

Why do people comply with social rules and expectation? essay sample

[Politics](#), [Marxism](#)



Rules are statement on what can, should or must be done in particular circumstances. They govern our daily life whether we are aware of them or not. Rules are divided into two, direct rules(written formal rules) such as laws regarding manslaughter or incest and indirect rules(unwritten informal rules) such as norms, values and traditions of a particular society. Social expectation serves as a powerful tool to reinforce common beliefs and hopes. For example, in the old days women are expected to be submissive, inferior and graceful and men masculine, dominant and tough. Clearly such traits are socially constructed.

On the surface, it seems that people comply with the socially constructed rules and expectation to be accepted and approved by the society. One theory that deals with the issue of conformity and social order with much depth is that of Functionalism. Durkheim saw human being as having two sides to their nature- the homo duplex model. One side is controlled by the desire to satisfy their needs, the selfish egotistical part and the other side has the ability to believe in moral codes and values. Then, why does most human being follow one course and comply with social rules and expectation instead of the other?

Social norms define what kinds of behaviors individuals are expected to display or to avoid in particular social situations. Norms are often seen as specific expressions of values. Therefore, Durkheim believed that the answer of why people comply with rules and expectation lie in consensus, in a collective conscience consists of common believes in values and norms. To maintain the level of social order and solidarity, behaviors and actions must

be regulated and those that have become patterned and predictable must be continued. Through the process of socialization that takes place since childhood, a person is taught the accepted behaviors and actions by society. They are also taught the consequences that will happen if the norms and values are violated. When socialization is effectively exerted, the individuals internalized the norms of a society. They will unconsciously comply with social rules and expectation. They will follow the norms almost as a matter of reflex.

According to Thomas Hobbes, people's behavior and actions are driven by reason and passion. Passion is the primary force and reason is employed to justify their actions and as a means to satisfy their wants. The only thing that stands on their way in satisfying their wants is the fear of the consequences if they do so. So, they submit to the higher authority and restrain their desire in exchange of protection against the fraud and aggression of others. Human is depicted as calculating, reasonable and self-interested. Durkheim and Parsons rejected Hobbes view that human comply with the rules and laws because of the fear of the consequences if they do not do so. They argued if people become conformists to the rules in the exchange of protection of aggression of others, why do some people defy the norms and values of society. They believe that people submit to the higher authority and comply to the rules of the society because they believe them to be right.

When the process of socialization fails, and individuals do not internalize the norms of society, external forces steps in to fix the problem, restore social order and return the society into the state of equilibrium. For individuals that

do not feel guilt, shame and remorse social forces for example the law will punish the as a deterrent to prevent others to commit the same offence. External control such as ridicule, ostracism and physical punishment are used to solve this problem and can be exerted either by informal or formal mechanisms.

There have been many criticisms on Functionalism's view on this matter. It has been criticized as putting too much emphasis on conformity of members of society that it neglects the possibility of dysfunction in society. It has also been criticized for being too deterministic. As Berger pointed out, individuals are likened to 'Puppet on a string' who only responds automatically and unconsciously to the various rules and expectations of society. It has also been criticized for undermining the existence of groups that control the means of production and the possibility of them to impose their own social reality, rules and expectations. Then, it will deny the claim that people comply with the rules because they believe them to be right. Instead they comply because they are coerced to do so.

Marxism offers a very different approach that is of functionalism. They believe people comply not because they want to or because they believe the rules to be right but because they are coerced to do so. The economic infrastructure that the society is based on creates two major groups, the minority that control the means of production and the majority who supposedly creates the wealth in society. The minority the one who control the means of production also controls the political and ideological superstructure. Through the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological

State Apparatus, the proletariat is deceived into thinking that the entire economic system is based on equality and fairness. They are blind from the real situation, the oppression by the bourgeoisie. The false consciousness creates the false sense of social order. Both the classes conform to the rules and expectation of society because they think they are acting for the sake of themselves and others.

However Marxists do not believe the false consciousness will exist forever. There will be a point in the epoch where the tension and conflict between the two classes reaches its peak. When that happens, the proletariat will become a class of itself. This shows that people will only comply within a certain period of time and will challenge the social rules and expectation that restrain their true desire and dreams.

Like Functionalism, there have been many criticisms towards Marxism explanation to this problem. First it has been criticized for putting too much emphasis on economic factor as the basis for compliance and conflict. There may be other factors to generate compliance and conflict between the two classes. One of them is the pursuit for power. According to Ralf Dahrendorf the existence of subordinate groups and dominance groups creates tension and conflict. It also provides the explanation on why people comply to rules and regulations. The subordinate groups, the working class and the subject class comply for their own self interest. They may face sanction by the dominance groups, for example being fired if they do not comply. As for the dominance groups, they comply to preserve their dominance and power over the subordinate groups.

Antonio Gramsci provides another explanation why people comply. For the ruling class to continue dominate the subject class it is important for them to win their support by making a real concessions with the other groups of society. By doing so they maintain their leadership and hegemony by making the subject class believe they are important and are part of the society. If this is true people comply because they are kept sufficiently satisfied to do so. They will benefit from the compliance to the rules and expectation of society.

But this approach still leaves us with one question. Why do some people follow one course, committing deviance and defying the norms and values of society instead of another- the path that will benefit them if they comply?

Interactionists reject the notion of the structure shaping the society. Instead they believe that people comply with the rule and expectation of society for their self interest, to be accepted by other members of society, to put themselves in the best light possible. In other word, people comply because of their self-concept that is developed throughout their lives. G. H Mead believed that one's self concept is divided into the 'I'. the active part of the self concept and the 'me' the passive part, the part which can be easily influenced by the reactions of others. A child learn and build his self concept through the process of play stage where he learn the role expected of him by others and the game stage where his self-concept is developed fully through the awareness of the reactions of others and how others perceive them to be. Therefore, people comply to please themselves and others. They comply so that the people around them perceive them to be according to specific

traits depending on how a society perceives acceptable and appropriate behaviors, norms and values.

Anthony Giddens believed that human have a basic desire for some degree of predictability in social life. They have the need in what he calls ontological security. Therefore, they submit to the higher authority, restrain their desire and follow the rules and expectation of the society so that the need for the sense of security to be satisfied.

No matter what theory that has been proposed to explain this problem, one thing is for sure, people comply both because they believe that rules are necessary and because they are coerced to do so by the social mechanism that constraint their behavior. Maybe the most reasonable reason why they comply is because of their own self-interest. They believe that the rules will protect them from the aggression of others. They comply with the expectation of the society so that they will be accepted by others and in return they will be protected by the higher authority and other members of society. No matter what, people need to comply so that social order and solidarity can be maintained and preserved.