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| **LT 1: Conformity: Types and Explanations** | | | |
| **Types of Conformity** | | **Explanations for Conformity** | |
| Herbert Kelman (1958) suggested that there are three ways in which people conform to the opinion of a majority:   * **Internalistaion:** a person genuinely accepts the group norms. This results in a private as well as public change of opinion/behaviour. This change is permanent. The attitudes have become internalised (become part of the way the person thinks). Occurs even in the absence of other group members. * **Identification:** we may conform to the opinions/behaviours of a group because we value something about that group. We identify with the group, so we want to be part of it. This may mean we publicly and privately change our opinions/behaviours, but only while the group is present. * **Compliance:** this is simply ‘going along with others’ in public, but privately not changing personal opinions/behaviours. Compliance results in only a superficial change. It also means that as soon as the group pressure stops, the behaviour or opinion stops. | | Morton Deutsch and Harold Gerard (1955) developed a **two-process theory**, arguing that there are two main reasons people conform. They are based on two central human needs: the need to be *right* (ISI) and the need to be *liked* (NSI)   * **Informational Social Influence (ISI):** this is about who has better information – you or the rest of the group. Often we are uncertain as to what behaviours or beliefs are right or wrong. E.g. you might not know the answer to a question in class, but if most of the class agrees on one answer, you accept that answer because you feel they are likely to be right. We will therefore follow behaviours of a group because people want to be right. ISI is a cognitive process because it is to do with what you *think*. * **Normative Social Influence (NSI):** this is about norms, i.e. what is normal or typical behaviour for a social group. Norms regulate the behaviour of groups and individuals so it is not surprising that we pay attention to them. People do not like to appear foolish and prefer to gain social approval rather than be rejected. So NSI is an emotional rather than a cognitive process. NSI is most likely to occur in situations with strangers where you may feel concerned about rejection. It may also occur with people you know because we are most concerned about the social approval of our friends. It may be more pronounced in stressful situations where people have a greater need for social support. | |
| **Evaluation of the Types and Explanations** | | | |
| **Empirical Evidence**  P: One strength of the explanations for conformity of ISI is that there is supportive research.  E: For example, Lucas et al. (2006) asked students to give answers to mathematical problems that were easy or more difficult. There was greater conformity to incorrect answers when they were difficult, rather than when they were easier ones. This was truer still for students who rated their mathematical ability as poor.  E: This study shows that people conform in situations where they feel they don’t know the answer to a question, and feel that someone else knows more than them and has more information than them. We look to them because we assume they know better than us and therefore must be right.  L: As a result, this strengthens the credibility of ISI as an explanation for why people conform. | **Individual Differences**  P: One weakness of NSI is that it ignores individual differences, as NSI does not affect everyone’s behaviour in the same way.  E: For example, McGhee and Teevan (1967) found that students high in need of affiliation were more likely to conform. They concluded that the desire to be liked underlies conformity for some people more than others.  E: This is a weakness because NSI generalises conformity and explains that everyone will conform because of the need to be liked. But NSI fails to recognise that there are some people who are less concerned about being liked, and others who care more about being liked (known as affiliators).  L: Consequently, the credibility of NSI as an explanation for why people conform is reduced. | | **Research Support for NSI**  P: One strength of NSI as an explanation for conformity is that there is empirical research to support it.  E: For example, Asch (1951) found that many of his participants went along with a clearly wrong answer just because other people did. When asked why they did this, the participants said they felt self-conscious about giving the correct answer and they were afraid of disapproval. When Asch repeated the study but asked participants to write down their answers, instead of saying them out loud, conformity rates fell to 12.5%  E: This is a strength because it shows people were more prepared to give the wrong answer just to be liked, rather than to give the correct answer just to be right, as suggested by NSI.  L: Therefore, the credibility of NSI as an explanation for conformity is increased. |