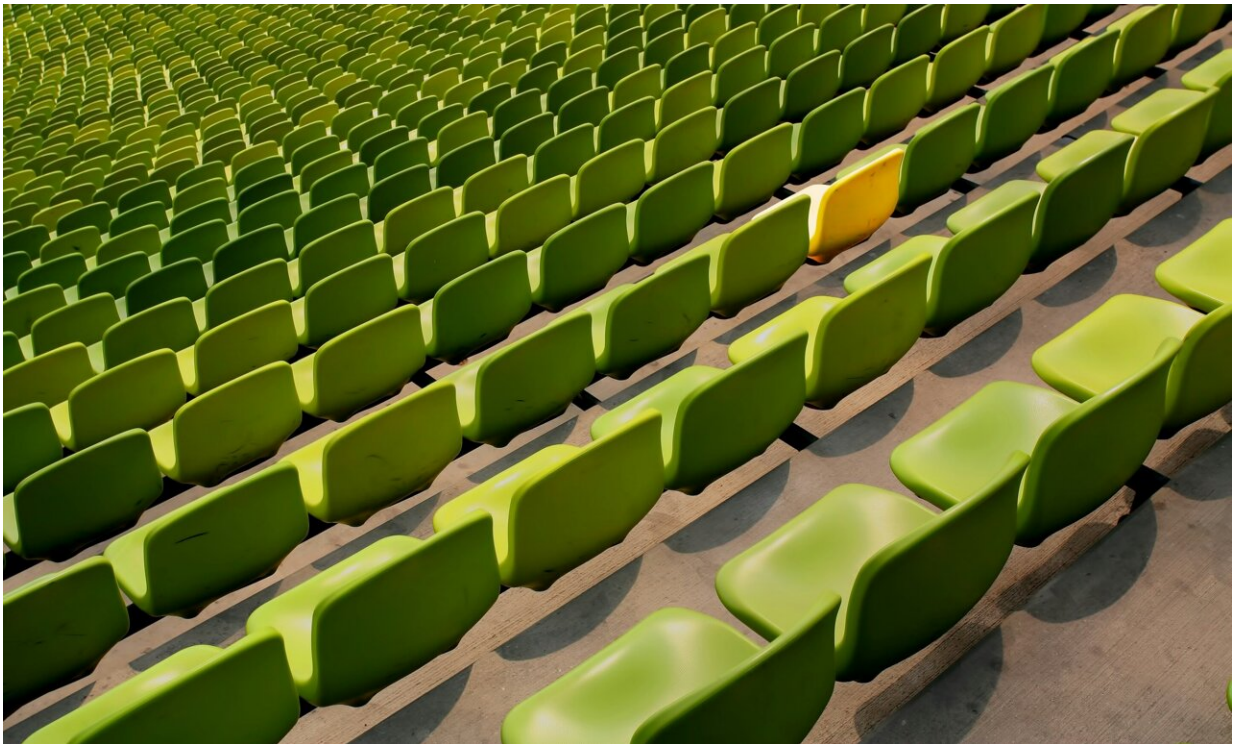


Study finds dramatic decline in people's desire to stand out from other people

August 13 2024, by Shelly DeJong



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A study by Michigan State University's College of Social Science found a dramatic decline in people's desire to stand out from other people over the past 20 years.

The study, published in [*Collabra: Psychology*](#), tracked over a million

people's desire to stand out or be unique from 2000 until 2020. This study provides some of the first evidence-based data comparing people's motivation to stand out in today's hyper-digital world compared to the early 2000s.

The study looked at three dimensions of uniqueness: concern about other people's reactions, desire to break the rules and the willingness to defend beliefs publicly. All three facets declined but the most dramatic were people being hesitant to defend their beliefs publicly (a 6.52% decline) and becoming more concerned with what people think about them (a 4.28% decline).

This data suggests that [individuals](#) see that expressing uniqueness might compromise their ability to fit in with others or may even lead to being ostracized.

"A 6.52% decline is a dramatic population change in as short as 20 years," said William Chopik, lead author of the study and associate professor in the Department of Psychology.

"Our data confirms a lot of intuitions people have. It's not just in their heads that we inhabit punitive spaces. Indeed, people are afraid of drawing too much attention to themselves, potentially because doing so leaves them vulnerable or at risk of being ostracized (or cancelled). This study acknowledges that people have valid fears and concerns about standing out, so much so that they're less willing to do so."

The researchers see that this decline in wanting to stand out has major societal implications.

"It's really important to have people willing to go against the grain—say the occasional unpopular thing, [challenge](#) groupthink, highlight the need to compromise with people different than us, and not cover up the

diversity of opinions and people because they're too scared to stand out," said Chopik.

"Withholding who we authentically are by trying so hard to blend in can ironically backfire and lead to guilt, anxiety and, sometimes, even more animosity between people."

More information: William Chopik et al, Changes in Need for Uniqueness From 2000 Until 2020, *Collabra: Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1525/collabra.121937](https://doi.org/10.1525/collabra.121937)

Provided by Michigan State University

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