

# Conformity vs. individuality assignment

Psychology



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Conformity discourages the type of individualism that most of us value in our supposedly free-thinking democratic world. Almost everyone possesses a basic understanding of it; however, many of us may fail to realize the application and the impact of conformity in our lives and in our society. In Fahrenheit 451, conformity is one of the major themes, and its impact is illustrated through conformity in belief, as well as appearance, and behavior.

This makes it rather easy for us to make obvious comparisons between Ray Bradbury's classic and our own society. One of the most obvious examples of conformity in our society today lies in belief. Because of the democracy in which we live, we are free to hold any opinions we wish and we pride ourselves on our right to freely express these beliefs through speech. However, we often find that although we have the right to think freely, we choose or tend to instead embrace the beliefs of the masses.

In Fahrenheit 451, Bradbury describes a futuristic society in which this conformity of belief is highly valued. In the novel, the fire captain Beatty, strongly believes that every person must think alike; for conflict and unhappiness only arise when preferences are stumbled upon. As Beatty says to Montag; " We stand against the small tide of those who want to make everyone unhappy with conflicting theory and thought. " (Page 62) One example of this is the strong pressure from our culture and some factions of government to be ' politically correct. Thus, there may be some truth to Beatty's claim that conflicting theory and belief creates unhappiness and discomfort within a society. As a somewhat mediocre remedy for the cruel intolerance of minorities, our society has created a system of belief in which we must exhibit ultimate acceptance of persecuted groups. The pressure to

be 'politically correct' can be so strong that any opinion that does not suggest an underlying prejudice but which is conveyed to the public in a 'politically incorrect' manner is considered socially unacceptable.

Those who communicate their non-mainstream beliefs may be viewed as immoral. Through the strong pressure to be 'politically correct' we see that conformity of belief remains in our society and can be compared to Bradbury's portrayal of the theme in *Fahrenheit 451*. Today, the relationship between appearance and social acceptance can be easily recognized in our own lives. In order to achieve societal norms we may want to appear similar to our peers, and as a result, conformity in appearance has become a common example of conformity in our society today.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, Montag realizes that a major part of being socially accepted as a fireman is to conform through appearance. Montag observes this fact, but does not comment aloud: "Montag stared up, his mouth opened. These men were all mirror images of himself! Were all firemen picked then for their looks as well as their proclivities?" While there are countless examples of uniformity through appearance in our society, one of the most obvious is directly associated with the last sentence of Montag's observation.

The belief that physical beauty is more valuable than intelligence or skill is a common American notion, and as a result we may often conform to accepted standards of appearance rather than focusing on the value of our intellect and skill. In this way we are able to see the use of conformity in appearance as proof of this commonality. He argues that conformity in behavior prevents

violence and Jealousy by restricting the more intelligent individuals in his society from their ability to excel.

However, the real problem in the situation Beauty describes is not the exceptionally bright child but the mass of those who conform. Unfortunately, this very situation occurs repeatedly in our society today. People who choose not to conform may be persecuted by the masses, and through that act of persecution the masses reinforce conformity of behavior. In this way we see that Bradbury portrayal of conformity in behavior is similar to the way we conform in our society, illustrating yet another fundamental really between Fahrenheit 451 and our culture today. If they give you ruled paper, write the other way,” a man named Juan Ramona Jimenez once said. This quote is placed at the beginning of Fahrenheit 451 , obviously selected to create awareness of Bradbury principal theme. By choosing this quote, Bradbury reaffirms that the purpose of the novel was to encourage independent thought and create a basic awareness of the conformity found in our culture. This conformity is illustrated through appearance, behavior and thought both in the novel and in our society today.