

Conformity attacking today's youth

Business



In today's youth there is an alarming rise in conformity, compared to the previous generations. Just like in every society, conformity and obedience are required to prevent chaos, but when the people of the society, especially the youth, forget who they are, there becomes a certain mindset. In this mindset the youth begins to over value other people's opinions, this mindset allows the media to control what they look like, and this mindset discourages being unique. Without individuals acting individually, society becomes boring, bland, and basic. Conformity is starting in the home, in the living rooms of millions of families. The television has become the most prominent medium used to control teens lives, " Television emerges as the important influence in children's lives today" (Winn 259).

By simply pressing the power button a person's mind begins conforming to whatever show or commercial is taking place. As Marie Winn says, " Turning on the television set can turn off the process that transforms children into people" (259). Then there are ' Cool-hunters', searching for the next big thing teenagers want to be a part of. Marketers go above and beyond to find out what interests the youth of today. Why? Because the teens run today's economy. By placing only 20% of teens, the ' trend-setters', in charge of the other 80%, the followers, the moral standards sag and will eventually bottom out.

Everyone thinks of commercials as annoying, but they are always there playing in your subconscious. Commercials, like television shows, control how, when, what, and where a person thinks. An average teen sees over 3, 000 discreet advertisements a day (Merchants). Each and every one of these ads are contributing to how the teen sees him or her self in society, most of

the time not contributing in a good way. Some might say that it is easy to ignore the media, and its very vigorous campaign, simply pass over it like so many people do to other things in their lives.

People don't stare at every blade of grass in the crack of the sidewalk, why should they notice and let all this media infiltrate their mind and their personality? The answer to this is simple: commercials and television shows have underlying messages that control the viewer. The media dictates the viewer on how to act and what to buy and because of this, the youth is conforming more and more. Social or peer pressure is a major conforming tool that all teens and children use all over the world. There have been numerous research studies done on social pressures and how they affect the people who conform to the pressures of society. Gabriel Tarde said, "Social man is a somnambulist" (Asch 352).

Tarde explains that people are sleepwalkers, just going through the motions. These 'sleepwalkers' follow their leaders and do what they are told, sometimes without any question. That is the scary part of society, the fact that the majority of people are under the control of a single person. As Stanley Milgram points out in his experiment on obedience to authority, "Obedience is as basic an element in the structure of social life as one can point to" (344). In Milgram's experiment a volunteer was brought in to shock a learner.

The experimenter tells the volunteer when to 'shock' the learner. After so many shocks the learner begins to scream and tells them to stop, the experimenter insists they continue. Most of the volunteers in this study

continued to follow orders of the authority figure, or the experimenter. Some even followed them so far that the learner 'passed out'. If an adult can be manipulated like this, what will happen to our youth? When these teens and children see older people and people that they look up to drinking a certain drink or wearing a certain outfit, they want to follow them. The role models become the authority figure.

Solomon Asch found that when an individual is around a group, the individual will most likely conform to the majority's ideas. Asch performed a study that had three lines on a piece of paper, and each line was a different size. In a group of seven there would be six actors and one subject. When the actors would select the line that was not the right answer the subject would announce his answer and be embarrassed about it because all the others had given a different one. After so many cards and lines, the subject begins to conform to what the group is saying, " Their submission to the majority was just about as frequent as when the minority subject was opposed by an unanimous majority throughout" (Asch 355).

Put together these results and the overwhelming need to fit in as a teenager and you get a completely malleable teenager who will go along with almost anything. Many disagree with this statement and say that if someone tells you to jump off a bridge would you do it? For most part they are right, that is too extreme. But, there are some cases where that is their only choice. For example, Maxine Hong Kingston's story about her aunt killing herself and her newborn because the villagers and her family shunned and humiliated her. The villagers raided the family's house throwing pigs blood all over and

chanting nasty things. Kingston said, " The villagers punished her for acting as if she could have a private life, secret, and apart from them" (33).

It doesn't take much to send someone over the edge. And with all these pressures from family, school, and now their peers, the youth of today almost have no choice but to conform. The last piece of the conformity puzzle is individuality. Individuality is uniqueness, it is when a person knows who they are. The identity of teens is being dictated by commercials, television shows, and movie stars. When are these teens going to wake up and realize that they are perfect the way they are and that there is no need to conform to others and their ideas? Why do these teens conform? " Afterwards I often wondered whether anyone understood that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool" (Orwell 4).

This is the answer, teens conform because they want to fit in. Being different is no longer a positive attribute. A person has to look like a Hollywood star for someone to notice them. This is why the youth is conforming, because if a person is different they are seen as weird, freakish, and most of all not cool, " When the consensus comes under the dominance of conformity, the social process is polluted and the individual at the same time surrenders the powers on which his functioning as a feeling and thinking being depends" (Asch 357). Teens need and crave the attention of their peers, it is not enough for a parent to say, " You are beautiful," they need someone they see as their equal to say that beloved line. In the Stanford Prison experiment there were guards and prisoners.

Both types were perfectly normal college kids, nothing wrong with them mentally and yet the guards, because they were in a higher position, began acting like true guards. Beating and screaming nasty words to the prisoners just because they were prisoners. There were some 'good guards' that did not conform to the others, "Still, the behavior of these good guards seemed more motivated by a desire to be like by everyone in the system than by a concern for the inmates' welfare" (Zimbardo 8). The desire to conform is all over society. Some might say that too much individuality leads to a chaotic society. But individuality means more leaders and less followers.

There is always enough room for a leader. This society has too many followers, too many somnambulists, too many zombies. Society needs to wake up and realize that if they don't start teaching their youth that being different secures them jobs, being different keeps anarchy away, being different allows for a whole new portal of ideas. No society wants to end up like Adlous Huxley's "Brave New World" where everyone is the same and there is no spontaneity in their lives. Spontaneity keeps the world sane, if everyone knew what was coming there would be no reason to live.

Conformity is a major problem in today's youth. The younger generations are beginning to value other people and their ideas more than their own.

Commercials, musics, Hollywood, and television shows have aided to this conformity epidemic, along with social pressures that society places on teens, and the lack of individualism in today's society. Society has the power to change these ideas and pressures, but society has to do it as a whole.

Because if just one person steps out, they will be considered weird, freakish, and most of all 'not cool'.

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