

Being Normal

I've always been weird, but at this point in my life I feel like I *understand* non-weird people quite well. If you're still baffled, my weird friends, one simple principle captures most of what you need to know.

*The Principle of Normality: A normal person says what others **say**, but does what others **do**.*

Notice that this principle captures two distinct features of normality.

First, conformism. People dislike expressing views or taking actions unless other people express the same views and take the same actions.

Second, the chasm between words and actions. Normal people lack integrity. They feel little need to bring their actions in harmony with their words – or their words in harmony with their actions.

Example: A normal person will say, “We should do everything possible to fight global warming” – yet donate zero to environmental charities. How can they cope with the cognitive dissonance? Because this psychological experience is alien to them. They speak environmentalist words to echo the environmentalist words they hear other people say. They donate zero to environmental charities because to mimic what they see other people *do*.

For normal people, Social Desirability Bias is far more than a bias; it is their way of life.

Once you understand the Principle of Normality, my weird friends, you are also ready to look in the mirror and understand weirdness in all its manifestations. While some weird people exhibit multiple manifestations, most weird people strongly emphasize just one. (I think).

Manifestation #1: Saying unconventional things. Some weird people like speaking about odd, off-putting, or socially disapproved topics, despite strong social pressure. Picture the comic book nerd, the gaming nerd, the literary nerd, or the anti-religious nerd. They still live much like other people; they just say weird things.

Manifestation #2: Doing unconventional actions. Other weird people focus on *doing* odd, off-putting, or socially disapproved things, again despite strong social pressure. Picture the polyamorist, the punker, the Hare Krishna (in Western societies), or the junkie. They still speak much like other people; they just do weird things.

Manifestation #3: The integrity of good. A third variety of weird person starts with plausible, even popular verbal premises. Then they stun the rest of the world by striving to bring their behavior into strict conformity with these premises. Picture the Effective Altruist, the vegan, the abolitionist, or the proponent of radical honesty.

Manifestation #4: The integrity of evil. The last variety of weird person starts with bizarre verbal premises that seem absurd unless you're thoroughly brainwashed. They horrify the rest of the world by striving to bring their behavior into strict conformity with these premises. Picture the Islamic fundamentalist, the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary, or the theonomist.

To point out the obvious: Manifestation #4 is responsible for almost all of the political horrors of the last three centuries. Most weird people are not violent fanatics, but all violent fanatics are weird. So while I'm personally high on Manifestations 1, 2, and especially 3, I can understand why weird people tend to frighten normal people. In defense of the weird, however, I have to point out that most moral progress comes from Manifestation #3 - the abolition of slavery being the greatest example. Normal people rarely initiate awful crimes on their own, but once violent fanatics make awful crimes normal, normal people will support them by word and deed.