

Essay on conformity

[Psychology](#), [Behaviorism](#)



The Price of Nonconformity Defiance is a daring and bold resistance to authority or society. In any group, whether a neighborhood, team, or school, there is a certain ethical and moral code that people are expected to abide by, and therefore defiance is not welcome. However, every group has its individuals, people who break the mold and go against the grain. Actions made by individuals that shake the foundations of a society's beliefs are seen in negative light, and as a result, the individual faces animosity.

Nonconformity and defiance to a society's customs lead to great implications for the individual.

In the novel *The Chocolate War*, Jerry's friendship with Roland Gouber deteriorates in correlation with Jerry's nonconformity. Popularly referred to as "The Goober," Roland is Jerry's only real ally in the novel. The Goober is a peaceful figure who hates strain and contention and gets along with Jerry who shares Goober's mild behavior (Cormier 100). The chocolate sale, however, drives a wedge between the two's easy friendship. Goober responds with fear and apprehension when Jerry relates his plan to refuse the chocolates.

He entreats Jerry to appease the school and sell the chocolates, and Jerry's empty response to Goober's plea starts the division in their friendship. "Jerry's lone protest is partly inspired by a poster displayed in the back of his Buda 2 locker. It shows a man walking alone on the beach, with a captioned quote from poet T. S. Eliot: 'Do I dare disturb the universe?' Beyond answering this challenge Jerry has no satisfactory explanation for his friend The Goober, or for himself, as to why he is still refusing to sell the chocolates" (Telgen).

As a result, Goober refuses to participate on the football team, which greatly upsets Jerry and widens the fissure between them. After sharing their conflicting positions on the way to the bus stop one morning, the two feel separated. " They sat in sadness. Finally, they gathered their books, got up, and walked in silence to the bus stop" (Cormier 160). One's nonconformity can also cause him to be subjected to psychological warfare. Archie Costello has a keen and disturbing talent for inflicting psychological damage on his subjects. Because Jerry defies the Vigils, Archie focuses his " talent" on Jerry. Jerry receives frequent, anonymous phones calls at all hours of the night. When Jerry answers, there is only silence; and then the people on the other line chuckle, privately, at some intimate joke (Cormier 191). This scheme proves very effective in penetrating into Jerry's mind. " In bed once more, small in the dark, Jerry willed his body to loosen, to relax. After a while, sleep plucked at him with soft fingers, soothing away the ache. But the phone rang in hisdreamsall night long" (Cormier 220). The morning after his first night phone call, Jerry goes to his locker and finds that someone vandalized his poster and slashed his shoes.

His poster that inspired his nonconformity had been smeared with something that appeared to be blue paint, and the message had been virtually obliterated into a grotesque jumble of unconnected letters (Cormier 192). After this event, Jerry feels as if someone is trying to send him a deliberate message. Archie further psychologically attacks Jerry by secretly taking Jerry's homework assignment after he turns it in. Jerry claims he left his watercolor project on theteacher's desk the day before, but Buda 3 the substitute, Brother Andrew, doubts him. " Jerry sighed quietly, in resignation.

He knew that brother Andrew wouldn't find the drawing there. He wanted to turn, to scan the faces of the kids in the class, to find that one kid who'd be gloating in satisfaction. Hey, you're getting paranoid, he told himself" (Cormier 195). Despite all the plots against him, Jerry decides to keep disturbing the universe. Unfortunately, more problems inevitably follow as Jerry becomes firm in his conviction. Jerry is made an outcast in the eyes of the students at Trinity. Archie states that nobody defines the Vigils and gets away with it (Cormier 148).

As one method of punishing Jerry, the Vigils make a point of separating Jerry and turning him into an outsider. The Vigils achieve this by interfering with the chocolate sale. The Vigils rally school support for the chocolate sale and make sure every boy meets his quota of fifty boxes except for Jerry (Peck). Jerry also starts to feel that he is invisible at school. As he walks through the corridors, students give him a wide berth. Nobody brushes against him, and guys step out of his path. Jerry believes that the teachers are part of the conspiracy too. They let their eyes slide over him, looking elsewhere when Jerry tried to catch their attention. Once, he waved his hand frantically to answer a question but the teacher ignored him" (Cormier 224). At first, Jerry feels like someone is trying to obliterate him and remove all traces of his existence, but after a while he begins to enjoy his absence of identity. Jerry relaxes, feeling as if he no longer has to be on his guard. His feelings of security, however, disappear when the students drop the cold shoulder act and move on to a much worse form of punishment. Buda 4 Often, it is only a matter a time before a nonconformist faces violence.

Jerry realizes that the football field becomes a place where people can abuse him unmercifully. The athletic department provides for the testing of individuals, including each one's willingness and ability to withstand physical abuse; the football field is an arena where violence is ritualized, sanctioned, and even demanded (Carter, Harris). At football practice one day, Jerry gets viciously tackled from behind, and he wonders who attacked him ("The Chocolate War"). Emile Janza also sets out to hurt Jerry and assembles a group of kids for an attack. Emile confronts Jerry alone after football practice. Emile calls Jerry a fairy, and when Jerry returns with crude remark Emile's band of kids emerge from their hiding places to beat up Jerry. Emile and Jerry's battle with each other reaches its height when Archie sets them both up to participate in a boxing match in front of the entire student body. "The undercurrent of physical bullying in the school, represented by Emile Janza, encourages our expectation that the larger battle will end in a key confrontation" (Peck). Archie puts a spin on the fight; he creates a raffle that dictates the moves of the boxing match, making it practically impossible for Jerry to win.

Voices overwhelmingly cry from the crowd of students for Janza to kill his opponent. Jerry is alone out there, at the mercy of the students who recently decided that he was not a revolutionary at all, but rather someone who considered himself better than them ("The Chocolate War"). Artists, including musicians and painters, have recognized and addressed the hardships and isolation of nonconformists in their works. The song "Minority" by the American band Green Day exemplifies an individual's nonconformity. The

lyrics “ Stepped out of the line like a sheep runs from the herd” (Metro Lyrics), imply that an individual is rebelling against a group.

The word “ herd” suggests a like-minded group that acts together and therefore is robbed of their individuality. “ A face in the crowd unsung, against the mold. Without a doubt singled out the only way I know” (Metro Lyrics). These lyrics demonstrate the isolation one faces as a result of nonconformity. If someone is “ Marching out of time” (Metro Lyrics), they are turned into a minority, as evident in Jerry’s case when students treat him as an outsider. The painting, “ Wake up America” by American artist Jon McNaughton symbolizes going against society.

The painting makes a political statement while also expressing the idea of defiance. “ There are all types of people bound together by the same problem we all face: our national debt. But strangely enough, most people don’t even seem to realize what is happening to them” (McNaughton). The people in this painting are bound by the national debt just like the students at Trinity are bound by the chocolate sale. The Trinity students carry out the sale unaware of its deeper purpose of keeping authority concentrated in the hands of Brother Leon.

The painting suggests that Obama is like Leon in the sense that Obama gains power from the very debt that chains American taxpayers. The man in the foreground sawing off his chain is like Jerry breaking free from the grip of the chocolate sale. Like Jerry, the man escaping from the group will certainly face hostility. In fact, the woman behind him is already pointing him out to the group. For most individuals, protesting a society’s ethical and moral standards ultimately proves to be a losing battle.

Even if a person fosters change among a group, it is only after facing numerous consequences. “ Jerry’s protest is not easy for him to carry out, but he gains a new identity through his actions. What this idea becomes in the novel is the concept of being true to oneself and standing up to the evil that one perceives in the world. The only character that is true Buda 6 to himself in the novel is Jerry — but at a terrible price” (Peck). Individuals face conflict with the values of society or society at large as a result of an idea that they espouse or an action that they commit.

Individuality may be described as the consciousness of the individual as to what he is and how he lives. The very essence of individuality is expression; the sense of dignity and independence is the soil wherein it thrives. Man's thirst for liberation from authority and power will never be quenched despite the fact that society operates against people who refuse to conform. Consequences such as isolation, emotional damage, and violence are the price an individual must pay along his quest for freedom from every shackle.