

# The Influence of Social Standards and Acceptance on Superficial Behavior

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## Abstract

Superficiality is defined as behaviors and speech that contradict the core character of the individual. An individual's behavior and speech can be self-altered to force an adaptation of societal standards. Although it requires excess effort, individuals even alter their behavior daily to obtain the desired results. Actions such as these are always caused by some motivator. When analyzing the root causes of altering behavior, the effort exerted towards superficial actions is shaped by various underlying factors such as conformity, age, self-standards, benefits, and self-control. Each of these components place pressure on the individual in different manners. For example, younger individuals have less experience in managing their behavior, which can lead to superficial attitudes. Assumed benefits from specific actions may also force individuals to alter their behavior to reap the results. These various aspects reshape how individuals behave around others, leading to an overall effect which is noticeable as the phenomenon of superficiality. I argue that the influence of these factors must be mitigated to prevent superficial behavior from dominating one's existence; it leads one to detach themselves from their own personality.

## Influence of Conformity

- It took 65% longer for individuals to stop working on an unsolvable math problem when they were told that they had the same birthday as another individual with a major in math (Walton et al., 2012)
- A third of individuals gave incorrect answers regarding different lines' lengths in Solomon Asch's study because they observed other individuals give the same incorrect answer (Fujita and Mori, 2017)
- When participants in a study about donations were split into two different groups, individuals donated amounts of money that were corresponding to how much others donated in the group (Nook et al., 2016)
- Conformity consists of impulsive actions acting as the foundation of superficiality; individuals want to blend into the majority and belong. The need for acceptance is the base of superficial actions.

## Superficiality as a Matter of Age

- Younger individuals, specifically adolescents, think about the opportunities they could obtain from certain actions (Chierchia et al., 2020)
- Defamation and in-group bias were two negative aspects of social media usage (Baccarella et al., 2018)
- The years of experience an evaluator possesses is negatively correlated to how frequently they bend to the will of their client's pressure (Malkowska et al., 2019)
- Younger individuals have a higher need for acceptance, so they perform superficial actions. As they face a sudden increase in societal pressure, they are unsure how to handle it due to lack of experience.

## Reevaluation of Self-Standards

- "Expectancy" and "value" from certain actions act as the motivation to perform these actions (Kruglanski et al., 2018)
- How an individual and raised and how others in the community will perceive the future occurrence will determine how much someone is looking forward to that occurrence (Kruglanski et al., 2018)
- The goals individuals set for themselves are based on what society deems to be socially acceptable. What an individual desires is based on what is expected rather than desired, leading to superficiality.

## Motivation of Benefits

- Individuals typically decide their actions based on what they would gain from this action rather than simply adhering to the majority, even if the majority decides to take the same action (Charness et al., 2019)
- Positive Reinforcement – Something is given to continue a behavior
- Negative Reinforcement – Something is taken away to continue a behavior
- Positive Punishment – Something is given to stop a behavior
- Negative Punishment – Something is taken away to stop a behavior (Xu et al., 2021)
- Superficiality relies on selfish goals, indicating that the corresponding behaviors are performed based on the intended benefits the individual can receive. By learning what was rewarded and punished in society, individuals have constructed superficial behaviors.



(MissLunaRose12, 2019)

## Connection to Self-Control

- Activity increases in the lateral prefrontal cortex (planning) and decreases in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (pleasure) when an individual practices self-control, which is influenced by an individual's and society's values (Berkman et al., 2017)
- Self-control occurs when an individual considers the outcomes of an action and what they should do rather than what they want to do in that moment (Berkman et al., 2017)
- Emotional intensity in certain situations will decrease within an individual when there is an extreme amount of self-control (Layton and Muraven, 2014)
- Self-control is a subset of decision-making that focuses on logic to obtain better results in the future. Excessively high levels of self-control can result in personality suppression and behavior restrictions that lead to superficiality.

## Discussion

- Superficiality is based on multiple, intertwined societal factors such as conformity and benefits that influence one's behavior. It causes one to detach from their personality and focus on their influenced goals rather than what they truly desire.
- These false actions from undue societal influence have been instilled in an individual's mind and they must be combated to mitigate the effects.
- It is necessary for an individual to focus on what they want rather than what other people project they should desire. This would allow individuals to be truly happy with their achievements without focusing on societal norms or superficial attitudes.

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