

Factors that influence conformity essay sample

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Conformity can be defined as a adjusting of behavior to fit the social norms of a group of culture in one's life. In Ashes study (1951) about conformity it is shown that we have a need to belong, to fit in the social norms and culture surrounding us. Human beings usually conform because we have a long for the security a group can brings us. We are willing to change our behavior, beliefs and attitude to suit the norms of the group we long to be a part of. Another reason for us conforming to a group may be because of insecurity, we may think that " they" are more knowledgeable than we are therefore " we" should conform to " them" because they know best. This is a very broad statement; to help us understand what the word conformity is we have divided the concept into three different factors, informational influence, normative influence and referent informational influence. These three factors help us understand the concept of conformity. The first of the three factors of conformity which I want to introduce is informational influence.

Informational influence is when we turn to others to obtain and accept information about our reality.

If we feel uncertain about something particular it is so much easier to conform to a group of individual because we are convinced that they are more knowledgeable and capable of handling the situation. Informational influence is the factor which seemed to have occurred in Sherif's (1935) study. The aim of Sherif's study was to find out how many people would change their opinion to fit the norm of a group. Informational influence showed that over time the participants' seeked the answers of the other participants because they wanted to overcome, remove the ambiguous reality they were facing and conform to a group. Sherif's study can be seen

problematic from different points of views, one of them from Tajels (1979) social identity theory. The participants may have not conformed because of insecurity but maybe because they wanted to enhance their self-esteem by seeking positive social identities, being a part of the in-group (answering like everybody else because “ they” know what’s right). Overall Sherif successfully conducted a study which shows how human being can give into conformity without the presence of anyone around, this was an important discovery. Normative influence is the second factor of conformity which is based on our need to live up to others expectations, we want to be accepted and appreciated with those surrounding us.

We end up conforming to a group, changing our beliefs, actions and attitude to fit the group so that we can avoid rejection. This is clearly shown in the Asch’s experiment (1951), Asch Paradigm. The aim of Asch’s Paradigm was to show how an individual’s own opinions, beliefs would be influenced by a majority of a group. To see if an individual would conform to a group giving the wrong answer even though the right answer is very clear. Asch wanted to investigate a non-ambiguous task (A task with one motive). Once the experiment was conducted the participants were debriefed, here they explained that they simply had the desire to be liked and accepted which is exactly what normative influence is. The Asch Paradigm was an excellent experiment but there were some problematic factors with it which was that it is hard to generalize and that the ecological validity is low because the task and situation was unnatural, causing Asch’s study to be unreliable. Ethics were also breached, there was neither informed consent nor protection from psychological harm this could have also made the participant uncomfortable.

Asch's findings were that 76% Caucasian males conformed at least once during the 18 trials.

This is the result of normative influence. This is the reason why Asch's Paradigm is a great experiment for conformity's normative factor because it clearly shows how we human beings easily conform to a group just to feel accepted or liked. The third and last factor of conformity is referent informational influence. This is when we conform to a group norm because we want to define ourselves as a member of the group. Our social norms adapt and change to suit the social norms of the group we want to belong to. This comes from Tajfel (1978) the social identity theory. We have a social self and an individual self; we are human being we have a need to belong to a group/s. This is when in-groups and out-groups are formed. If you are not a part of the group you are then considered the out group. That's when referent informational influence comes in when you want to be a member of the other group. You want to become a part of their in-group.

With the help of the three different factors of conformity mentioned above we get a clearer and deeper understanding of what the concept conformity really is. Understanding the different factors of conformity can help us with our own personal problems in our social life. It also helps us explain and understand why people act the way they do towards different people. Most of all how and why people can dramatically change their social norms just to fit in with a certain group of people. Sherif's experiment (1936) and Asch's experiment (1951) demonstrate this exactly, helping us understand the true concept of the word " conformity".