



International Journal of Advanced Research in Arts, Science, Engineering & Management

Volume 12, Issue 2, March- April 2025



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 8.028

Conformity vs Conviction: Social Psychology and Juror Behaviour in “Twelve Angry Men”

Dr. Kulin Kumar Joshi, Praful Tiwari

Assistant Professor, Central University of Punjab, Bathinda, India

M.P.A Student, Central University of Punjab, Bathinda, India

ABSTRACT: Twelve Angry Men by Reginald Rose is a thought-provoking exploration of interpersonal relations, social influence, and individual ethics in the context of a jury trial. This essay applies theories from social psychology to examine the jurors' behaviour and choices in an attempt to explore the interconnection between conviction and conformity in decision-making. The struggle between the pressure to conform to the majority and the strength of individual belief in seeking justice is the core of the play. The jurors' social identity, personality, and prejudices heavily influence their actions, showing how prejudice, groupthink, and fear of standing out may impair judgment. The play emphasizes the power of one individual's firm belief to overturn group consensus and alter the outcome of the deliberation through the character of Juror Eight. This research applies the concepts of prejudice, minority influence, groupthink, and peer pressure to demonstrate how emotional reactions and personal experiences can impede logical decision-making. Ultimately, Twelve Angry Men is a critique of the importance of moral responsibility, critical thinking, and individual courage in challenging society norms and achieving justice in both legal and lawful situations. This essay illustrates how individual belief can inspire more critical thinking and bring about dramatic change in group decision-making, even though conformity may dominate in group situations.

KEYWORDS: - Social Psychology, Conformity, Conviction, 12 Angry Men

I. INTRODUCTION

12 Angry Men by Reginald Rose is an American classic piece of drama that explores the delicate intersection of morality, social pressure, and group decision-making. A young defendant is tried for murder, and the drama revolves around the twelve jurors, who must determine his fate in a jury room. Insightful psychological analysis of conformity, persuasion, and the tensions between social expectations and personal beliefs is exposed in Twelve Angry Men by this extreme scenario (Reginald Rose). An engaging analysis of how social psychology affects human action, the play demonstrates the power of both individual defiance and groupthink. The aim of this essay is to analyse the intricate relationship that exists between belief and conformity within the jury room, investigating the ways in which the social identities, prejudices, and psychological characteristics of the characters affect their choices and behaviours.

II. SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY THEORIES REFLECTED IN THE PLAY

Let's connect some major psychological theories directly to the jurors' behaviour:

Theory	Psychologist	Juror Behaviour
Conformity	Solomon Asch	Juror 2, Juror 12 initially follow the group without strong conviction
Minority Influence	Serge Moscovici	Juror 8 influences the group through calm persistence
Groupthink	Irving Janis	Juror 7 and others push for consensus to avoid conflict
Obedience to Authority	Stanley Milgram (indirectly)	Jurors initially defer to the judge's implied authority rather than forming independent opinions
Bystander Effect /Social Inhibition	Darley & Latane	Some jurors hesitate to speak out, especially early in the play, even when they sense something is wrong

The Psychology Behind Group Dynamics

Reginald Rose explores group dynamics masterfully in Twelve Angry Men by analyzing twelve jurors' interactions and choices. The play offers a powerful demonstration of how social psychology operates, particularly how individuals behave within a group situation when facing tough moral and ethical decisions (Reginald Rose). In order to thoroughly enjoy the play, one needs to understand well the psychology behind group action, such as groupthink, obedience,



conformity, and peer pressure (Janis). These psychological phenomena play a significant role in the jurors' decisions, interactions, and, ultimately, the verdict of the case.

Groupthink: The Pressure to Conform

Groupthink, according to social psychologist Irving Janis' definition, is one of the most significant psychological events in *Twelve Angry Men*. When the desire for harmony and conformity by a group creates dysfunctional or irrational decision-making, it's referred to as groupthink (Janis). With 11 jurors voting guilty and only Juror 8 dissenting, the first vote in the juror trial is almost unanimous. Even though they are unsure, most jurors go along with the majority because they really want to make a quick decision and not disagree (Reginald Rose). For example, Juror 7 is shown to be primarily concerned with getting the verdict over with because he has a baseball game to play. Even if he has not fully taken into account the information, his requirement of urgency causes him to disregard the gravity of the decision and take the majority view. Another such example is Juror 10, who initially gives prejudiced views but takes comfort in the fact that they are in accordance with others. At such times, social pressure to conform and not stand out can have a great effect.

Quite early in the conversation, the team practices groupthink such as: unquestioned unanimity (without a proper discussion, everybody thinks the defendant is guilty), coercion to comply (Juror 8 is belittled by other jurors for questioning the judgment), and suppression of dissenting views (most jurors fear confrontation and are thus reluctant to contradict the majority) (Janis) (Reginald Rose).

The Role of Minority Influence

The concept of minority power within the dynamics of a group is established throughout the play through Juror 8's insistence on being a lone dissenter in the face of the majority. Based on the social psychology concept of minority influence, even if the majority does disagree at first, a persistent, confident minority can influence the attitudes and behaviour of the majority. The panel is compelled to look closely at the facts and confront their prejudices and assumptions because of Juror 8's strong belief. Juror 8 increasingly shifts the other jurors' perceptions through the application of cool reasoning, tolerant questioning, and emotional appeal (Reginald Rose). Although this minority opinion is initially marginalized, it ultimately gets momentum since the social incentives to conform are diminished by the persistence and rational argument of the minority. Since he realizes how important it is to uphold justice, Juror 9, the elder of the jurors, begins to agree with Juror 8. This change illustrates how, in spite of group pressure, a logical minority can make an impact on the majority.

Social Influence and Conformity

Another powerful influence operating in the jury room is conformity. It refers to the tendency to change one's behaviour, attitudes, or opinions in order to fit into a social group. Initially, a few jurors join the majority verdict without giving much thought to the evidence. The shy and bashful Juror 2 goes along with the crowd without presenting his own arguments. His lack of confidence feeds his conformity, and it is only after greater introspection that he begins to speak up and use critical thinking (Reginald Rose). Juror 6 also goes along with the majority initially, but as the debate continues, he becomes more confident and begins to disagree with the majority when he believes that it is unjust. Normative social influence, as per social psychology, is when individuals go along with the group decision even if they disagree with it in an effort to be accepted by others (Asch). This is observed by several jurors, including Jurors 2 and 12, who are hesitant to voice their opinions or cast "not guilty" verdicts. When individuals conform because they believe others are wiser than they are, informational social influence is also applicable. For instance, Juror 4 is the rational influence that convinces others and largely relies on reasoning and evidence.

Obedience and Authority

Obedience to authority, a theme that is set early on in the play, is the second psychological element. On the surface, jurors do appear to obey the processes of the court and tacit authority. Jurors take on the assumption that the legal system has in part made up their minds and do not argue the judge's directions (Reginald Rose). But as the arguments continue, Juror 8 challenges the fairness of the verdict, questioning the implicit authority of the legal system. His nonconformity to the anticipated obedience shows how a minority voice can confront authority when it brings a differing, compelling argument.

Juror 11, himself an immigrant watchmaker, appreciates the law and legal process and serves as a check upon the other jurors' respect for authority. Impartiality and due process are important, as exemplified by his own life as an outsider (Reginald Rose).



Cognitive Dissonance: The Inner Conflict of Conformity

The mental agony that arises when beliefs and conduct conflict is called cognitive dissonance, and it is felt by some jurors as deliberation advances and they begin to switch votes. Most jurors vote "guilty" initially because they were too apathetic to care deeply or because they did not want to oppose the majority. These jurors do experience tension between their original vote and the new information they are considering due to Juror 8's arguments, which raise doubts about the case (Reginald Rose). Some jurors change their votes in an attempt to reduce this dissonance. Juror 4 changes his vote after carefully considering the reasons and coming to the conclusion that the eyewitness testimony was unreliable. Juror 6 also makes up his mind when he sees how unjust it is to find a person guilty without getting a fair trial.

Prejudice and Moral Blindness in Twelve Angry Men

Reginald Rose explores tough social issues in *Twelve Angry Men*, particularly the way bias and moral myopia affect individuals' decisions. Twelve jurors have to decide the fate of an adolescent defendant who has been accused of murder in the play's small jury room. While the boy's innocence or guilt is the central issue of dispute, prejudices, life experience, and moral principles that influence the jurors' choices and disable their judgment form a more profound source of conflict (Reginald Rose). Prejudices play a significant role in shaping jurors' perceptions of the case, as prejudice is defined as preconceived notions or judgments regarding a person based on who they are, their race, class, or other characteristics (Kibin). Their internal battle between their initial decisions and the new dilemmas demonstrates how the mind attempts to reconcile opposing notions by either rationalizing them or changing behaviour to accommodate them. Another key topic is moral blindness, or the inability to see or act on a moral reality. This is particularly relevant when jurors are either so blinded by prejudice in their own minds as to be unable to come up with a fair verdict or are themselves unable to see the moral dimensions of their decisions. Rose offers a strong critique of how prejudice and moral blindness destroy justice through the attitudes and actions of the characters, emphasizing the need for empathy, fairness, and self-awareness in social and legal institutions.

Juror 10 is the most blatantly biased juror. He has strong racial and class prejudice, especially towards the "slum" people. He makes sweeping generalizations about those who are poor throughout the debate, referring to them as "animals" and suggesting that they are all basically violent and untrustworthy (Reginald Rose). He tries to use his preconceptions to justify a guilty verdict without regard to the evidence, and his prejudice goes unchallenged for a time. Prejudice Example: When Juror 10 makes the statement, "You know how these people are," his open racism is apparent. "They lie from birth. They have no choice." His objectivity in assessing the issue is clouded by this prejudiced outlook, and he becomes morally blind (Reginald Rose). This pronouncement illustrates Juror 10's perception that the defendant is guilty from the beginning based upon his racial and class-based bias. His generalization based on the defendant's background and not the facts of the case handicap him. His perception that guilt is established through the defendant's socioeconomic class and race is a sad commentary of the entrenched prejudice that still persists in many areas of society.

Prejudice and Social Identity

The psychological concept of social identity—the notion that individuals' identities are often shaped by the groups they are part of—is also at play in Juror 10's views (Marlene E Turner). Juror 10 is motivated by his social identity as an individual who believes his own group is better, whether it is based on wealth, colour, or education. Whereas overt prejudice is frequently seen in jurors like Juror 10, moral blindness is more insidious and dangerous and plagues jurors who are either unable to act nobly in the face of injustice or who are unable to see the moral implications of their actions. The "moral blindness" refers to a lack of information or ignorance of moral issues, often due to emotional blindness, self-interest, or personal biases that prevent one from making the difference between right and evil. This interplay of social identity and moral distortion reveals how dangerous unchecked bias can be in legal and ethical decision-making.

Juror 3: The Personal Bias that Obscures Justice

One of the lead characters that epitomize moral blindness is Juror 3. Since he has unfinished personal issues with his son, whom he shares a tense relationship with, he cannot make a rational decision. Juror 3's personal baggage and unresolved resentment against his child are responsible for his moral blindness. This bias leads him to perceive the defendant as a "bad kid" since he identifies the defendant's behaviour with his own son's disobedience and rebellion. Juror 3 lets his feelings override his juror responsibilities by attributing his own emotional problems to the case during deliberation. His perception of the defendant as a "bad kid" is based on this personal bias, as he identifies the defendant's behaviour with his own son's defiance and disobedience. Juror 3 allows his own personal emotions to cloud his jury responsibilities throughout the deliberations by bringing his own emotional challenges to the case (SparkNotes; LitCharts).



"I'm going to see the kid gets what he has coming to him," he declares. Here, he disregards the moral responsibility that accompanies issuing someone the death penalty because his own prejudice prevents him from looking at the facts of the case logically or sympathetically. The end of the play, when Juror 3 is the last individual to vote guilty, is where his moral blindness is most apparent. He resolutely holds fast to his belief in the guilty little boy in the face of increasingly sceptical inclinations and cogent arguments put forth by other jurors. His climactic flash-out, which comes when he rents a snapshot of his boy, is evidence of his psychological mending as well as recognition of the fact that his prejudices as well as buried pain clouded his thought process (SparkNotes; LitCharts).

The Interplay between Prejudice and Moral Blindness

The fate of an innocent man in *Twelve Angry Men* hinges on the jurors' ability to confront their personal biases and emotional blind spots. Reginald Rose effectively demonstrates how prejudice—be it racial, class-based, or personal—can distort perception and hinder empathetic or equitable decision-making. Moral blindness, as portrayed in the play, shows how one's sense of justice can be clouded by self-interest, apathy, and unresolved emotional issues, especially when the stakes are high (Reginald Rose). Ultimately, the play illustrates that achieving true justice requires individuals to overcome their biases, confront their moral blind spots, and make decisions grounded in fairness, compassion, and moral awareness. The deliberation process in *Twelve Angry Men* serves as a powerful example of how individuals can change for the better when they are willing to challenge their own biases and make decisions based on justice and truth, embodying the essence of moral courage (Reginald Rose).

Theoretical Framework: Social Psychology and Conformity

To understand the behaviours depicted in *Twelve Angry Men*, specifically conformity, social psychology is essential. When individuals change their opinions, attitudes, or behaviours to align with social norms or the pressure of others, it is referred to as conformity. Especially when high stakes are involved and the decision-making process is emotionally and socially charged, jurors are under immense pressure to follow the majority opinion in the jury room. Solomon Asch's classic conformity experiment, where subjects were compelled to give incorrect answers to simple questions, is a prime example of how group influence can make people alter their positions (Asch). This aligns with the concept of minority influence, where a lone dissenter can trigger analytical thinking and ultimately change the opinion of the majority. Juror Eight's insistence on questioning the evidence makes the group reevaluate their assumptions, progressively eroding the group's confidence in the defendant's guilt. In this regard, *Twelve Angry Men* can be seen as a reflection on the vulnerability of justice to social pressure. The play emphasizes the importance of independent thinking and the strength to resist the tide when the group's decision-making process is compromised by conformity. The final verdict to acquit the defendant is not just a triumph of individual conviction but also a triumph of reason over social pressure (Reginald Rose).

The Influence of Authority Figures and Social Status

The conformity-justice dilemma in *Twelve Angry Men* also depends greatly on the roles of authority and social status. The foreman, who tries to keep things under control but does little to assert authority, is a very passive character in the beginning of the play. Conversely, since they are lacking in confidence, Jurors One (the foreman) and Two respect other people's opinions. However, it is Juror Eight who assumes an unstated leadership role due to his calm demeanour and uncompromising commitment to justice. This dynamic illustrates how the depth of one's conviction, not one's position, can establish power within a group. Personal biases and socioeconomic status of the jurors also influence how they reach a decision. Juror Ten's blatant racism, for instance, undermines his judgment and leads him to deny the defendant's innocence based on assumptions rather than firm facts. Such prejudice illustrates how deeply ingrained cultural assumptions can foster conformity and distort one's sense of justice (Reginald Rose).

III. CONCLUSION

Besides being a gripping courtroom drama, *Twelve Angry Men* examines intensively the psychological forces at play in group decisions. The jurors' behaviours demonstrate the tension between conviction and conformity, as well as the manner in which social pressures, personal convictions, and prejudices shape our decisions. The play serves as a powerful reminder of how important it is to remain steadfast in one's principles, especially when faced with strong social pressure. It also highlights how valuable critical thinking is and how valuable it is to question the prevailing quo, particularly in high-stakes situations such as a trial where justice hangs in the balance. Ultimately, *Twelve Angry Men* makes a classic assessment of the complexity of human nature, and the ways in which moral integrity and social psychology interact to impact the quest for justice.



REFERENCES

1. Asch, Solomon E. Opinions And Social Pressure. california: W. H. Freeman And Company, 1955.
2. Janis, I.L. "Victims Of Groupthink: A Psychological study of foreign policies decisions." Houghton Mifflin (1972).
3. Kibin, K. "A description of persuasion, conformity, minority, influence and cognitive heuristics and the relation of these concepts to twelve angry men." (2025).
4. Marlene E Turner, Anthony R Pratkanis. "Twenty-Five Years of Groupthink Theory and Research: Lessons from the Evaluation of a Theory." Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes (1998): 107.
5. Reginald Rose, David Mamet. Twelve Angry Men (Penguin Classics). Kingwood,TX,U.S.A: Penguin Classics, 2006.



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA



International Journal of Advanced Research in Arts, Science, Engineering & Management (IJARASEM)

| Mobile No: +91-9940572462 | Whatsapp: +91-9940572462 | ijarasem@gmail.com |

www.ijarasem.com