
Conformity And Conditioning As Types Of Social Influence

Conformity and conditioning is a type of social influence. It is a change in belief or behaviour in order to fit into a group. Conformity can be defined as “yielding to group pressure”. An example of group pressures include persuasion and bullying. Normative conformity occurs when people conform in order to be liked or accepted by the group. On the contrary, informational conformity occurs when people conform to peer views in an attempt to reach the correct answer for themselves. It is the desire to be correct. This concept is linked with the term ‘Mob mentality’ which describes how people can be influenced by others around them in order to adopt certain behaviours on a largely emotional basis.

A cult is a group or movement with a shared commitment to a usually extreme ideology that’s typically embodied in a leader. Destructive cults control people’s behaviour, thinking and emotions and create a new false identity. Cults claim to provide answers to life’s biggest questions through its doctrine. Both formal and informal systems of influence and control is used to keep members obedient with no disagreement. The word ‘cultus’ originally described people who cultivated the worship of certain gods by performing rituals and maintaining temples, however, now a days it is recognised to mean excessive devotion.

The Unification Church, founded in 1954, originally known as ‘The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity’, is a worldwide religious movement. The movement is best known for its mass weddings and staunch anti-communist beliefs. The term ‘Moonies’ refers to the members of this movement. The nickname “was derived from the movement’s founder, Sun Myung Moon. The beliefs of the Unification Church are based on Moon’s ‘Divine Principle’, the basic scriptures of the church. At the age of 16 moon wrote that he had a vision of Jesus Christ in which he was told to carry out Christ’s unfinished task. Stated in the Divine principles were Gods purpose in creating human beings, the fall of men and redemption. Moon believed that God chose him to save mankind from Satanism. Moons cult believe that one of the main purposes of the Unification Church is to unite all of the fragments of Christianity into a single body and eventually become the majority. After he began preaching his new religious message in the mid-1940s, he was arrested by the Communist North Korean government on charges of spying for South Korea. He was given a five-year prison sentence in a labour camp. He began to preach his doctrine in Korea in 1946. 2 years later he was executed by the Korean Presbyterian Church, followed by imprisonment by the North Korean authorities. They felt that his views were incompatible with traditional Christianity. After his sentence he fled to South Korea in 1950, where he established the Unification Church. Moon called on members of the church to follow his example and participate in God’s plan for re-establishment. Followers believe that they can help establish God’s kingdom on Earth by accepting the blessing of their marriage in one of the mass wedding ceremonies, which is what the movement is most well known for.

Conformity and condition can be associated with this movement as it has a large social influence on the public. Since the movements founding in 1954, it has attracted hundreds of thousands of members in more than 100 countries, mostly in Korea, Japan, and other East Asian nations. The movement has brainwashed many young people who wish to seek guidance from a superior being or authoritative person. The concept of brainwashing is used to distort the

minds of members until they find it difficult to distinguish what is reality and what is not. People who were recruited into the Moonies cult believed that they were the chosen ones and that they would eventually take over the world. This “us vs. them” mentality ultimately leads to cult members isolating themselves socially from friends and family. They replace those relationships with new ones inside the cult. Recruiters of cults strategically lure people into joining cults mainly through manipulation which leads to the person giving up everything they have and dedicate themselves to the cult, in this case the Moonies. Cults initially attract many people because they promote illusion of comfort. They like to prey on people who are vulnerable, for example, one who loses their job or a loved one, persuading them into believing they can speak to their needs of self-worth and hope for the future. The Moonies was described as being “a new intoxication of knowing that there is no ultimate truth”.

Conformity and conditioning can facilitate certain social issues. In some cases of conformity, a person's desire to fit in with a social group can interfere with the ability to make moral or safe decisions. Just like Moon's Cult several people gave up everything including their families, jobs and money as consequence of joining.