

Types of Conformity

Compliance - shallow level conformity - changing your behaviour but not your belief. Therefore, publicly going along with a group while privately keeping your own differing beliefs.

Internalisation – deeper level conformity - changing your behaviour and your belief. Therefore, fully accepting and believing the group's point of view, changing both your public behaviour and private belief.

Definition

Conformity can be defined as:

A type of social influence defined as a change in belief or behaviour in response to real or imagined social pressure. It is the act of changing your behaviours, beliefs, or attitudes to match the norms of a social group or the behaviours of others.

Conformity is an essential social mechanism in society, and without it we would not have social norms and acceptable behaviour. Examples of conformity in everyday society include driving on the left side of the road (or the right side depending on the country), greeting other people with a 'hello' when we see them, forming queues at bus stops, and eating with a knife and fork. We expect people to conform to these 'normal' behaviours and in turn we conform ourselves. However this does not mean that people cannot also behave independently, and independent behaviour that does not conform to established social norms is an essential mechanism for social change. Examples of failure to conform which has led to social change include the suffragette movement, civil rights activists in countries with oppressive regimes, and fashion trend-setters. People may change their behaviour for different reasons in conformity.

Compliance

Compliance is an outward behaviour in which a person goes along with the attitudes and viewpoints of the majority in order to be socially accepted. The person does not share the attitudes and viewpoints of others or the group; they are merely appearing to do so. An example might be expressing a political viewpoint when you are with a group that share that viewpoint even though you do not believe it yourself, or perhaps even saying you like a particular musician or band when you do not but your friends do. It is a shallow behaviour with the single aim of public acceptance.

Internalisation

Internalisation is both an outward and an inward behaviour in which a person adopts the viewpoints and attitudes of a group and makes them their own. Unlike compliance, in which conformity is purely for social acceptance, with internalisation the person conforms because they believe the group's viewpoint. An example might be becoming a vegetarian because the people around you believe it is wrong to harm animals. It is a deep behaviour that leads to attitude change.

