

Name _____ Class _____

Conformity

Charlotte Harrison

About this text	
Sometimes people change to fit in with a group. In this text, the author describes this process and explains how it affects society.	
Purpose for Reading	Vocabulary
To determine how an author develops a central idea about conformity to build our understanding about what makes people follow the crowd.	<p>Let's pronounce these words together as a class:</p> <p>Impel [im-pel] Individuality [in-duh-vij-oo-al-i-tee]</p>

PARTNER READING	DURING READING QUESTIONS
<p>[1] Conformity, or acting the way most other people in one's social group act, often grows out of a person's desire for security and belonging in a group — usually a group of similar age, culture, religion, or educational background. Being different from the group carries the risk of social rejection, a deep fear of many people. The drive to conform is often particularly powerful for adolescents, for whom acceptance by peers can be a primary goal, but it affects people of all ages. However, some studies suggest that conformity decreases with age.</p> <p>[2] Although the word often has a negative connotation, conformity is not necessarily a bad thing. People's tendency to conform helps society function smoothly in many ways. For example, when drivers follow the rules of the road, it enables safe transportation. If the members of a team conform to the norms of interpersonal interaction, they enable effective communication and collaboration.¹</p> <p>[3] Psychologist² Herbert Kelman identified and labeled three major types of conformity. The first, compliance, occurs when a person conforms publicly but privately keeps his or her own original beliefs. People comply because of a need for approval from others and a fear of rejection. The second, identification, is conforming to a particular person whom one respects, such as a friend or family member. Identification is usually motivated by the role model's perceived³ attractiveness or success. The third type of conformity, internalization, is when a person has actually absorbed a group's belief system and sees it as truly their own, both publicly and privately. This is the most profound⁴ type of conformity and is likely to stay with people for a long time.</p>	<p>Paragraph 1 Write: Define "conformity" in your own words.</p> <p>Paragraph 2 Turn & Talk: What are some other examples of how conformity helps society function smoothly?</p> <p>Paragraph 3 Write: Why is internalization "the most profound type of conformity"?</p>

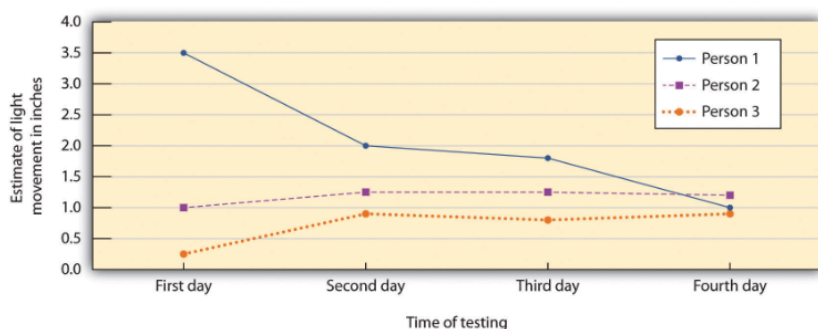
¹ **Collaboration** (noun): the act of working together
² **Psychologist** (noun): a scientist who studies the mind and human behavior
³ **Perceived** (adjective): believed, understood
⁴ **Profound** (adjective): intense or deep

[4] The strong force of conformity is well documented in psychological research. In 1936, a researcher named Muzafer Sherif hypothesized that people would change their opinions about something in order to conform to a larger group even if they were among strangers. To test this hypothesis, he designed an experiment which made use of the autokinetic effect.

[5] The *autokinetic effect* is caused by the fast, small movements of our eyes that happen as we look at a particular object. When a person is placed in a dark room that contains only a single small, stationary⁵ pinpoint of light, these eye movements produce an unusual effect: they make the point of light appear to move.

[6] In Sherif's experiment, he placed several people in a dark room one at a time and asked them to stare at a small dot of light 15 feet away. They were then asked to estimate the amount by which the dot of light moved (although it actually did not move at all). On that first day, each person saw different degrees of movement; sometimes their answers varied by as much as three inches. Sherif then had the subjects return each day for three more days to repeat the experiment. However, on the second, third, and fourth days, he would put three people in a room together to observe the dot and give their answers.

[7] Sherif observed that, over the course of the three trials in which the subjects sat together, their answers became more and more similar. On the final day, their answers settled around a common norm (see graphic below).⁶ Sherif concluded that this experiment demonstrated the way a norm develops in society, and how people tend to give up their **individuality** in order to conform to that norm. Few people desire to be an "outlier" whose opinion differs widely from what is typical in the group.



[8] Researchers have also explored the "dark side" of conformity. The need to be accepted and the fear of punishment for deviating from group norms can, in many cases, **impel** people to adopt negative attitudes or behaviors. A phenomenon called the "spiral of silence" can occur when one opinion becomes entirely socially dominant⁷ because those with other opinions are afraid to speak out. Human history is rife with examples of the destructive power of mass conformity.

Paragraphs 5-6

Turn & Talk: When Sherif asked his subjects how much the dot moved, what was the correct answer?

Paragraph 7

Write: How did the subjects in Sherif's experiment demonstrate conformity?

Graphic

Write: Based on the graphic, which person in this trial was most affected by social pressure? Explain.

Paragraph 8

Turn & Talk: What is one example of conformity making things worse in society? Explain your answer.

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⁵ **Stationary** (*adjective*): unmoving

⁶ Graphic and information from [The Many Varieties of Conformity](#) by Dr. Rajiv Jhangiani and Dr. Hammond Tarry is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

⁷ **Dominant** (*adjective*): most important, powerful, or influential

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Independent Practice

Directions: Answer the multiple choice questions for “Conformity.” 5 minutes



1. Which of the following *best* describes the central idea of the text? **[RI.2]**
 - A. Societies can maintain order without any forms of conformity.
 - B. People conform in order to fit in based on societal pressure.
 - C. People who conform lack individual independence.
 - D. Conforming is a conscious decision people make.
2. Which of the following *best* explains the relationship between compliance, identification, and internalization? **[RI.3]**
 - A. Compliance, identification, and internalization are three types of conformity that range from most intense to least intense.
 - B. Compliance, identification, and internalization are three types of conformity that range from longest-lasting to shortest-lasting.
 - C. Compliance and identification occur when people begin to believe others’ ideas, while internalization occurs when people pretend to change their personal beliefs.
 - D. Compliance occurs when people pretend to change their personal beliefs, while identification and internalization occur when people begin to believe others’ ideas.
3. What theory was Muzafer Sherif testing in his experiment? **[RI.3]**
 - A. People will try to persuade others to accept a different point of view.
 - B. People will change their opinions to agree with others, even strangers.
 - C. People will change their opinions when their close acquaintances disagree.
 - D. People will always stand by their opinions when strangers disagree with them.
4. Based on paragraph 7, what is the *best* meaning of “norm”? **[RI.4]**
 - A. a fact that has been confirmed by evidence
 - B. a point about which there is disagreement
 - C. a point on which a group of people agrees
 - D. an idea that needs to be tested
5. How does paragraph 7 support the central idea of the text? **[RI.5]**
 - A. The experimental results reveal that people will conform even when they disagree with strangers.
 - B. The experimental results provide a counterargument to the author’s ideas about conformity.
 - C. Sherif’s experiment is an example of how scientists conform to popular scientific ideas.
 - D. Sherif’s experiment illustrates how difficult it is to test theories about conformity.



Independent Practice

Directions: Answer the short response prompt for “Conformity.” *15 minutes*

PROMPT: Do you agree with the following statement from paragraph 2: “conformity is not necessarily a bad thing”? Use evidence from the text and experiences from your life to support, challenge, or refine this claim. **[RI.5]**

Make sure your paragraph is complete by:

- starting with an argument that clearly answers the prompt
- including two pieces of evidence that support your argument
- explaining how your evidence supports your argument

CHECKLIST FOR WRITING A COMPLETE PARAGRAPH:

- ☐ Did you begin with an argument that clearly answers the prompt?
 - A. YES!
 - B. No, I will go back and add that.
- ☐ Did you include at least **two** pieces of evidence that support your argument?
 - A. YES!
 - B. No, I will go back and add that.
- ☐ Did you explain how each piece of evidence supports your argument?
 - A. YES!
 - B. No, I will go back and add that.