

# Is conformity 'liberating' or 'enslaving'? assignment

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Question: Is conformity 'liberating' or 'enslaving'? Discuss with reference to the influence of groups, group behavior, etc. Conformity as a means of enslaving or liberating is an issue which is relatively practical and can be experienced or observed in many societal forums. This paper will seek to examine the concepts of conformity, analyzing its effects with the aid of research based data, observations and my own experiences. Before any proper analysis could be done, a functional, working definition of conformity and how it relates to groups, should be established.

Dr. C. George Boeree in his online article, Conformity and Obedience approaches the topic of conformity by stating that conformity is actually a rather complex concept, and there are a number of different kinds, which includes: ? Conformity to norms is often quite unconscious. It has been internalized (learned well), probably in early childhood. Our societal norms are seldom doubted; rather, we take them as givens, as " the way things are. " The learning is supported throughout life by the " validity" of the norm i. e. it works because it is the norm. Sometimes we choose, consciously, to conform, as when we join a group voluntarily. We adopt certain norms because the group is attractive to us and we identify with the group and its values or goal. In its more dramatic forms, this is called conversion. ? In other cases, we conform because we are forced to, i. e. we are conscious of our conformity but it seems a lot less voluntary. This is often called compliance, and it can be brought on by anything from a gun to the head or the promise of candy. In other words, it is conformity due to the sanctions the society or group has in effect. But most of what we call conformity in the research literature concerns something " somewhat conscious" and " not

quite voluntary. " It is usually brought on by social anxiety, fear of embarrassment, discomfort at confusion, a sense of inferiority, a desire to be liked, and so on. I think it should be called defensive conformity. Credence being given to each of these definition, we will however only be looking at conformity as it relates to groups. Thus conformity is defined as the process by which people's beliefs or behaviors are influenced by others.

People can be influenced via subtle, even unconscious processes, or by direct and overt peer pressure. Many people imagine themselves as unique individuals unlike anyone else; indeed, we all possess specific characteristics that distinguish us from the crowd. However, despite our imaginations and wishful thinking, the majority of human beings comply with some set of societal rules most of the time. Cars stop at red traffic lights; children and adults attend school and go to work; policemen are paid to protect our communities.

These are examples of conformity for obvious reasons; without compliance with certain rules of society, the entire structure would break down. Why, though, do individuals give in to less important reasons to conform? Why do college students play drinking games and elementary school children shun the outcast child? We conform to be correct, to be socially accepted and avoid rejection, to accomplish group goals, to establish and maintain our self-concept/social identity, and to align ourselves with similar individuals (Nail, MacDonald, & Levy, 2000).

Another definition of conformity that would aid in answering the above mentioned question is explained to be, changing one's behavior or beliefs to

match those of other group members, generally as a result of real or imagined, though unspoken, group pressure (p. 637 Bernstein, et al. 2000). To fully understand exactly what this definition is implying let's examine the dynamics of human behavior. According to the behavioral approach, human behavior is determined mainly by what a person has learned in life, especially by the rewards and punishments the person has experienced in interacting with other people.

These life lessons usually contribute to the formation of values and beliefs that govern morals and foster a certain type of personality. Now if my deductions are correct, conformity can be defined as the disregard of the lessons one has learnt from previous interactions of life, lessons which have shaped the beliefs and foundations of an individual, to beliefs that comply with those of a group which do are not in sync with the individual's own beliefs. Is that liberating as an individual?

Suppressing my beliefs and accepting those of a larger organization, as a means of being a part of it is by no means liberating to me. Liberation is defined as the releasing of a person, group, population or country from restraint. Looking at conformity as the liberation of a person, I can only see it as enslaving in all its effects to that individual. However this paper must present an unbiased research, not only looking at conformity as it relates to the individuals of the group only, but also as it relates to the entire group as one unit.

The idea that group conformity affects each and every one of us in some way is no surprise; it happens on some level to every socially integrated person

multiple times a day, whether it be putting on appropriate attire in the morning, eating what is widely known to be a healthy diet, or stopping at a stop light, conformity is all around us. Civilization as we know it was built on the principle that we can all work together to establish a greater cooperative ability than any individual could manage on his or her own.

Without the fundamental abilities to work together and conform to the ideas of those around us, humankind would never have reached the level of social modernization that it has today (Brewer & Caporael, 1990). An interesting and pertinent point that should be addressed when considering the reasons for group conformity is: What do we gain from this conformity? In Lumbert's "Conformity and Group Mentality: Why We Comply," it was noted that the average person enjoys knowing that he or she is correct about judgments, and Lumbert mentioned that participants will change their perceived correct answer to conform with group norms.

But a key point has been overlooked that should be addressed and that is the issue of Science. Science is intended to be a collaborative approach to knowledge wherein every individual is no longer required to unravel the mysteries of the universe within his or her short lifespan. With the advent of science, we can now look to the minds and work of others to find the answers to our questions, as well as for guidance in ambiguous situations. Science provides us the ability to live longer, healthier, more knowledgeable lives, and we owe it all to conformity. Accepting another's ideas and thoughts as reference for our own way of life seems to come naturally to us. Some believe that group conformity is the result of a genetic predisposition that humans have acquired throughout the course of history (Barresi, 1996), and <https://assignbuster.com/is-conformity-liberating-or-enslaving-assignment/>

they are probably right, at least on some level. As a group, conforming is intricately necessary to accomplish group goals, which has been illustrated in several studies.

In one study, subjects were first given a stimulus story to read and interpret on their own. The subjects were then exposed to the feedback of other participants and were allowed to change their attitudes if desired. Subjects were strongly influenced by the group opinion for some stories; however, for an emotional story involving relevant attitudes, the subjects seemed less willing to conform without question and only did so after lengthy discussions of the content of the story with other subjects (Buehler & Griffin, 1994).

It appeared that the subjects worked towards a common goal together through discussion, eventually coming to mutual agreement and conforming to foster cohesiveness in the group. In a study on cooperation in sports teams, it was found that the perception of one's own sacrifice and the sacrifices of other team members contributed to a feeling of togetherness and equity which, in turn, contributed to the team members' notion of conforming to the group norms.

For the study, state-level sports teams were chosen because of the high degree of competitiveness in game play. Members of the teams were asked to complete questionnaires with scales ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' regarding different types of sacrifices that individuals perceived themselves and other members of the team making for the advancement of the team. Such sacrifices included items such as those

made in competition and training, at work and at home, and social sacrifices (such as giving up time with friends/giving up relationships).

The study implies that personal sacrifice is an integral part of how a group functions as a whole; when a group functions well, there appears to be more conformity (Prapavessis & Carron, 1997). From these studies it can be concluded that accomplishing group goals is a relevant reason for conforming within the past several decades. It's obvious the fact still remains that in order for groups to operate at their highest potential, to produce the best outcome for the group as a unit, there must be a unification of its members and this is the core of group conformity.

Does this conformity promote liberation as a group? Suppressing my beliefs and accepting those of a larger organization, as a means of achieving a greater purpose or goal, which the group has established is the core of group member enslavement but the genesis of liberation for the group. When groups succeed at their goals, they are essentially removing the element of restraint from the equation, allowing them to progress towards greater accomplishments. I therefore conclude that conformity enslaves individual group members, to the cause of liberation for the group.

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