

GENDER DIFFERENCE AND PEER PRESSURE IN CONFORMITY OF A SAMPLE OF ADOLESCENTS IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of gender and peer pressure on conformity among randomly 60 (30 males & 30 females) students in senior secondary school. A 2 by 2 factorial experimental design. Their ages range between 12 to 17 years. Data collected were analyzed using two-way Analysis of Variance. Results revealed that gender had no significant main effect on conformity among participants, $F(1, 36) = 3.675, p > .05$. Similarly, peer pressure had no significant main effect on conformity of participants, $F(1, 36) = 0.800, p > .05$. Both gender and peer pressure had no significant joint effect on conformity of participants, $F(1, 36) = 1.323, p > .0$. It is concluded that gender and peer pressure are not significant determinants of conformity among students in this study.

Keywords: Gender, peer pressure, conformity, compliance, obedience and adolescent

INTRODUCTION

Gender and peer pressure are possible determinants of conformity among adolescents; however, the interaction between them is not clear. Conformity is an individual's tendency to keep his/her opinions or behaviors in accordance with the majority (Asch, 1956). Conformity plays an important role in helping individuals adapt to social lives (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Researchers feel that strong conformity is an important, adaptable strategy among individuals' developing process (Morgan et al., 2015). Perhaps natural selection makes us respect others' ideas and consider them to aid our survival rate. Those keeping accordance with others are more likely to obtain acceptance and protection from the group; therefore, they are more likely to survive. In particular, with the increasing importance of group social connections, a strong conformity pattern has a more realistic meaning (Zhang, Deng, Yu, Zhao, & Liu, 2016). Sometimes, conformity is naïve and individual's choices are unconsciously influenced (for example choosing one clothing style over another (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). Other times, pre-established convictions influence behavior; however, individuals still copy the performance of the unanimous majority (Henrich & Henrich, 2007). Generally,

obedience, compliance and conformity are the three interrelated sources of social influence.

Obedience is based on the belief that authorities have the right to make requests. It also refers to the act of conforming to direct orders from a person of high status and authority. For example, students obey the teachers, automobile drivers obey the policemen, and soldiers obey the generals. A certain degree of obedience is a necessary ingredient of social life. In any society, some individuals need to have authority over others, at least within a limited sphere. Compliance on the other hand refers to overt behavioral conformity while maintaining one's own attitude. It results from asking people to do something. Compliance is public, that is, it does not involve private opinion change. However, it involves congruence between a new opinion and the individual's overall value system. This type of social influence is called internalization. The distinction between compliance and internalization is important, as it enables us to predict how an individual will act when influencing pressures have been removed.

There are two important reasons why people conform. The first is normative influence - the desire to be liked, to gain approval or avoid disapproval of other people. We often want others to accept us, like us and treat us well. The second reason is informative influence (the desire to be right). This means that the behavior of other people often provide useful information. Previous study has found a high degree of conformity in subjects who had received no support from the group in previous meetings but who expect future benefit from it (Hancock & Sorrentino, 1980). This means that lack of prior support reduced the individual's self-confidence and the expectation of future benefit made acceptance as group members an important issue.

Adolescents learn what is acceptable in their social group by "reading" their friends' reactions to how they act, what they wear, and what they say. The peer group gives this potent feedback by their words and actions, which either encourages or discourages certain behaviors and attitudes. Anxiety can arise when adolescents try to predict how peers will react, and this anxiety plays a large role in peer influence. In fact, Burns and Darling (2002) stated that self-conscious, worrying about how others will react to future actions is the most common way adolescents are influenced by their peers. When adolescent takes an unpopular stand and goes against the expectations or norms of the peer group, he or she is at risk for being ridiculed. Ridicule is not an easy thing to accept at any age, let alone when an individual is twelve or thirteen years old. The attempts to adjust in such situations bring about the development of peer pressure.

Peer pressure is defined as when people of your own age encourage or urge you to do something or to keep you from doing something else, no matter if you personally want to do it or not (Ryan, 2000). The more subtle form of peer pressure is known as peer influence, and it involves changing one's behavior to meet the perceived expectations of others (Burns & Darling, 2002). In general, most adolescents conform to peer pressure about fairly insignificant things like music, clothing, or hairstyles. When it comes to more important issues like moral values, parents remain more influential than the peer group (Black, 2002). According to Ryan (2000) an important component of interpersonal attraction and selection of friends is similarity. While, Brown, Mounts, Lamborn, and Steinberg (1993) suggested that adolescent peer group members select each other based on similar characteristics just as adults do. According to Black (2002), peer groups provide a forum where adolescents construct and reconstruct their identities. Overall, peer groups provide a strong sense of security that allows an adolescent to build

a sense of identity. For better or for worse, adolescents spend much of their structured and unstructured time with peers.

Peer relationship becomes richer and more complicated during adolescence as they face issues of acceptance, fitting in, exclusion and social comparison in their peer group. The nature of friendship changes during adolescence to incorporate psychological closeness as well as shared activities thus becomes more intense. Friendships transform into large peer groups or social clubs with their own norms for dress, vocabulary or hairstyle. These norms distinguish those who are included from those excluded from the group and create strong pressures on group members to conform. At the same time, such group can help adolescent build self-esteem and social skills. Peer influence happens differently among males and females. Research has shown that males are more likely to associate with larger peer groups, while females are more likely to form close friendships. Furthermore, males tend to be seen in public more often with their peers and females tend to spend more time with peers in the home. In either case, males and females both exert influence on their peers, just in slightly different ways.

According to Castrogiovanni (2002), peer group is defined as a small group of individuals similar in age, fairly close friends, sharing the same activities. Researchers have established that human beings have a pervasive need to form long-lasting and mutually supportive relationships with one another. According to Elegbeleye (2008), making and keeping friends is a social attribute that determines whether one can initiate a social action in terms of crafting a social relationship in which the other party would willingly agree to strike a social relationship. Social contract in psychology is predicated on the anticipated satisfaction of a perceived social need. The need profile in this case may however be less obvious and indeed difficult to define at the outset by the social participants themselves. Whether a social relationship lasts or is short lived nevertheless depends on the successful satisfaction or otherwise of this initially amorphous need profile. More importantly, peer groups provide a sense of security and they help adolescents to build a sense of identity. Adolescents ask questions relating to social identity and feeling part of a group, allows adolescents to feel like they are on the way to answering some of these questions.

Researchers have argued that family exerts the most powerful influence on the development of a child's conception of gender, their gender identity and how they express gender (Davidson et al., 2015). Gender simply means the sexual characteristics difference between male and female individuals. It is physical and biological differences that distinguish individuals according to their functions in the reproductive process. This natural difference between male and female individuals has been found to have significant effect on their social behaviors. Again, a number of earlier studies (Gerard, Wilhelmy, & Conolley, 1968; Julian, Regula, & Hollander, 1968) found that women are more likely to conform than men. These results were often explained by reference to sex roles, men are expected to be independent while women are expected to be reasonable and sensitive to others. Sistrunk and McDavid (1971) found that women conformed more than men when the task was one in which men should have been expert. However, when task involved female related items, men conformed more than women. Also, Eagly, Wood, and Fishbaugh (1981) found that women conformed more than men when their behaviors were being observed.

This study focused on adolescents because these adolescents are in a critical stage of rapid development and are highly self-aware. Research has indicated that adolescents show adaptable strong conformity to learning social skills effectively (Chen

et al., 2013. Adolescence is a time of transformation in many areas of an individual's life. It is also a time for individuals to make important decisions about their commitment to social interactions. The choices that adolescents make regarding their motivation, engagement, and achievement in life, and the satisfaction they obtain from their choices depend, in part, on the context in which they make such choices (Ryan, 2000). Adolescence is a time when old friendships end and new ones begin. Castrogiovanni (2002) stated that at no other stage of development is one's sense of identity so unstable. Previous studies revealed that peer groups do have an influence on adolescents. Considering the unique impact of gender difference and given that adolescents spend twice as much time with peers as with parents or other adults, it is important to study the effect of gender difference and peer pressures in conformity among adolescents.

Theoretical Frame Work

The "belongingness hypothesis" proposed by Baumeister and Leary (1995) states that human beings have a fundamental need to feel connected with others. For adolescents, this need stimulates friendship and peer group formation. Social identity theory also suggests that peer group membership plays a critical role in self-appraisal, such that the individual is motivated to create and maintain the norms of the group in order to achieve a positive identity (Tarrant, 2002). It has been posited that this process of socialization leads to a high level conformity among adolescents (Ellis, Wendy, & Zarbatany, 2007).

Hypotheses

These three hypotheses were tested in the study:

1. Male adolescents of senior secondary school will conform more than their female counterparts.
2. Adolescents of senior secondary school who are subjected to peer pressure will conform more than those not subjected to peer pressure.
3. Gender and peer pressure will have interaction effect on conformity among adolescents of senior secondary school.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a 2 by 2 between-subjects factorial experimental design. Gender has two levels: (male versus female) and peer pressure has two levels: (peer pressure present versus peer pressure absent). There were two groups; experimental group and control group. The effects of the manipulations of gender and peer pressure (the independent variables) were observed on the conformity (the dependent variable) among adolescents.

Participants

The population of this study comprised all the senior secondary students of Obafemi Awolowo University International School, Ile-Ife. Based on the school register, the total population of senior section of the school was 242 students. A sample of 60 participants was randomly selected, through a systematic random sampling technique by

using the students' class register of the purposely selected classes and chosen every 4th student on the register. 10 of the 60 participants were made to act as confederates, another 10 participants constituted peer pressure group, and the remaining 40 participants served as real participants (the 40 real participants comprised 20 males and 20 females). The researcher generated random numbers to assign participants into different groups. The participants ages ranged from 12 years to 17 years with a mean age of $M = 13.8$ years and standard deviation of $SD = 1.8$. We chose this age range because these adolescents are in a critical stage of rapid development and are highly self-aware.

Research Instruments

The research instruments used in this study included; 1 ruler (12 centimeter long), 1 red marker and 10 pairs of plane white cardboard papers. In each pair of cardboard paper, one sheet of the cardboard paper contains a single line while the other sheet of cardboard paper of the same pair contains 3 lines of different lengths labeled A, B and C. A ruler of 12cm long was used to measure the length of lines to be drawn on both sheets (1 and 2) of each pair of the cardboard papers. A red marker was used to draw lines of different lengths on each pair of the cardboard papers. 20 plain white cardboard papers were used, on each of the cardboard papers; red marker was used to draw lines of different lengths. The choice of red marker and plain white cardboard papers was for clarity purpose.

Procedure

Out of the 60 participants randomly selected for this study, 10 participants were made to act as confederates and these confederates comprised 5 males and 5 females. The nature of the experiment allows the confederates to have details knowledge of the content and procedures of the experiment. Based on this, the experimenter instructed the confederates on how to respond to each of the questions to be asked and also instructed them to give wrong responses to some questions during the course of the experiment. Again, another 10 participants were selected to form peer pressure group. The remaining 40 participants were randomly assigned into the experimental group and control group respectively. Each of the two groups had 20 participants balanced for gender, that is, there were 10 males and 10 females in each group.

The experiment started by inviting the 10 confederates into a classroom and they were asked to sit in one side of the class. Then, 10 participants that formed the peer pressure were also invited into the classroom and asked to occupy the other side of the class. The experimenter assigned numbers from 1 to 10 to the confederates. Among the 40 real participants that were in another classroom, only one of them was invited into the classroom at a time and was asked to sit behind the confederates and number 11 was assigned to him/her. The experimenter then adopted a deceptive approach, in order to protect the psychological integrity of the experiment by telling all the participants that the experiment was about visual perception and learning, he further instructed them that each of the participants should respond to each question one by one according to the number assigned to them, that is from number 1 to 11 respectively.

This approach implies that, the only one real participant among them in the classroom on each occasion would respond last. On each occasion, the experimenter brought out a pair of cardboard papers. The first sheet of cardboard paper contained only one single line of a specific length, and on the second sheet of cardboard paper of the same pair, there were 3 lines of different lengths labeled A, B and C, out of which only

one of the three lines is of equal length to the single line on the first sheet of cardboard paper of the same pair. Then, the experimenter asked each of the participants to mention loudly the letter of the line on the second sheet that he/she believed to match the separate line on the first sheet. The participants began to respond to each question started from the participant number 1 to the participant number 11 who happened to be the only real participant. Meanwhile, the experimenter was simultaneously observing and recording the response of the real participant whether he/she would conform to the group opinion, that is, the opinion of the other participants (confederates) or stick to his/her own opinion as regard the correct response to each question.

On each occasion, 10 questions were asked and the experimenter had earlier instructed the confederates to give right responses to questions number 2, 3, 6, 8, 10 and to give wrong responses to questions 1, 4, 5, 7 and 9 respectively. Also, throughout the period of the experiment the responses of all the confederates were expected to be similar in order to have strong peer pressure effect on the real participants. This procedure was repeated for all the 40 real participants and their responses were properly recorded. However, after the first 20 Participants have completed the experiment, the peer pressure group was asked to leave the classroom. This implies that only half (20) of the real participants experienced the peer pressure (that is, peer pressure present) while the remaining half (20) of the real participants did not experience the peer pressure (that is, peer pressure absent). At the end of the experiment, the experimenter debriefed all the participants of the original intention of the experiment. Surprisingly, all the participants expressed joy and happiness for participating in the experiment.

Ethical considerations

The Management of Obafemi Awolowo University International School granted approval to conduct the experiment within the school premises. Again, all participants and their parents provided written informed consent to participate in the experiment and this experiment lasted exactly one and a half hour.

RESULTS

Hypothesis one stated that male adolescents of senior secondary school will significantly conform more than their female counterparts.

Hypothesis two stated that adolescents of senior secondary school subjected to peer pressure will significantly conform more than those not subjected to peer pressure.

Hypothesis three stated that there will be a significant joint effect of gender and peer pressure on conformity among adolescents of senior secondary school.

Table 1: Summary of the 2-way ANOVA of Gender and Peer Pressure on conformity

Source	Type III Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P
Gender	5.625	1	5.625	3.675	.063
Peer Pressure	1.225	1	1.225	.800	.377
Gender X Peer Pressure	2.025	1	2.025	1.323	.258
Error	55.100	36	1.531		
Corrected Total	63.975	39			

The results indicated that gender had no significant main effect on conformity among adolescents of senior secondary school ($F \{1, 36\} = 3.675, p < .05$). Therefore, hypothesis one was rejected. The results further indicated that peer pressure had no significant main effect on conformity among adolescents of senior secondary school ($F \{1, 36\} = 0.800, p < .05$). Therefore, hypothesis two was rejected. Lastly, the results indicated that gender and peer pressure had no significant interaction effect on conformity among adolescents of senior secondary school. ($F \{1, 36\} = 1.323, p < .05$). This finding suggests that gender and peer pressure do not affect adolescents behave when they are under group pressure. Therefore hypothesis three was rejected.

DISCUSSION

This study adapted a modified Asch paradigm to measure the effects of gender difference and peer pressure on conformity among a sample of senior secondary school adolescents aged between 13 and 17 years. Contrary to our prediction, we found that male adolescents did not conform more than their female counterparts. This finding was contrary to the existing studies (Gerard, Wilhelmy, & Conolley, 1968; Julian, Regula, & Hollander, 1968) reported that women are more likely to conform than men. These results were often explained by reference to sex roles, men are expected to be independent while women are expected to be reasonable and sensitive to others. Sistrunk and McDavid (1971) found that women conformed more than men when the task was one in which men should have been expert. However, when task involved female related items, men conformed more than women. Also, Eagly, Wood, and Fishbaugh (1981) found that women conformed more than men when their behaviors were being observed. However, the finding of Burns and Darling (2002) explained that self-conscious about how others will react to future actions is the most common way adolescents are influenced by their peers.

Again, we found that adolescents exposed to peer pressure did not conform more than those not exposed to peer pressure. This finding is not consistent with that of Black (2002), who reported that most adolescents conform to peer pressure about fairly insignificant things like music, clothing, or hairstyles. But when it comes to more important issues like moral values, parents remain more influential than the peer group. Therefore, this can be explained in terms of the tendency to conform based on informational influence which depends on two aspects of situations; how well-informed we believe the group is and how confident we are in our own independent judgments.

Finally, regardless of condition, we found that both gender and peer pressure did not have any interaction effect in conformity among adolescents of senior secondary school. Therefore, it is believed that a group of well-informed and intelligent adolescents with high self-confidence are not likely to conform to group pressure.

CONCLUSION

This study indicated that gender and peer pressure had no significant independent or interaction effect in conformity among adolescents of senior secondary school. Therefore, the study concluded that gender and peer pressure are not important determinants of conformity among educated adolescents.

Implication of findings

This study which revealed that, there was no independent or interaction effect of gender and peer pressure in conformity among adolescents of senior secondary school, implies that education and self-confidence are the likely determinants of conformity among adolescents.

Recommendations

It is therefore, recommended that all adolescents should be encouraged to have a minimum of good and qualitative secondary school education and also be allowed to participate in cognitive training aiming at promoting their self-confidence which may possibly help them to evaluate which is more effective, holding their own opinions or conforming to the majority.

Limitations

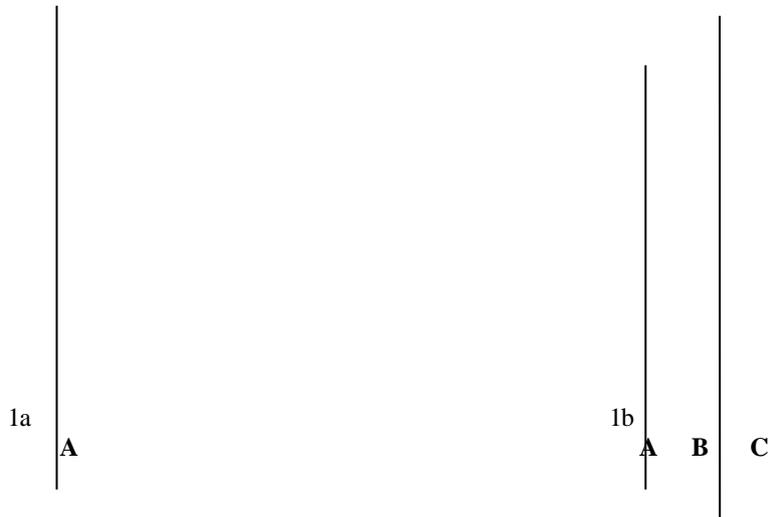
This study has some limitations. First, more evidence is necessary to determine the validity question of the experimental condition. Second, the sample size is grossly small, future researchers should include more variables such as; educational qualification, social support, and self-esteem to improve the credibility of the current findings. Finally, the physiological mechanism underlying this behavioral pattern has not yet been revealed. Further studies should explore the physiological component of this human behavior.

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APPENDIXES



The stimulus cards in Asch's social pressure experiment (Asch 1956). Participants were asked to pronounce the options of one of the three lines that match the separately drawn line.

Subject's response to the test on "Effect of Visual Perception on Learning Performances of Secondary School Adolescents"

Demographic Variables

Name: -----
Sex: -----
Religion: -----
Class: -----

Peer Pressure Absent (official remark): Yes/No -----

S/N	OPTION (A)	OPTION (B)	OPTION (C)	CONFEDERATES RESPONSE	CORRECT OPTION	OFFICIAL REMARK (Conformed or not conformed)
1	A			A	C	Conformed
2			C	B	C	Not conformed
3		B		C	B	Not conformed
4		B		B	A	Conformed
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						

If participants made a wrong response which is the same as confederates' choice, this implies strong conformity.