

Conformity and Deviance

Conformity and deviance are two responses to real or imagined pressures from others. Conformity means going along one's peers—individuals of a person's own status. ... **Deviance is a** behaviour that violates the standards of conduct or expectations or social norms of a group or society.

Conformity, the process whereby people change their beliefs, attitudes, actions, or perceptions to more closely match those held by groups to which they belong or want to belong or by groups whose approval they desire. ... Conformity has important social implications and continues to be actively researched.

Conformity

We all like to fit in to some degree. Likewise, when we want to stand out, we want to choose how we stand out and for what reasons. For example, a woman who loves cutting-edge fashion and wants to dress in thought-provoking new styles likely wants to be noticed, but most likely she will want to be noticed within a framework of high fashion. She wouldn't want people to think she was too poor to find proper clothes. Conformity is the extent to which an individual complies with group norms or expectations. As you might recall, we use reference groups to assess and understand how to act, to dress, and to behave. Not surprisingly, young people are particularly aware of who conforms and who does not. A high school boy whose mother makes him wear ironed button-down shirts might protest that he will look stupid—that everyone else wears T-shirts. Another high school boy might like wearing those shirts as a way of standing out. How much do you enjoy being noticed? Do you consciously prefer to conform to group norms so as not to be singled out? Are there people in your class who immediately come to mind when you think about those who don't want to conform?

Psychologist Solomon Asch (1907–1996) conducted experiments that illustrated how great the pressure to conform is, specifically within a small group (1956). After reading about his work in the following feature, ask yourself what you would do in Asch's experiment. Would you speak up? What would help you speak up and what would discourage it?

Conformity is the act of matching attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to group norms, politics or being like-minded. Norms are implicit, specific rules, shared by a group of individuals, that guide their interactions with others. People often choose to conform to society rather than to pursue personal desires - because it is often easier to follow the path others have made already, rather than forging a new one. This tendency to conform occurs in small groups and/or in society as a whole, and may result from subtle unconscious influences (predisposed state of mind), or from direct and overt social pressure. Conformity can occur in the presence of others, or when an individual is alone. For example, people tend to follow social norms when eating or when watching television, even if alone.

People often conform from a desire for security within a group —typically a group of a similar age, culture, religion or educational status. This is often referred to as groupthink: a pattern of thought characterized by self-deception, forced manufacture of consent, and conformity to group values and ethics, which ignores realistic appraisal of other courses of action. Unwillingness to conform carries the risk of social rejection. Conformity is often associated with adolescence and youth culture, but strongly affects humans of all ages.

Although peer pressure may manifest negatively, conformity can be regarded as either good or bad. Driving on the conventionally-approved side of the road may be seen as beneficial conformity. With the appropriate environmental influence, conforming, in early childhood years, allows one to learn and thus, adopt the appropriate behaviours necessary to interact and develop "correctly" within one's society. Conformity influences the formation and maintenance of social norms, and helps societies function smoothly and predictably via the self-elimination of behaviors seen as contrary to unwritten rules. In this sense it can be perceived as a positive force that prevents acts that are perceptually disruptive or dangerous.

As conformity is a group phenomenon, factors such as group size, unanimity, cohesion, status, prior commitment and public opinion help determine the level of conformity an individual displays.