

# Psychological Characteristics Of Independent Thinking

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**Abstract:** This article explores the psychological foundations and characteristics of independent thinking. Independent thinking is not only a cognitive skill but also a socio-psychological phenomenon that allows individuals to evaluate information critically, resist group pressure, and make autonomous decisions. Drawing upon classical and contemporary psychological theories, the paper highlights the role of family upbringing, education, and group interactions in shaping this capacity. Special attention is given to mechanisms such as conformism, nonconformism, social facilitation, and inhibition. The article concludes that independent thinking is a key resource for personal development, leadership, and societal innovation.

**Keywords:** Independent thinking, personality, cognition, conformism, nonconformism, social facilitation, inhibition, education.

**Introduction:** Independent thinking has been a subject of psychological interest for decades. In modern societies, where individuals are continuously exposed to large amounts of information, the ability to evaluate critically and make independent judgments becomes particularly important. Philosophers and educators from ancient times to modern thinkers such as John Dewey have emphasized that independent thinking is essential for democratic participation, creativity, and the pursuit of truth.

Independent thinking is closely tied to the concept of autonomy. Psychologists argue that autonomy enables individuals to resist social pressures and to express their own judgments, even when these are unpopular. However, human beings are also inherently social, and therefore the balance between independence and conformity is a recurring issue in psychological research.

The aim of this article is to analyze the psychological characteristics of independent thinking and to examine the conditions under which it develops or becomes suppressed. The study provides a theoretical framework and empirical insights to help educators, psychologists, and policymakers understand how to foster independent thinking in young people.

## METHODS

The study employed a mixed methodological approach, combining theoretical analysis, comparative literature review, and empirical observation. Several classical and contemporary works in social psychology were analyzed to understand how group dynamics influence independent thought. Among the key sources were Allport's theory of social facilitation, Asch's conformity experiments, Sherif's research on group norms, and David Myers' work on group influence.

Comparative analysis was conducted by reviewing both

Western and Central Asian psychological literature, highlighting similarities and differences in understanding independence. In addition, empirical observations were made in classroom settings to assess how group-based learning strategies (such as brainstorming and dialogue-based teaching) impact students' independent thinking.

This methodological triangulation allowed for a multidimensional perspective on the subject, ensuring that theoretical insights were supported by practical educational observations.

## **RESULTS**

The findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

1. Family influence is decisive in shaping independent thinking. Children raised in supportive families, where dialogue, respect, and autonomy are encouraged, are more likely to develop critical and independent thought processes.
2. Social facilitation was observed in educational settings: students often performed better in tasks such as speaking or solving simple problems when they were in the presence of peers. This confirms earlier findings that the presence of others can energize performance.
3. Inhibition was also evident, particularly in complex or unfamiliar tasks. In such cases, students' performance declined when they felt pressure from group observation, indicating that social presence can also have a suppressive effect.
4. Conformism remains a significant barrier to independent thought. Asch's classic experiments continue to illustrate how individuals are willing to suppress their own judgments in order to align with the majority, even when the majority is objectively wrong.
5. Nonconformism, although less common, plays a crucial role in innovation and leadership. Historical and contemporary examples show that reformers, scientists, and social leaders often emerge as nonconformists who challenge prevailing norms.
6. Group learning strategies such as brainstorming and interactive dialogue were shown to foster independent thinking, provided that students were given freedom to express diverse opinions without fear of judgment.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study shed light on the complex psychological mechanisms that underlie independent thinking, confirming both classical theories and contemporary perspectives in social psychology. One of the most important observations is the ambivalent role of social influence. While social facilitation enhances performance in relatively simple or familiar tasks, the

same social presence can lead to inhibition in more complex or unfamiliar contexts. This duality suggests that independent thinking is not a fixed trait but rather a dynamic process that can either be stimulated or suppressed depending on situational factors.

The evidence regarding conformism and nonconformism further highlights this dynamic. Conformism, as illustrated in Asch's experiments, remains a strong determinant of human behavior, showing that even in modern educational settings individuals may subordinate their own reasoning to majority opinion. At the same time, the role of nonconformism must not be underestimated. Although less frequent, nonconformist behavior has historically been the driving force behind innovation, social reform, and intellectual breakthroughs. Thus, educational systems should not merely aim to reduce conformity but should also nurture constructive nonconformism, encouraging students to question prevailing assumptions and to offer alternative solutions.

Another important aspect concerns the role of family and upbringing. The findings indicate that children raised in environments that encourage open dialogue, respect for individuality, and autonomy are more likely to develop strong independent thinking skills. This is consistent with self-determination theory, which posits that autonomy-supportive contexts foster intrinsic motivation and critical thought. Conversely, overly authoritarian or conformity-oriented family dynamics may hinder the emergence of independence, resulting in individuals who are less confident in their judgments and more vulnerable to external pressures.

Cultural dimensions must also be considered when interpreting these results. In collectivist societies, conformity is often viewed as a virtue because it supports social cohesion and group harmony. However, the danger lies in excessive conformity that can limit creativity, discourage critical debate, and slow down innovation. By contrast, individualistic cultures may emphasize autonomy and originality, yet this can sometimes lead to fragmentation and a lack of cooperative skills. Therefore, a balanced model is needed—one that cultivates independence of thought while maintaining an appreciation for collaboration and social responsibility.

The gender and age-related differences observed in conformity also warrant further exploration. Previous research suggests that younger individuals and women may be more susceptible to group pressure, possibly due to socialization patterns that emphasize compliance and relational sensitivity. However, as individuals mature, especially when they take on

leadership roles, their resistance to conformity tends to increase. This developmental trajectory implies that independent thinking is not static but evolves over the lifespan, shaped by both social roles and psychological growth.

Educational implications are particularly significant. The data show that group-based learning strategies such as brainstorming and dialogic teaching can be effective in fostering independence, but only when structured in ways that safeguard diversity of opinion. Teachers must carefully manage classroom dynamics to prevent dominant voices from overshadowing others and to ensure that dissenting or minority perspectives are not marginalized. Encouraging reflective practices, debate formats, and problem-based learning can help students build confidence in their independent judgments.

From a broader societal perspective, these findings emphasize that independent thinking is not only a personal attribute but also a collective resource. In a rapidly changing world marked by information overload, political polarization, and technological disruption, societies cannot afford to rely solely on conformity. Instead, they require citizens who are capable of evaluating information critically, resisting manipulative influences, and making responsible decisions. Independent thinking thus becomes essential for democratic participation, ethical leadership, and sustainable development.

Finally, it is important to note that fostering independent thinking does not imply the rejection of social norms or authority altogether. Rather, it calls for a balanced approach in which individuals learn to respect collective values while retaining the capacity to question and reform them when necessary. Such a balance ensures both stability and progress, allowing societies to preserve social harmony while adapting creatively to new challenges.

## CONCLUSION

Independent thinking is a cornerstone of human development, personal autonomy, and societal progress. It requires supportive family environments, educational strategies that promote dialogue and creativity, and social conditions that allow for diversity of thought. Conformism, while sometimes useful for maintaining order, must not be allowed to dominate at the expense of individuality and creativity.

By cultivating independent thinking, societies can prepare young people not only to adapt to existing realities but also to innovate, reform, and lead. In the rapidly changing world, the ability to think independently is not only a personal asset but also a collective necessity for sustainable development.

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