

Life without Controversy is no Life

But why one should not choose the safe haven of conformity? (2017)

OUTLINE

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Introduction

Thesis Statement: Conformity at the expense of individuality and felicity traps man in a vicious cycle of mundane life. This leads him to just exist and not live. Thus, life with controversy weighs more than to choose conformity.

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How one should not conform to the traditional and prevalent norms

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Conformity must be discouraged owing to its threatening impacts

(a) Shatters the individuality

(b) Leads to robotic and stagnant life

(c) Elimination of man's existence

(d) Butchery of one's creativity and intellectuality

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Theoretical perspective to explain the behaviour of a deviant

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Literary depictions to prioritize the need to nurture individuality by forsaking the notion of conformity

(a) Deviance of choosing liberty over marriage

(i) Jo March in Little Women

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(ii) Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw

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(i) Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

6 Personalities who dared to defy the notion of conformity and stirred the controversies

(a) Friedrich Nietzsche

(b) Martin Luther

(c) Martin Luther King Jr.

(d) Virginia Woolf

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7 Global political and social events which proved that conformity is a curse and there is always a need of deviance

(a) French Revolution

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8 Conclusion

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." (Martin Luther King Jr.) In this quote darkness and hate can be referred to the gloomy lingering cloud of conformity which has veiled the world. Amidst this, instead of conforming to society's norms and values, only non-conformity - represented by light and love - can rekindle one's relationship with one's inner-self. Conformity at the expense of individuality and felicity traps man in a vicious cycle of mundane life. This leads him to just exist and not live. Thus, life with controversy weighs more than to choose conformity. Conformity must be neglected for it shatters individuality, eliminates man's existence, leads to stagnant life along with killing one's creativity and intellectuality. Moreover, Robert Merton's theory of Anomie illustrates the very concept of deviance. Furthermore, the literary depictions of Flaubert, Shaw and Woolf further reiterate that one should never conform to prevalent beliefs. Likewise, there were famous personalities who chose to be different and shunned being a pawn in the game of conformity. These include Nietzsche, Martin Luther,

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Martin Luther King Jr, Virginia Woolf and Rousseau. Similarly, there were global events in the world which impacted socio-political dimensions and reinstated the need of rebellion in the face of conformity. These events include French Revolution, 'Black Lives Matter' movement, outbreak of Feminism and the recent Hamas raid on Israel on October 7. Thus, human beings should muster up the courage to be different than to quietly follow and be a conformist.

Since the era of Greek, the question that has been bugging philosophers for centuries is the question of 'fate vs free will'. It has been asked that whether human beings have ability to take the reins of their lives in their hands. Fate has been given utmost importance for it shows that one's life is predetermined and one cannot do anything to prevent it from happening. On the other hand, free will give breath to the notion of life. It states that God has given this life, but it is one who is going to steer one's life. Free will prevails the fate and it is free will which gives the basis of being different and non-conformist.

Owing to the number of threatening impacts of conforming mindlessly, threat of shattering one's individuality remains the crucial one. Individuality is the quality of ^{one} being different from one another. If all are conforming to one thing, it shatters and shuns the concept of individuality. To illustrate, Postmodernism believed that individualism is that people cannot choose what is factually true. But they are left to interpret those facts according to their own value systems. Therefore, conformity snatches the quality of individuality - the notion of being distinctive - from individuals.

Second, conformity must be discouraged, because it leads to robotic and stagnant life. It leads every individual to conform to the traditional and prevalent beliefs of the society which leads to stationery style of living. For example, Jim Rohn said, "If you are willing to risk the unusual, you will have to settle for the ordinary." (Jim Rohn) Therefore, life without controversy results in mundane life where one does exist but does not live thoroughly.

Furthermore, living one's life by conforming to the accepted beliefs and norms gradually eliminates man's existence from the world. Individuals are blessed with critical thinking which makes them supreme beings. However, if they do not use that faculty, it would lead to their elimination from world.

For example, Descartes's famous 'I think therefore I am' is based on the very notion that the proof of one's existence is that he thinks. If one does not think, one does not exist mentally but only physically. To conclude, conforming to everything eliminates one's existence.

In the last, along with elimination of man's existence and his individuality, conformity butchers one's creativity and intellectuality. When one is told what to say and how to say without giving regards to one's will and choice kills his creativity and intellectual abilities. To explain, every individual has different way of thinking owing to his creative faculties. However, conforming and herd mentality of society butchers one's creativity. Therefore, conformity should never be a safe haven of

an individual.

Theoretical perspective to explain the behavior of a non-conformist, Robert Merton's Theory of Anomie remains the most important. Merton explains that deviating from the accepted code of conduct of society is known as social deviance and society does not accept a deviant person. Society begins to label him as a curse for the society. However, being deviant for a good purpose gradually brings change in a society. For example, both Adolf Hitler and Luther King Jr. deviated from society, but former did for pride and latter did for good purpose. Therefore, Merton theory provides the basis that deviance not always works for rebellion.

Literature is the reflection of life. It depicts social, political, economic, psychological and prevalent beliefs belonging to an era. Similarly, literature has been used to explore the theme of 'conformity vs deviance' and how deviance can lead to a new aspect of life.

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To begin with, the defiance and defiance of choosing liberty over marriage has been explored in literature thoroughly. Louisa May Alcott in her novel 'Little Women' sketches the character of To March, who defies the prevalent traditional beliefs of society. To illustrate, To March, a young lady, turns down the proposal of a wealthy protagonist, for she holds her liberty very dear to her. She decides to break off from societal norms by saying, "I'm happy as I am, and love my liberty too well to be in a hurry to give it up for any mortal man." Thus, Alcott through the character of To March provides the idea of conformity as an evil for controlling one's life.

In addition to this, literature has also reiterated the concept of non-conformity by shunning the concept of traditional heroic traits. George Bernard Shaw in his renowned play Arms and the Man challenges the concept of masculinity. Bluntschli, the protagonist of the play, is a soldier, but he is afraid of being martyred and reveals that heroes are not supposed to be always brave and strong. For example, he says, "All of them,

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dear lady, all of them; believe me
are afraid of death. Thus, Shaw decides
to challenge the prevalent belief of
masculinity and hoists the flag of
non-conformity.

In the last, literature has
not only shunned the concept of
traditional masculinity, but also
condemned the notion of women being
irrational and illogical. Jane Austen
draws her renowned Elizabeth Bennet
character in Pride and Prejudice.
Elizabeth Bennet does not comply to
the typical traditional gender roles
and proves herself to be an equal
of male protagonist. For example,
she says, "Do not consider me now
as an elegant female intending to play
you, but as a rational creature
speaking the truth from her heart."
Thus, Jane Austen also reinstates
that one should never take shelter
under the wings of conformity.

"In the background, there
is a lake, / and beyond that, some low
hills / The photograph was taken the day
after I drowned / I am in the lake,
in the center / of the picture, just under
the surface /" (Margaret Atwood,
This is a photograph of me) Through

these lines, Atwood explains that a lot of marginalized people died because they were repressed by traditional norms of society. They die as they are never allowed to chase their dreams. However, there were renowned personalities who dared to defy the notion of conformity and lived throughout the centuries.

To start with, Friedrich Nietzsche, renowned German philosopher, is considered as the most misunderstood philosopher of all times. Nietzsche challenged the prevalent beliefs of God and religion and got the label of nihilist and negator of God. For example, he wrote, "God is dead. God remains dead and we have killed Him." (Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, 1882). He was misunderstood for his sentence rather he perceived death of a god as a liberating force. He believed that God cannot be perceived objectively, but rather God is an objective reality. Therefore, Nietzsche negated to conform to societal norms and lived a life of controversies.

Moreover, Martin Luther, often called the father of Protestantism, deviated from the prevalent conformist views of Catholic Church. Martin Luther fundamentally changed the Christian world through his force of will and new ideas. To illustrate, Martin Luther was the first man who raised his voice against the indulgences of Catholic church and challenged the foundations of hypocrite church. The clergy was corrupted and used faith to control people. Martin Luther led to the emergence of 'Protestants' and tried his best to reform catholic church. Therefore, Martin Luther rejected to have the safe haven of conformity and deviated.

Likewise, Martin Luther King Jr. reformed the American mindset and negated being a sack of flour whom white people could throw. Martin Luther King Jr. became the voice of black African American and led the civil rights movement throughout America. To illustrate, he organized and led marches for Blacks' right to vote, desegregation, labour rights and other basic civil rights. He said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter" (Martin Luther King, Jr.). Thus, according to Martin Luther King Jr.

one must not always conform to what society says and believes.

Moreover, Virginia Woolf, one of the renowned modernist 20th century authors and pioneer in the use of 'stream of consciousness', does not conform to traditional roles. Virginia Woolf stood the test of times and became a staunch supporter of feminism in a male-dominated society. Her works and publications reveal her strong mindset to defy what was prevalent in her era. For example, Woolf writes, "The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting than the story of that emancipation itself." (Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, 1929) To conclude, Virginia Woolf stood the test of times, for she did not comply to traditional beliefs of society.

Last but not the least, Jean Jacques Rousseau, the man responsible to lead the emergence of French Revolution, revolted against the power of King and clergy. Rousseau gave his famous 'social contract' and his concept of 'General will'. He condemned the ultimate power and invincible nature of King and

through his writings and publications gave voice to the public demand. His political theory influenced the program of enlightenment through Europe. He deviated from prevalent beliefs of Clergy and King. To sum up, Rousseau defied being a conformist and shook the foundations of Europe with his philosophy.

Historically, global socio-political events have transformed the dynamics of the world. Similarly, there were some unprecedented events in the history that proved that there is always a need of non-conformity to bring change in the world.

Among the number of global uprising, French revolution remains the crucial one. French revolution was the result of continuous injustice on the common people of France. French people, instead of conforming to the corrupt and political system of France, revolted against it. They revolted against the inequalities of French society, the corruption of royal officials, and despair owing to widespread economic hardship. To conclude, French Revolution was one of the global events which defied

the concept of conformity and resulted in something which impacted the whole world.

Second, the famous movement 'Black Lives Matter', which started back in 2013 is another example of speaking against conformity. Black Lives Matter seeks to highlight racism, discrimination, and racial inequality experienced by black people, and promote anti-racism. It impacted the whole world with its slogans, protests and social media power. It was an example of deviation against American white racism mindset. For instance, "Black Lives Matter helped usher in a series of policy and organizational changes to policing that include implicit bias trainings, body-worn cameras, and bans on no-knock warrants". (Brookings, Black Lives Matter at 10 years: 8 ways the movement has been highly effective, 2022) Thus, through this movement, people challenged the prevalent oppression of white people.

Moreover, the outbreak of feminism in 19th century is another global event which challenged the traditional status quo. During the time when women were confined to homes

with no due right, women revolted against this traditional and prevalent belief. With publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's book and number of huge protests made it clear that women were not going to be stoppable. They attained educational opportunities, the right to vote, employment decisions and liberty to make one's own life decisions. To sum up, women through the feminist movement defied from taking shelter in conformity.

In the last, the latest Hamas' raid on Israel on October 7 is illustration that Palestinians have spirit to conform to Israel's brutality. Hamas attacked Israel even though it had limited resources and shook the basis of Israel's belief on its military being invincible. Hamas attacked to show that they are still not ready to forsake their land. To illustrate, "Hamas has said it was motivated to launch the attack essentially as the culmination of long-building anger over Israeli policy, but more generally over the treatment of Palestinians and the expansion of Israeli settlements." (CBS News, Why did Hamas attack Israel?, 2023) To sum up, Hamas attack is an example of deviating from conformity.

In conclusion, even though it is easy to take shelter under the wings of conformity, it is done so at the expense of one's individuality and felicity. This leads him to be forever trapped in the shackles of societal norms, values and prevalent beliefs. Therefore, conformity must be discouraged, because it suspends individuality and one's essence of existence. Moreover, it leads to robotic and stagnant life and butchers one's creativity and intellectuality. Furthermore, theoretical perspective of Merton's Strain Theory provides the foundation of non-conform behaviour of an individual. Along with theoretical perspective, literary depictions of Louisa May Alcott, Jane Austen and George Bernard Shaw reiterate that despite conformity is a safe haven, one should not conform to the values blindly. Likewise, the personalities of Nietzsche, Martin Luther, Martin Luther King Jr., Woolf and Rousseau prove that it is against the nature of supreme creatures to conform and not deviate. Also, the global socio-political events such as French Revolution, movement of Black Lives Matter,

outbreak of feminist movement and the recent Hamas raid on Israel serve as an examples that one should not comply to what is taught. One should follow what one believes. Therefore, Hermann Hesse has rightly said that, 'Truth is Lived not Taught'.