Conformity

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**Introduction**

Conformity entails changing of individual behavior to comply with those of group or other persons. The change of behavior comes as a result of yielding pressure or influence of other people. Siedlecki, Szwabinski & Weron (2016) argued that conformity affects the behavior and not the internal processes such as beliefs and attitudes. Conformity is undesirable when it result to behavior or practices that are not considered appropriate in the society (Forsyth, 2013). On the other hand, conformity is desirable when it leads to appropriate behavior or practices. Conformity could be considered inconsequential when it directs individuals into ordinary practices such as using a mug to drink soup instead of a bowl. Conformity bears a negative connotation in communities like Western individualistic culture where giving into peer pressure is undesirable. For instance, due to their individualistic cultures, Western social physiologist discourage social influence concepts and consider the influence to be a sign of undesirable labels such as submission and compliance instead of considering the social influence to be communal sensitivity and responsiveness on the part of the individuals. In various Asian cultures, agreeing and going along with others is encouraged and considered a sign of social maturity and tolerance.

Conformity comprise of the general concept of acting contrary to what one would choose to act due the influence of others (Myers, 2013). The concept does not only explain behaving like other people but also the impact of their behavior on an individual. Conformity entails behavior and reasoning differently from the way an individual would think or behave when not with other people. It is the variation of actions and belief to be in concurrence with a peers or the society. Individuals who are not able to change or alter their behavior or belief system to accommodate others are considered non conformers. However, individuals who have the capacity or in some instances are able to compromise their position, actions or beliefs to concur with other people are said to conform.

There are various forms of conformity that include acceptance and compliance (Nail, MacDonald & Levy, 2000). Whereas acceptance takes place when an individual genuinely considers inwardly and believes sincerely in what other people have persuaded them is right, compliance is acting according to the group with any sincere and internal persuasion. For instance, when one engages an aerobic exercise due to influence from others, the individuals engages in the exercise because they believe and accept that exercise is a precursor to good health. However, wearing school uniform is compliance since students do not need to have inward and sincere conviction to wear them. Obedience is a form of compliance given individual taking the orders or command such as a child who spreads their bed because their parent has said so, do so to comply and avoid punishment (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). On the other hand, individuals could obey and act according to the group due to the expected reward or desire to be seen as a good person.

**Description of the Experiment**

The paper’s experiment was to examine the influence of group decision on 5 students who had vast knowledge on the Cold War. The experiment involved 10 participants; 5 were pursuing a course in diplomacy and international affairs and the other 5 unknown to the students, were the subject. I had given information about the experiment to the subject and told them to be firm on their explanations so that they seem knowledgeable in the area of international affairs. The 5 students had studied that the Cold War was named so because it was a diplomatic war that scarcely involved physical weapon and combatant battles. They had prior knowledge combatant operation took place on proxy wars such as Vietnam and Frankfurt Wars but there were no direct confrontation between the major participants (Allied forces led by USA against the Soviet led communism expansionism) in the war.

I asked the 10 participants who were seated together to explain why was the Cold War given the ‘cold’ term. Each was 2 additional chances to either restate or change their answer/explanation. The first round of questioning, the students gave their responses first but the 2nd and 3rd round, the subject respondents were given chances first. I had instructed the subject participants to state that the word ‘cold’ was used to denote the fact that Cold War was a war fought inside the ocean’s *cold water* where it was difficult to use physical weapons and engage in combatant operations. The 5 students were aware that the audience knew they were undertaking diplomacy and international affairs, which entails among other areas of study, the study about diplomacy and peace during various global conflicts in the present and past decades.

**Outcome**

During the first round of questioning, all the students gave correct explanation about the reason the Cold War was the ‘cold’ term. Although the 5 students gave varied responses, all their responses pointed to the fact that Cold War did not involve direct confrontation between the main antagonist (USA and Soviet) and that the war was mainly a diplomatic battle. Students who were assertive gave examples of various conferences whereby foreign ministers or leaders from USA and Soviet or their partner nations could engage in war of words. However, the 5 subject gave similar answer during all the three round of questioning. They used almost similar words to explain the concept of ‘cold water’ of the ocean, which was used to describe the war.

During the second round, only 2 students restated their previous explanation. Other 2 gave an explanation that was inclined to the explanation of the 5 subject participants. The other students gave a combination of their previous explanation and the explanation given by the subject. During the third round of questioning, all the 5 students had changed their explanation to conform to that of the 5 subject participants. Therefore, at the end of the experiment, all the 10 participants gave a similar explanation that the ‘cold’ term was used to denote a war that was fought in deep sea where the *cold water* of the ocean made it difficult for soldiers to use their weapons and carry out combatant operation against their enemies, hence ‘Cold War.’

**Discussion of the Outcome**

According social psychologist, individual actions stems from the desire to impress the group or avoid offending others or avoid being perceived as an outcast from the group or social norms (Krizan & Baron, 2007). For instance, each of the 5 students conformed to the group explanation to avoid being perceived outcast from the other 10 participants. However, Myers (2013) claimed that conformity is sometimes as a result of the impact others have on an individual’s internal concepts or processes such as change of beliefs or attitudes. In addition, the conformity behavior could be as a result of change in perception due to conscious influence from the social or peer group. For instance, although the 5 students had prior knowledge about Cold War, they changed their perception of the Cold War being diplomatic due to the acrimonious explanation from the group, which seemed rational and more concrete.

Conformity could be as a result of internal or external processes. However, whether the conformity originates from external or internal processes, the behavior of the individual (s) considered to have conformed is always explicit as argued by Nail et al. (2000). The question of whether or not a certain conformity behavior is an internal or external concept depends on the psychodynamic respond of the individual, the purpose it serves or the intention of the group or individuals, whether the intention is conscious or unconscious. For instance, among the 5 students, the decision to change their explanation could have been out of external compliance to the group and not because of internal change of perception or acceptance of the argument being given by the others. Brechwald & Prinstein (2011) reasoned that among other fundamental reasons why individual conform is the fact that the group, society or other individuals might have greater experience or knowledge than ourselves thus, we look up to them to model our behavior. It is also helpful to consider the group actions to inform or to give us clues on how we ought to behavior under various circumstances. Since the 5 subject participants seemed more knowledgeable in the area of international affairs, this could explain why the 5 students conformed to their explanation.

Informational and normative influence is a rationale for conformity among individuals. The student might have conformed due to desire to be correct and since they were known to be students of diplomacy and international affairs. As a result, the burden of being correct or conform to social pressure to avoid being labeled was incidence on them. Informational influence is the tendency of individuals to change behavior to ensure they are correct (Forsyth, 2013). This happens in situations when we have limited knowledge about a subject or we are unsure about what is correct or wrong. Consequently, we agree with the response of someone when we consider them to be more informed that ourselves (Siedlecki et al., 2016). For instance, a child in class might agree with the answer of a classmate whom they consider to be highly gifted. Individuals use the lead or behavior of those we perceive to be knowledgeable to guide or model our behavior. The decisions and judgment that are made by individuals are inclined to those made by people the individuals consider are in authority such as parents or other people or entities they consider to have more knowledge and information than self.

On the other hand, Forsyth (Forsyth, 2013) claimed that the desire to identify or be in agreement with social norm or group decisions causes people to conform. This explains the concept of normative influence as a cause of conformity behavior or thinking. Normative influence entails giving into peer pressure or social norms due to the need to evade punishment or desire to be rewarded. For instance, the 5 students gave into the peer pressure and decision/explanation of the group due to the desire to evade castigation for giving wrong explanation yet they were expected to have knowledge of the Cold War since they were students of diplomacy and international affairs. Castigation is a form of punishment since it is a reprimand for doing wrong when one is expected to do right. Therefore, the desire to evade punishment or receive a reward forces individuals to conform to the social influence or group decisions.

**Conclusion**

Conformity is simultaneous a good and a bad within the society. When conformity results to desired behavior and practices such as accepting to start aerobic exercise program with colleague, then the society consider conformity as a good but on the other hand, when conformity results to undesired behavior such as give into peer influence to start heavy beer-drunkard, the society would consider conformity as a bad. Individuals such as the 5 students conform for various reasons. Among them is the objective to impress a group or the level of influence or impact other individuals such as parents or those in positions of authority have on the person conforming. In addition, individuals conform due to internal convention/persuasion or the external pretence of change of behavior to avoid looking an outcast. The desire to be correct or avoid punishment could made one change their behavior and beliefs to conform to social or group actions and norms.

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