

Discuss Explanations of Conformity (12 Marks)

An explanation of conformity is the Dual Process Dependency Model, created by Deutsch and Gerrard (1955). It consists of Normative social influence and Informational social influence.

Normative social influence explains compliance. The individual conforms to gain approval or avoid disapproval of the majority. This is because the majority have the power to include or exclude the individual from the group. The individual may have their own private belief but publicly change their behaviour. This is the need to be liked and was shown by Asch.

Informational social influence explains internalisation. In certain situations a person conforms because they accept the belief of the majority as their own, because they doubt their own judgement. This is because the majority have the knowledge they need. This leads to a change in public and private behaviour, and is the need to be right.

In evaluation, a strength of the Dual Process Dependency Model is that there is evidence to support it. In Asch's study, he provides support for normative social influence. This is because, during the debrief, he asked his participants why they conformed and they said they conformed to avoid disapproval. This is compliance as they changed their public behaviour, but not their private belief, in order to gain approval and be liked. This adds validity to the Dual Process Dependency Model as normative social influence has been proved to be correct because the participants had a need to be liked.

There is further supporting evidence for the Dual Process Dependency Model. Lucas asked students to answer easy and difficult maths problems. He found that there was higher levels of conformity when answering more difficult maths questions than easy ones. This adds validity to the Dual Process Dependency Model as it shows informational social influence is accurate as the students conformed in order to gain knowledge from the group. It shows they had a need to be right, but doubted their own judgement.

On the other hand, this explanation does not account for individual differences in conformity. Not everyone will conform due to informational social influence, this is only good at explaining why people with low intelligence conform. Also, normative social influence is more likely to explain why people with low self esteem conform as they need to be accepted, not anyone else. This decreases validity of the Dual Process Dependency Model as it only applies to certain people and doesn't explain why everyone conforms.