’s beliefs, one gains confidence in them; if they disagree, one loses confidence. Because disagreement is disturbing, people are motivated to eliminate it, and one way to do so is to conform to group norms. According to that analysis, people sometimes conform to groups because they are uncertain about the correctness of their beliefs and believe the group is more likely to be correct than they are. That kind of conformity reflects what the American researchers Morton Deutsch and Harold Gerard labeled informational influence. Informational influence generally produces private acceptance as well as public compliance. This is illustrated in Sherif’s work, which indicated that people judging an ambiguous stimulus exhibited both compliance (when they made judgments in others’ presence) and acceptance (when they later responded privately). Because informational influence is based on insecurity about one’s beliefs, one would expect it to be more common when an individual feels dependent on others for information. Consistently with that assumption, people exhibit more conformity when they are working on ambiguous tasks than on unambiguous tasks. In addition, they conform more when they have doubts about their own task competence and when they think other group members are highly competent in the task. In order to continue enjoying our site, we ask that you confirm your identity as a human. Thank you very much for your cooperation. Conformity involves changing your behavior to align with other people’s behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes. People often conform to blend in with others in their social group. It is a type of social influence that compels people to behave in ways seen as “normal” for that specific group. Researchers define conformity as “aligning one’s attitude, opinion or behavior to those of others” (Stallen and Sanfey, 2015). The presence of others can be a powerful force that can convince people that they need to change their beliefs and behaviors. Pressure from groups often leads people to conform with those around them, sometimes even if it conflicts with their personal goals or beliefs. In this article, learn more about the different types of conformity, why people conform to the group, and how it can affect how people think and behave. There are also several different types of social conformity that people may engage in. Compliance refers to changing behavior to gain a reward or avoid punishment. In the famous conformity experiment known as Asch’s conformity experiments, participants were offered a cash reward if they could correctly identify which comparison lines matched the standard line on a test. Many participants conformed and gave an incorrect answer rather than go against the rest of the group. Complying involves changing your behavior, even though you might still disagree with the rest of the group. This type of compliance involves changing behavior because people want to align their identity with the rest of a certain group. The conformity that typically takes place with this motivation is much more subtle than compliance. This type of conformity leads people to change their beliefs and attitudes because they desire to be like others. Internalization may lead to conformity out of the best interests of the individual. It may also lead to conformity out of the best interests of the groups they identify with. This type of conformity involves changing behavior in order to be accepted or favored by other people. People may ingratiate themselves to other members of the group in order to be liked, to gain power, or to obtain some other form of social reward. To better understand the meaning of conformity, it can be helpful to look at a few examples of how this phenomenon can affect behaviors. Some common examples of conformity include: Buying certain types of clothing because other people in your social group are wearing them Saying that you agree with other people in your social group just because you don’t want to stand out Standing up when you notice that other people are also standing up Giving into peer pressure Joining a club because other people you know are signing up Voting for the political candidates that your friends or family support Following a health or fitness trend because you see it everywhere on social media Buying specific products because you keep seeing people on social media promoting them The conformity bias refers to the tendency to change behaviors or beliefs in order to fit in with a social group. This bias causes people to do what the group is doing rather than trusting their own judgment, knowledge, and experience. While people often like to believe that they are independent and unique, the reality is that most of us conform in a wide variety of ways each and every day. People are naturally social creatures, so being able to fit in with our social groups plays an important part in social cohesion and group acceptance. “People adjust their preferences, attitudes, and behaviors to conform to the norms of a group as a means of benefiting their social and physical welfare within the group, because social hierarchy profoundly affects the welfare of both animals and humans,” researchers suggest (Kim, Kim, and Kim, 2021). People conform for various reasons, some of which can be positive and some negative. According to researchers, there are two primary reasons why people engage in conformity: On the positive side, conformity can be a way to learn what to do in different situations and settings. If you are looking for people who are more informed and experienced, it can help guide your own actions. People tend to engage in information conformity when they lack knowledge or experience. They may also change their behavior to avoid looking foolish or incorrect. Social norms and expectations can also influence conformity. The desire to fit in with groups and avoid being singled out for going against the status quo can also be a powerful motivation for conformity. People may engage in normative conformity to avoid punishment, ridicule, or exclusion for standing out from the crowd. They may also conform in ways designed to get others from the group to like or approve of them. People conform to the group for many reasons. Two of the most common reasons are to acquire information and avoid rejection. We understand some of the reasons why people conform, but there are also other internal and situational variables that can impact whether or not people conform in different settings. These factors can affect how likely people are to conform to the rest of the group: Personal characteristics: Individual factors such as a person’s overall personality and goals can affect the degree to which they conform. Situational factors: When people encounter situations with unclear or ambiguous expectations, they may be more likely to look to others for information about what they should do and how they should behave. Group size: Asch’s classic conformity experiment found group size impacts conformity up to a certain point. People are most likely to conform when three to five other people are present. Status: People may be more likely to conform in situations where they feel that others have a higher status level than they do. Belongingness: Conformity tends to be higher when people have a strong sense of identification and cohesion with the rest of the group. Cultural influences: People from different cultural backgrounds may respond differently to social influences. In collectivist cultures, people are often more likely to conform to social expectations. People from individualist cultures may be less likely to do so. Difficulty level: If people are unknowledgeable, uncertain, or inexperienced, they are more likely to conform to what others in the group are doing. Certain factors can impact whether or not people conform to the group. The size of the group, the difficulty of the task, the ambiguity of the situation, and the status of the individual are just a few influences that play a role. Conformity can have a powerful influence on how people behave in different settings. It can potentially lead people to change their opinions and behaviors in various ways, both for good and for bad. Conformity can play an important role in the learning and socialization process during child development. Kids often learn by watching and imitating the actions of others, a process that is known as observational learning. This can convey important information about what to do and how to behave in various situations. Social pressure continues to influence life. People often alter their behavior, appearance, attitudes, or opinions to fit in with the rest of their social group. This can contribute to social harmony and group cohesiveness. It can help people to feel that they belong to a group, which an be a positive influence on a person’s mental health. However, such pressure can also lead people to engage in risky or even harmful behaviors. It can also play a role in social phenomena such as the bystander effect, in which the presence of other people discourages people from helping others. In such situations, people observe others not intervening when help is needed, and the pressure to conform leads people to also fail to lend assistance. In many cases, members of the group may utilize a range of tactics, including modeling, persuading, and even bullying to try to get other members of the group to conform to a certain set of expectations. Several well-known psychology experiments have explored conformity. Such experiments have contributed to our understanding of why people conform and how it can affect behavior in both positive and negative ways. In one of the first experiments on conformity, psychologist Arthur Jenness asked participants to guess how many beans were in a glass bottle. People were asked individually and then later placed in a room to discuss. After the discussion, Jenness found that most participants changed their answers to conform to what the rest of the group had estimated. During the 1950s, social psychologist Solomon Asch conducted experiments where participants were asked to perform a perceptual task. In this simple task, they had to look at a line and choose the line from a set of three different lines that matched the original one in terms of length. However, other people in the group were in on the experiment and would intentionally select the wrong line. The results revealed that the majority of people (around 75% of the participants) would go along with the wrong answer at least one time. In these experiments, psychologist Muzafer Sherif had participants guess how far a light dot moved in a dark room. The movement of the light was actually due only to an autokinetic effect caused by the movements of the eyes. Sherif found that when people were asked how far the light moved in part of a group, their answers all tended to be rather similar. However, when asked individually without the influence of the group, their answers were far more variable. His results indicated that because people were unsure, they looked to the rest of the group to inform their responses. Several notable experiments have demonstrated how conformity affects behaviors. Famous experiments include Jenness’s conformity experiment, Asch’s conformity experiments, and Sherif’s autokinetic experiments. While conformity and obedience share some similarities, they are different concepts. Conformity involves changing your behavior, thoughts, or appearance to fit in with the rest of your social group. Obedience involves following the orders of another person, often a person with authority or status. Simply put, conformity happens because people want to be socially accepted. Obedience happens as a result of power differentials in social roles. Conformity can have a positive and negative influence. On the plus side, it can encourage positive social behaviors and provide information that allows individuals to function effectively in their environments. On the negative side, it can stifle creativity and lead people to give in to destructive peer pressure. Not everyone gives in to pressure from the social group. If you want to resist conforming in different social situations, experts suggest that you should: You’re less likely to conform to social pressure if you have a few people who are willing to resist alongside you. Talk to your friends and loved ones in such situations and ask them to stick with you when it comes to avoiding conforming to the rest of the group. You are more likely to conform when you aren’t really sure about how to think, behave, or feel in a specific situation. Spend time thinking about your own beliefs, what’s important to you, and how you can commit to those values. Locus of control refers to whether you believe you have control over your own destiny, or if you feel that outside forces are primarily responsible for what happens in your life. Having an internal locus of control means that you feel that you have the power to control what happens and that your own efforts can create change in your life. By strengthening this sense of control, you’ll be better able to resist social pressure to conform. Resisting conforming requires practice. This doesn’t mean that you should be intentionally argumentative. Instead, work on standing your ground in situations where you might have otherwise conformed to the rest of the group. Belonging is a basic human need. Human beings are inherently social creatures, so being accepted by others is a way to gain a sense of community and closeness. In broader terms, social cohesion plays an important role in the success of a group. Conformity can allow groups to meet their goals, increase social harmony, and minimize interpersonal conflict. Conformity is often viewed negatively, particularly when it involves engaging in behaviors that are risky or destructive. However, conformity can also be a positive influence, particularly when it encourages people to engage in prosocial behaviors that support individual and community well-being. However, it is important to recognize that conformity has a dark side. When people engage in conformity out of fear or as a way to avoid punishment, it can potentially play a role in terrible actions and large-scale atrocities. One factor that can play a role in conformity is a phenomenon known as social proof. Social proof is a psychological phenomenon first described by psychologist Robert Cialdini in which people copy the actions of others to know how to act in a certain situation. This idea stems from the assumption that if other people are doing something, it must be the correct thing to do. Sources: Asch, SE. (1951). Effects of group pressure upon the modification and distortion of judgments. In H. Guetzkow (Ed.), Groups,