

Conformity



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

1.

Suppose that someone argued that conformity is bad under all circumstances. Do you agree or disagree State your response, and explain why you think so. Conformity refers to the convergence of individual responses towards group norms. Most of the time people adopt group norms as their own, believing them to be correct and appropriate.

(Smith et al, pg 334). In many cases conformity is believed to be bad in that it can cause a negative impact on society, it can form unacceptable behaviour, unhappiness or disappointment and can be wrong or immoral as in the case of Nazi Germany. If some one were to argue however that conformity is bad under all circumstances I would have to disagree.

Conformity can also be beneficial to many. It not only allows the proper functioning of a society, but it can also produce many positive results in both groups and amongst individuals.

Most people throughout their lives balance the need to conform and fit in with the need to express their individuality throughout their lives. Finding this balance however is a challenge and in some circumstances groups or individuals can lose their identity altogether by succumbing to external pressures around them. In this essay I will discuss the benefit and disadvantages of conformity in terms of religious, political, moral and social pressures. Throughout history, conformity has lead to the most violent of wars, of religious and ideological conflict (Rosenbaum pg 55). This is clearly illustrated in the events of the holocaust, during which we saw the mass killings of many minority groups in Germany including the Jewish community,

Gypsies, homosexual and homeless people. Historians are still unable to explain why millions of Germans voted for National Socialism and how such a regime could eventually acquire such an extensive European Empire (Welsh, pg1).

Sometimes, however, conformity occurs because we feel we have no choice but to go along with social norms. These people conform because they fear ridicule, rejection, incarceration, or worse as in the case of Nazi Germany. Hitler's rise to power was largely due to the skilful exploitation of propaganda techniques and as a result his ideologies became appropriate ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving that people in Germany agreed on and endorsed as right and proper. The willingness of tens of thousands of people in Germany to carry out deeds of terrible cruelty is accounted for by the mechanism of conformity to Hitler and external pressures from others around them (Rosenbaum, pg 213). Succumbing to external pressures however can lead to a loss of identity. When individuals see themselves purely in terms of group identity, their behavior is likely to be guided by group norms alone. Most of the time people adopt group norms as their own, believing them to be correct and appropriate and because they want the group to accept and approve of them.

When people are truly persuaded that the group is right and they willingly accept the group's norms as their own, private conformity occurs. Sometimes however, people publicly conform to norms they do not privately accept. Public conformity occurs when people respond to pressure and behave consistently with norms that they do not privately accept as correct.

This is when conformity can become dangerous as we begin to lose perspective of our own thoughts and beliefs.

Conforming to norms that we don't privately accept can cause the feeling that one's personal and individual identity has become lost in the crowd. (Smith et al, pg 383). Although most people have a strong desire to maintain their uniqueness and individuality some choose to be so much like others to the extent that they lose their personal identity. However, along with the need to be right and to be liked, most of us still possess a desire for individuation and for being differentiated, in some respects, for other – something which consistently conforming to group norms and other people's ideas does not allow.

In many cases however, choosing to disagree with others or to act in idiosyncratic ways, makes people realise that such behaviour may be costly in terms of gaining other people's approval or acceptance, and this leads to various inducements to conformity to be stronger than their desire to maintain a unique identity. Another reason why succumbing to group pressure may be harmful is that the person conforming lacks the ability to control the events in their lives. Most people want to believe they can determine what happens to them, but yielding to social pressure sometimes runs counter to this desire and going along with a group implies behaving in ways one would not ordinarily choose, this can be interpreted as a restriction of personal freedom and control.

Conversely, loss of identity can occur on a national or global scale. In the face of globalization we have seen the integration and uniformity of the

world tied together by technology, ecology, communication and commerce. Today almost every country in the world is conforming to the processes of globalization. All national economies are now vulnerable to the inroads of larger, transnational markets within which trade is free, currencies are convertible, access to banking is open, and contracts are enforceable under law (Barber, pg. 3).

In many countries such markets are eroding national sovereignty and giving rise to entities such as international banks, trade associations, transnational lobbies, world news services like CNN and the BBC, and multinational corporations that increasingly lack a meaningful nation identity. Although globalization may have some benefits in terms of bringing people together, in many countries there seem to be a permanent rebellion against uniformity and integration. (Barber, pg. 5) The majority of wars that take place in the world today are ethnic, racial, tribal, or religious in character.

The aim of many of these wars is to redraw boundaries and re-secure national identities simply due to the fact that global relations have often suppressed traditional cultures. Some degree of conformity, however, is necessary for society to function. The law, when obeyed, regulates and manages individuals and groups in society. Legal enactments produce compliance because they tell us something about what we should do and about what other people think we should do. In such cases we are likely to comply with the law even if it is not enforced and some people will often comply with the law even though they do not believe that it is fair.

Sometimes, however, we comply with apparently unfair law because we don't want to disappoint other people or to make them angry. In most circumstances people comply with the law even though they do not fear action by the police. This occurs for a number of reasons.

Firstly, if the law bans certain conduct, citizens have reason to believe that the conduct is harmful and really should be banned. Secondly when the law bans certain conduct, citizens have good reason to believe that their fellow citizens think that the conduct should be banned, in either case, sensible people have reason to do what the law asks them to do (Sunstein, pg 42). If one was to consider whether to comply with the law the citizen will probably consider the reputational costs of violation, and since people are less likely to violate the law if other people will hate or ostracize them for doing so. Sometimes law is not enforced, however compliance is automatic.

People comply with the law even though they do not fear action by the police. For example I would never park in a place reserved for the handicapped. Of course most people would not violate the law even if they could do so privately or invisibly. But the few people who are tempted to park illegally are deterred by the prospect of unpleasant encounters with strangers who are prepared to object loudly to able-bodied drivers who park in spaces reserved for the handicapped. They conform to the law partly to avoid these encounters. Conforming to group pressures, however can often also lead to the violation of law or behaving in ways they do not approve of.

The idea of restriction of personal freedom and control is tied closely to the issue of peer pressure. Although people feel peer pressure their entire lives,

young people who are seeking to define themselves are generally most influenced by the values and attitudes of their peers. Adolescents often encourage friends to do or try things that they themselves are doing in order to fit into a group. In many cases the encouragement can be negative. This type of conformity is bad as it may influence the willingness of people to engage in activities such as illicit drug use, alcohol abuse or high risk sexual activities.

The desire to be part of a group and the fear of social isolation however, makes it more appealing for the adolescent to conform to their groups values than to seek different friends with values more in line with their own. Although it may simply be the adolescents eagerness to define themselves, the effects of these issues surrounding conformity and peer pressure in teen adolescent year can continue into adult life. As seen through many of these examples of different types of conformity, people are profoundly influenced by other people's idea actions and as a result interaction causes peoples' thoughts, feelings and behaviours to become more alike. Whether it be a tradition public opinion, the way we do things or a well known fact, people other people's reactions towards a situation guide our own responses as we believe them to be both a correct and an appropriate model for our own action. Although conformity can be bad in certain cases in that it produces negative outcomes for the individual or groups in society as seen through the event of the holocaust, more recent events such as globalization and succumbing to peer pressure, there are many examples where conformity has proven to be beneficial to our way of living.

Not only does it allow for law and order in society but it provides a sense of approval and acceptance for many amongst groups as well as contributing to the effective functioning of groups in society. It has also proven to be beneficial for many in terms of compliance to religion illustrated through the works of mother Theresa and conforming to ethical codes such as those in Hindu cultures. Conformity is not bad under all circumstances and can bring both satisfaction and happiness to many. References: Barber. B. R. Jihad Vs. McWorld.

The Atlantic Monthly March 1992, 269(3): 53-65. Rosenbaum. M. Compliant behaviour: Beyond Obedience to Authority. Human Sciences Press, Inc. New York. 1983 Smith. E.

R., Mackie. D. M. Social Psychology 2nd Edition. Taylor & Francis 2000 Steinert.

M. Hitler??™s War and the Germans. Ohio University Press. Ohio. US. 1977 Sunstein. R.

C. Why Societies need Dissent. Cass. R Sunstein. 2003 Welsh. D. Nazi Propaganda: The Power and the Limitations. Barnes and Noble Books. New Jersey. US. 1983.