

Conformity

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AGENDA

- What is conformity, and why does it occur? (social influence)
- Why do we obey others?
- How can people use their knowledge of social influence to influence others?
- What happens when we do not conform?

What resonates more with you?

Conformity is
the jailer of freedom and
the enemy of growth.

John F. Kennedy



THE MIND UNLEASHED
UNCOVER YOUR TRUE POTENTIAL



**WE ARE HALF
RUINED BY
CONFORMITY,
BUT WE SHOULD
BE WHOLLY
RUINED
WITHOUT IT**

CHARLES DUDLEY WARNER

PICTUREQUOTES.com

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Question

Is conformity a good or a bad thing?

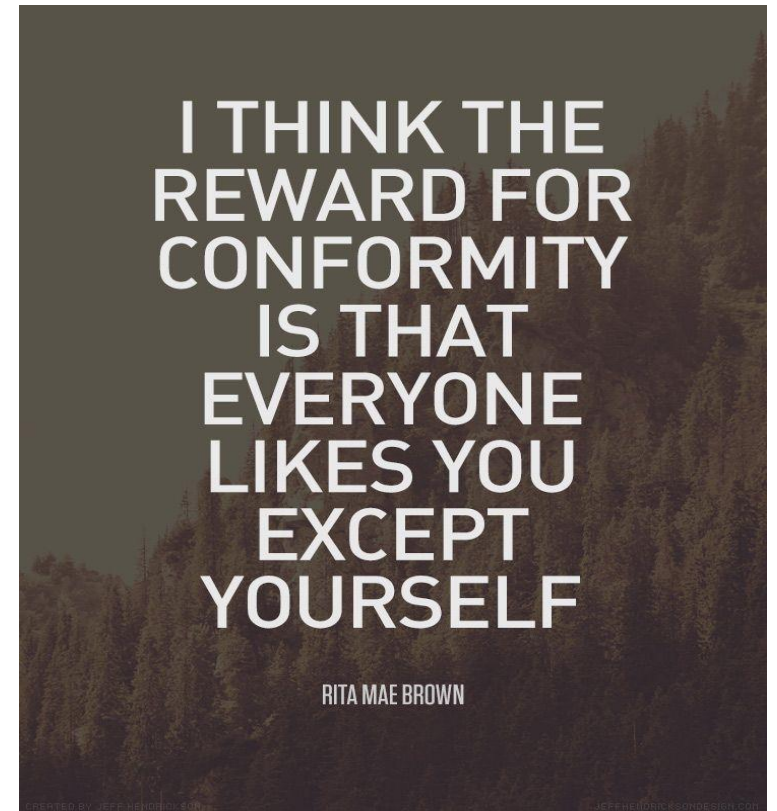
Conformity has its own pros and cons

- Conformity promotes social cohesion, sense of belonging, creates predictability and stability, social approval and efficiency in a society
- On the other hand, conformity creates loss of individuality, suppression of ideas and identities, peer pressure

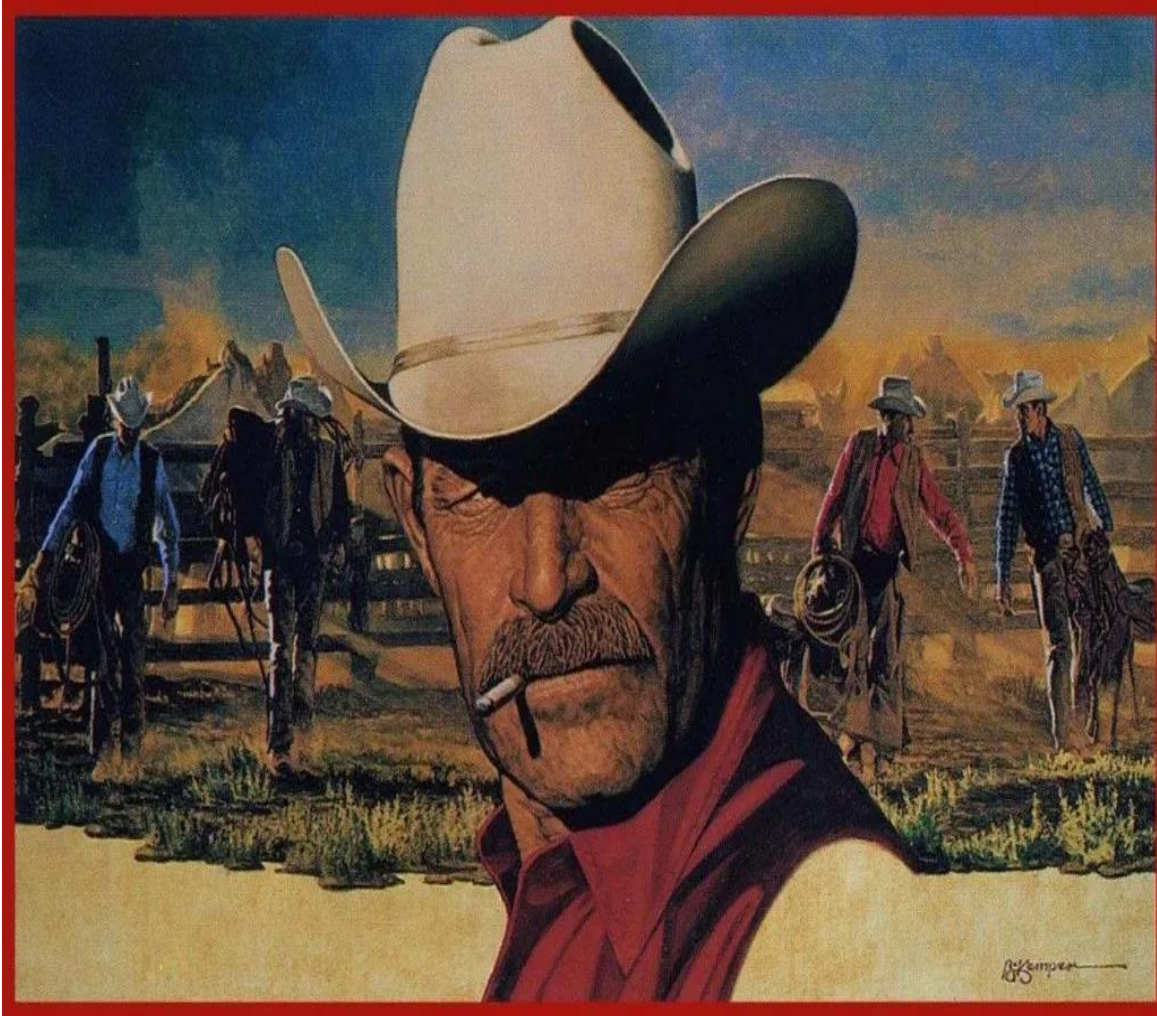
Conformity

Conformity is a change in one's behaviour due to real or imagined influence of other people

Fundamentally, it challenges your need to be “yourself” (**autonomy**)



We have spoken about subtle social influences...



Think different.

Social Influence can be explicit...



Why do we conform?*

- **Informational Influence:** In situations where we are unsure of the correct response, we often look to others who are better informed and more knowledgeable and use their lead as a guide for our own behaviors.
- **Normative influence** stems from a desire to avoid punishments and gain rewards

*short answer: psychological (and sometimes physical) safety

Informational Conformity

An important feature of informational conformity is that it leads to:

Private acceptance: conforming to other people's behaviour out of a genuine belief that what they are saying or doing is right

Public compliance: conforming to other people's behaviour publicly without necessarily believing in what the other people are doing or saying

Informational Conformity

Evidence of public compliance: [Nolan et al \(2008\)](#)

The study concluded that the **fourth message led people to conserve more energy.**

In fact, governments have used these findings and such information shows up in electricity bills to make people adopt energy conserving behaviors

bility. We also included an item that asked participants about the importance of social norms in their decisions to conserve energy. The questions read, “In deciding to conserve energy, how important is it to you . . . ” (a) that using less energy saves money, (b) that it protects the environment, (c) that it benefits society, and (d) that a lot of other people are trying to conserve energy. Responses were made on a 4-point scale (*not at all important* = 1, *somewhat important* = 2, *very important* = 3, *extremely important* = 4).

Informational Conformity

When do we rely on informational conformity?

Ambiguous situations : we are most open to informational conformity when we are uncertain about the situation

Crisis Situation: we do not have the time to think through a situation. Typically, ambiguity and crisis are good friends 😊

Expert power: When you feel like you can rely on the knowledge of the other person (trust is established)

Informational Conformity

- When it comes to informational conformity- we are **conforming to be right**.
- If we think more deeply, informational conformity is an end result of social comparison itself- we compare our opinions or readily adopt opinions of others to gain an accurate appraisal of the validity of an opinion or behaviour
- In simpler words- if everyone believes in a certain thought, it must be right!
- The end result of this process is private acceptance however it can also lead to public compliance

Normative Compliance

- In other cases, we conform not to gain valid knowledge but rather to meet the goal of belonging and being accepted by others
- Normative compliance occurs when we express opinions or behave in ways that help us to be accepted (positive reinforcement) or avoid the pain of rejection or isolation (negative reinforcement).

Normative Compliance

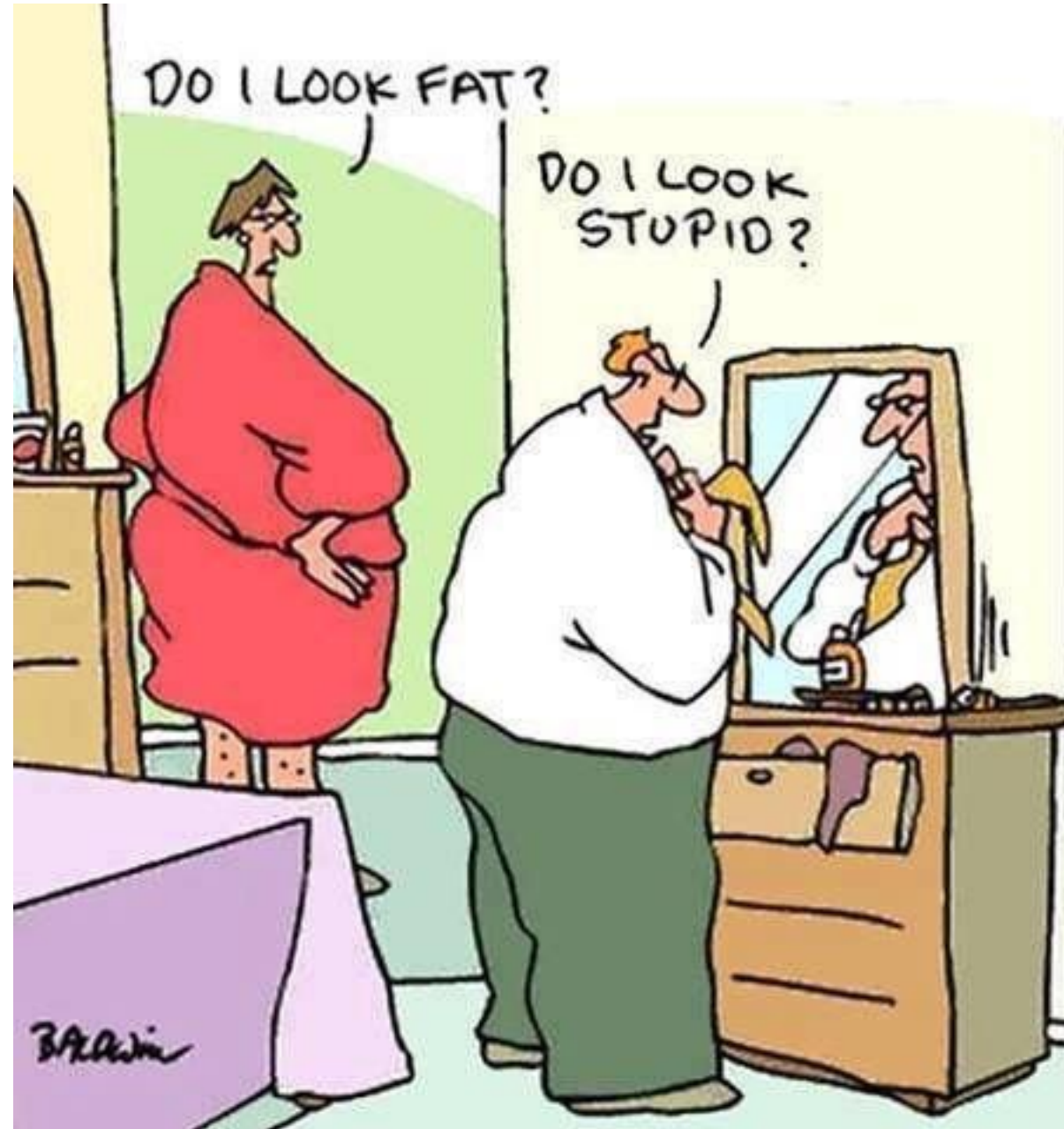
When it comes to normative compliance, we are conforming to social norms- implicit and explicit rules for acceptable behaviours, values and beliefs

Groups have some expectations about “good behaviours”, and members in good standing conform to these rules.

Members who do not meet these expectations are perceived as different, difficult and eventually deviant

Normative Compliance

- Once again conformity is not always a bad thing. It is the reason why “social trends” become viral
- Notably, in contrast to informational social influence, normative pressures usually result in public compliance without private acceptance
- This means people (can) go with the group even when they think it is wrong – good example is smoking or social drinking



Normative Compliance

But, one would think, if it is an important decision- I am less likely to conform and be careful before I copy-paste?

OR

Those who comply are spineless and weak?

Normative Compliance

Answer: We are in huge denial most of the time that things influence us. Evidence?

Nolan et al (2008) study

ASMR, GRWM ?!

Hemlines of our clothes (and many such fashion trends)

Normative Compliance

In which situations do we conform to normative social influence?

Strength : How important the group is to you?

Immediacy: How close is the group to you in space and time during the attempt to influence you?

Number: How many people are in the group?

Normative Compliance

Social Impact Theory – the idea that conforming to social influence depends on the group's importance, immediacy, and the number of people in the group

The theory predicts that conformity will increase as strength and immediacy increase. The more important the group is to us and the closer group members are to us physically, the more likely we will be to conform to its normative pressures.

Normative Compliance

When the group affiliation is important to us, it puts pressure on us to conform sometimes leading to potential problems like **groupthink**

Groupthink is a phenomenon that occurs when a group of individuals reaches a consensus without critical reasoning or evaluation of the consequences or alternatives. Groupthink is based on a common desire not to upset the balance of a group of people.

Normative Compliance

- Cross-cultural evidence* on Asch's conformity study shows that normative influence varies across culture (individualistic vs collectivistic)
- Participants from collectivistic cultures showed more conformity on Asch's line judgement experiment because conformity promotes social harmony and supportive relationships



Drummers' performance at Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony 2008

The Under-dog!

- It is not always true that majority puts pressure on the minority to change.
- Minority influence is also valid – the case where a minority of group members influences the behavior or beliefs of the majority
- Any social uprising (including feminism) is an example of that. But how does this happen?

The Under-dog!

While minority may not have normative influence, it can exert informational social influence.

They can introduce new and unexpected information to the group and cause reflection and re-examination of issues.

Thus, majority can secure public compliance because of normative social influence, whereas minorities are likely to achieve private acceptance because of informational social influence

Obedience : Milgram's Study

- **Role of Normative Social Influence:** Normative pressures make it difficult for people to stop obeying authority figures. They want to please the authority (or stay safe) by doing a good job.
- **Role of Informational Social Influence:** Obedience studies created a confusing situation for participants, with competing, ambiguous demands- in such instances obedience becomes necessary to gain clarity.
- We sometimes conform to the wrong norm because of consensus effect

How to use our knowledge of social influence to influence others?

The fact that we know that conformity is a real thing, we can use this knowledge to influence people towards better behaviour choices:

Injunctive norms : What people **ought** to do (perceived moral rules or social approval/disapproval).

Descriptive norms What people **actually** do (typical behavior in a given situation).

Injunctive norms reflect what is socially approved or disapproved.

Descriptive norms reflect what is common or typical behavior.

How to use our knowledge of social influence to influence others?

We can use these norms to change behaviour. However, we need to be careful because particularly descriptive norms sometimes create a **boomerang effect** (when an attempt to persuade someone actually causes them to adopt the **opposite** attitude or behavior.)

Eg., Anti-smoking ads showing that “Many teens smoke” could backfire by *normalizing* the behavior, making it seem more socially acceptable.

What happens when we do not conform

What is passion* paradox?

*Relentless pursuit of something with positive consequences

Book: The Passion Paradox: A Guide to Going All In, Finding Success, and Discovering the Benefits of an Unbalanced Life by Brad Stulberg and Steve Magness

The Paradox

- **Unfashionable bit:** passion makes us happier and helps us lead a more fulfilling life
- **More fashionable?:** Also gives us anxiety, depression and burnout. INFACT- our brain is responding to a passionate pursuit in the same way it responds to (substance) addiction!!

What is “Relentless”

- Momentum and inertia aka **emotions** associated with the pursuit are very strong- you hardly see anything outside of it!
- Meanwhile, some brain info- brain responds in the same way all the time:
 - Entrepreneurs starting a business
 - Athlete preparing for Olympics
 - You falling in love for the first time

What is common here is: brain's **obsession** about this pursuit (you need more dopamine to feel good about living your life!)

Why do we obsess?

- We obsess when we attach our success or our self-worth to that outcome
- That's when we also activate the dark side of passion

The Dark Side of Passion at Work

- Underpaid and overworked*
- Academic and occupational gender disparities**
- Accepting lower wages to ensure that work is meaningful (or they can feel passionate about it)***

*Kim, J. Y., Campbell, T. H., Shepherd, S., & Kay, A. C. (2020). Understanding contemporary forms of exploitation: Attributions of passion serve to legitimize the poor treatment of workers. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 118(1), 121.

**Siy, J. O., Germano, A. L., Vianna, L., Azpeitia, J., Yan, S., Montoya, A. K., & Cheryan, S. (2023). Does the follow-your-passions ideology cause greater academic and occupational gender disparities than other cultural ideologies?. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

***Hussain, I., Pitesa, M., Thau, S., & Schaerer, M. (2023). Pay suppression in social impact contexts: How framing work around the greater good inhibits job candidate compensation demands. *Organization Science*.

Choices sometimes can feed inequality

- The **Nordic Paradox/ Gender-Equality Paradox**
- The study found that in countries with the highest levels of gender equality (such as Norway, Sweden, and Finland), occupational gender segregation was actually greater compared to less gender-equal countries.
- In Nordic countries, women were more likely to choose traditionally "feminine" careers (e.g., healthcare, education) despite having more freedom and equal access to higher-paying, male-dominated fields (e.g., STEM).
- Conversely, in less gender-equal countries (e.g., Algeria, Tunisia), women were more likely to enter STEM fields, often due to economic necessity rather than personal preference.

Here is the problem...

Since **unbridled** passion has a dark side and can get activated within any work context (eg., employed in an organization vs self-employed/entrepreneur)

How do we develop/work with our passion to a degree (and what degree!) that can enable a meaningful (work) life?

Developing Passion

- Not looking for passion
- Not chasing it but let it find you – true romance :P
- Evaluate trade-offs of being unbalanced* (because you will be unbalanced!)
- Importance of surrounding yourself with a support system that “gets your weirdness 😊”

*everyone has a default mode and they seem to prefer being unbalanced to balanced while pursuing their passion. However, in my experience, people normalize “hustle” as a part of passion (eg., pick any entrepreneur interview!). Anyway, who are you?!

Dopamine Trap

- Overconsumption of instant gratification activities (e.g., social media scrolling, junk food, video games) creates a dopamine addiction loop.
- Modern technology exploits this by providing constant, low-effort rewards (e.g., likes, notifications), making real-life, harder tasks feel dull by comparison.
- This lowers your sensitivity to dopamine, making regular activities (e.g., work, studying) feel boring and unappealing.

Recommended Book: Dopamine Detox : A Short Guide to Remove Distractions and Get Your Brain to Do Hard Things by Thibaut Meurisse

Dopamine Detox

- Identify your High-Dopamine Triggers – what are you consuming for instant gratification?
- Remove or reduce some triggers- full or partial detox
- Replace with low-dopamine, meaningful activities

Recommended Book: Dopamine Detox : A Short Guide to Remove Distractions and Get Your Brain to Do Hard Things by Thibaut Meurisse