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The Sadness of Conformity

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By [Kristen Houghton](#)

As the creator of “[The Twilight Zone](#)” television series of the late 1950s and ‘60s, Rod Serling wrote several stories about the human experience of being pressured to conform to so-called societal norms. Two of the episodes from that series are particularly relevant today because they deal with the problems of being different in a world that professes tolerance yet stresses conformity.

In 2010, we would like to believe that being different is good and wholesome, that we should and would somehow celebrate our differences. But we’re as narrow-minded and as intolerant today as the characters in those episodes of over 40 years ago. Not much has changed, and that is tragic.

In one “Twilight Zone” classic, “Number 12 Looks Just Like You,” a young girl in a futuristic world rails against being pressured by her family and friends to look and think just like everyone else. The powers-that-be in society have created a strange coming-of-age process called the “Transformation.” To facilitate the process, there are specific models of both the ideal male and female forms from which people can choose. You go through the transformation and you become the aforementioned ideal individual.

Though the young woman makes a valid point about liking who she is and the way she looks, at the end of the episode she gives in to the pressure and has the “Transformation.” She ends up looking, as well as thinking, like everyone else in her society.

In “Eye of the Beholder,” which was written by Serling himself, a woman willingly has plastic surgery procedure after procedure in order to conform to the ideal of beauty by which she is surrounded. Each surgery is a failure. Before her last surgery she is told that if she cannot be made to look like the rest of society, she will be banished to a ghetto where “people like her” are made to live.

What we find out at the end of the story when her bandages are removed is that she is a stunningly beautiful woman. Seeing this, we believe that the last surgery was a phenomenal success, but we’re wrong. The “normal ideal” she is trying to achieve is to look like the human pig-faced creatures around her. Her own beauty is considered repulsive. Rod Serling wrote this as a great modern morality play on the value of individuality and the dangers of wanting to conform to one ideal of beauty.

The desire to have the perfect image is one way that we try to conform to what society says is normal. One would think that plastic surgery (which is still major surgery, make no mistake about that) has become as commonplace today as having your teeth cleaned. Diets galore and “nutritional” cleanses are available to help us fit the size that society says we should be. What we do to our bodies borders on torture, starvation and mutilation simply to fit in.

There is something very dangerous about total conformity. We don’t celebrate who we already are because, according to statistics, we want to be like everyone else!

Conformity doesn’t only concern our bodies and faces; it is also present in our life choices. Our society is not tolerant of the person who chooses a lifestyle that is not considered the norm. During the

