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How we train ourselves to conform

BYLINE: Richard Alleyne

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THE thought process that underlies the human tendency to conform and "follow the crowd" has been identified by scientists.

Researchers believe that the brain re-educates itself if its views conflict with the norm. The process could explain why people followed fashion trends and even the rise of extreme political movements.

The Dutch researchers, whose findings are published in the journal *Neuron*, used scans to monitor the brain activity of volunteers asked to judge the attractiveness of a series of faces.

Attempts were made to sway their initial judgments using group opinion and such conflict often caused volunteers to adjust their own ratings in a conformist way. Conflict with the group produced a "prediction error" signal in the brain that arose from the difference between expected and actual outcomes.

The most conforming participants appeared to have the strongest conflict-related signals.