

# How does society affect people's beliefs and behaviours?

Have you ever found yourself doing something or saying something just so you can be like everyone else? 30 years later I can still remember being SO angry with my parents that I wasn't allowed to have a shellsuit, that I couldn't go to the primary school dance wearing bright orange eyeshadow and that they wouldn't let me have some neon pink and yellow cycling shorts.

But why did I even want these awful items? Easy! Because my friends were all wearing them. People allow themselves to be influenced by society all the time, sometimes without even realising it. One reason is that we often do what everyone else is doing so that we can feel part of a group. A feeling of belonging gives us, as humans, a sense of identity and security. Naturally, we seek out other people we feel have a similar identity to us to form relationships with so that we can feel accepted as part of a group. This is a normal, healthy part of human psychology

Psychologists have spent decades studying the power of social influence within society, and the way in which it manipulates people's opinions and behaviour. Social influence can mean that people change their ideas and actions to meet the demands of a social group, perceived authority, social role, or a minority within a group who has influence over the majority.

This is where being influenced by society can have negative effects, with people going along with others rather than thinking for themselves, or even pretending to be something they are not in order to fit in. Ultimately excluding anyone from your social group or anyone who doesn't look like or think like you means you could be missing out.

It's important to experience and be open to things that may fall outside of your social norm – what you are used to. This helps you to develop your critical thinking and avoid stereotyping. It ensures you are making intelligent, informed decisions rather than following the crowd.

**Mrs N Taylor**

## TASK

- Can you think of a time when you have done something you didn't really want to in order to fit in with the crowd?
- Have you ever stood up for someone or something when others didn't?