

---

# Conformity: Experiments, Nonconformity And Presence In Media

It is human nature to want to feel comfortable. We are programmed to coordinate our behavior with that of the people around us. When we are put in unfamiliar circumstances, we look to others for cues on how to act. To follow normative cues is an instinctual action, in situations we have little to no experience in, we tend to follow what other people do or say. We conform in order to learn, conformity has facilitated our survival and allowed us to grow as a society. Conforming is second nature and comforting, we are usually unaware of our conformist behavior, it's not something we either want to or actually can remove from our actions. Neuroscientists claim that about 15% of society are innovators, the other 85% apparently need to be conformists in order to allow society to maintain stability. Conformity is what ties our society together. However, the world as we know it today would never have evolved or grown into what it is now without a few nonconformists. We are all a part of the whole, we must have dissenters and submitters, we must have creativity and rigid structure.

**Experiments:** Extensive social experiments have taken place in order to analyze the way humans unconsciously conform. In Solomon Asch's experiments on conformity, conducted in the 1950s, people were shown a line and then asked to select the line of a matching length from a group of three. Asch placed assistants in the group who would intentionally select the wrong choice. The results revealed that when other people picked the wrong line, participants were likely to conform and give the same answers as the rest of the group, although the answer was clearly incorrect. While most people would like to believe that they would resist group pressure (especially when they know that the group is wrong), Asch's results revealed that people are surprisingly susceptible to conformity and will depend on it for comfort. Another example, The philosopher Hannah Arendt famously argued that the atrocities of the Holocaust were not caused by psychopaths but by ordinary people placed under extraordinary pressure to conform.

**Media:** Some people see the value in individualism, while some like to keep themselves in the confines of conformity. The American society tends to favor the conformist point of view and it is mostly due to the effects of media. There is a set of standards to uphold in society, and social media has brought those standards to light. Americans crave the idea of association and strive to become the individuals that the media deems worthy. We may have private qualms about a point of view or given course of action, but because we want to remain in the good graces of our social grouping, we suppress our dissent and eventually fall in line. This is particularly apparent in how social media polarization operates, where people gain prestige and influence when agreeing with their cohort's biases rather than opposing them.

**Mill argument:** On Liberty by John Stuart Mill discusses his ideas on both conformity and individuality and how each characteristic is critical in evaluating social progress.

**Counterargument (nonconformity):** Nonconformity is necessary for a community to thrive and flourish. People are and will always be resistant to change, but it has been proven that it is vital for long-term progress and development. Many remarkable inventions that have revolutionized our world were created by people who believed change was inevitable. People who question the default or try to improve it, have come against strong opposition, sometimes by violent force. But sometimes it's the only way to achieve the progress we desperately need as humans. Historically, innovation and acceptance have struggled to co-exist. It takes a lot of courage to challenge the ideas and practices that the majority of people consider to be what is

---

“right”. Ideas that challenge orthodox methods and conventions are usually harshly opposed by those in positions of power and authority. But if you want to change the world and make it a better place, prepare to defend your convictions. And sometimes you will be forced to do it alone. **Conclusion:** All in all, a certain amount of conformity needs to exist in life in order to avoid disorder. This is the reason we have laws. Take those laws, rules, control, or even expectations, to an extreme, and some form of rebellion is probable. Struggle with these opposites, and you have a catalyst for war, or perhaps, being fired from a job. We are all vulnerable to conforming in various aspects of our lives. But, when it comes to helping solve huge global problems, we need to think of the greater good and the good of our descendants - take the longer, broader view. Be brave enough to challenge existing or, seemingly, popular or authoritative views if you think you have a better idea. Brainstorm, and respect everyone's viewpoint. We need lots of ideas, regardless of how absurd they may seem at first. As John Stuart Mill would say, eccentricity is the path to genius innovation.