

Why do some people always agree with others? The science of social conformity

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New brain imaging research from the Monash Institute of Cognitive and Clinical Neurosciences (MICCN) suggests that some people experience mental distress when faced with the prospect of disagreeing with others. The findings, published in the journal *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, reveal that some individuals choose to agree most of the time with others to spare themselves feelings of discomfort.

The study gives new insights into how the brain handles disagreement, with implications for understanding social conformity.

Using [functional magnetic resonance](#) imaging, the Melbourne based research team lead by senior author Dr Pascal Molenberghs and first authors Dr Juan Dominguez and Sreyneth Taing, investigated which brain areas are involved when [people](#) disagree with others. They found that people who rarely disagreed showed lots of activation in the [medial prefrontal cortex](#) and anterior insula when they disagreed. These areas have been previously implicated in cognitive dissonance, a heightened state of mental stress.

According to Dr Domínguez, their findings provide insight into why some people find it hard to disagree with others. "People like to agree with others, a social default known as the truth bias, which is helpful in forming and maintaining social relationships. People don't like to say that others are not telling to truth or lying because this creates an uncomfortable situation," he added.

So, if you like to avoid [mental distress](#) when arguing with your partner, it is better to agree with them.

However, the research team also argues that a reduced inclination for individuals to disagree with others may have adverse effects as people may feel compelled to conform, potentially against their own interests.

The authors suggest an aversion to disagree has real life implications including poor decision-making, anxiety, or interpersonal relationship problems. A better understanding of the brain mechanisms of disagreement is therefore of great relevance in devising ways for helping people assert their independence.

Provided by Monash University

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