

Why We Should Resist the Urge to Shame People into Conformity

The American psychologist Rollo May (1909-1994) once observed that the opposite of courage is not cowardice; it's conformity.

May believed this was particularly true for modern man, but it would be a mistake to assume the pressure to conform is a phenomenon confined to our age.

The individual, Kipling observed, has *always* struggled to resist the pull of the tribe, and the tribe has always tried to bend the individual to its will.

It's part of the human experience and a theme common in American literature (*To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Cool Hand Luke*), history (Anne Hutchinson and Rosa Parks), and film (*Dead Poets Society* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*).

These are all fine examples of the pressure to conform, but my personal favorite comes from a *Seinfeld* episode in which Kramer is participating in an AIDS walk. When a volunteer hands him a red ribbon to wear during the walk, he declines. The volunteer is not happy.

VOLUNTEER: But you have to wear an AIDS ribbon.

KRAMER: I have to?

VOLUNTEER: Yes.

KRAMER: Yeah, see, that's why I don't want to.

Wearing the ribbon would not cost Kramer anything; it's a mere symbol. Wearing the ribbon is a much easier task than walking

miles, which he is doing. But the people walking with Kramer don't see it this way.

WALKER 1: Hey, where's your ribbon?

KRAMER: I don't wear one.

WALKER 2: You don't wear the ribbon? Aren't you against AIDS ?

Kramer: Yeah, I'm against AIDS . I'm walking, aren't I? I just don't wear the ribbon.

WALKER 3: Who do you think you are?

WALKER 1: Put the ribbon on!

WALKER 2: Hey, Cedric, Bob. This guy won't wear a ribbon.

BOB: Who? Who will not wear the ribbon?

The episode came to mind during the Golden Globes on Sunday,

when actress Blanca Blanco (and [a handful](#) of others) decided [not to wear black](#) to the award ceremony, the color selected to show solidarity with the #MeToo movement.

Blanco wore a red dress, which drew the ire of the Twitterverse.

You don't get to blatantly thumb your nose at a movement, then cry "shaming". That's not how it works. You clearly were in dire need of attention, you got it. Maybe not the kind you wanted, but you took that gamble.

– Allie (@bloggyblog17) [January 8, 2018](#)

It's ok to disagree with the [#MeToo](#) movement, nevertheless wearing a dress like this when women are asking to heard not just seen is so appalling.[#GoldenGlobes](#)

– ClassyNoggin (@classynogin) [January 8, 2018](#)

The complaints sounded very much like 'Wear the ribbon!' to me. Blanco faced pressure to comply with a symbolic gesture. She declined and was met with her own version of "ribbon bullies."

Wearing black outfits to a Hollywood celebration is basically an empty gesture, particularly in the aftermath of the sexual assault claims rocking Hollywood, and the hollowness of "the campaign" was not lost on everyone.

Writing at the *New York Times*, Jenna Wortham [hinted](#) it was essentially virtue signaling that gave actors cover. It costs them nothing but makes them feel good.

“There is something unsettling about how little these celebrities have to lose by taking these stances. They aren’t risking financial ruin, nor are they vulnerable to violence, as is the norm for most who take a bold position. It feels completely privileged, and a little complicit, to still participate in the larger system that has condoned sexual violence in their industry. Besides, don’t they already wear lots of black on the red carpet anyway?”

The definition of virtue signaling is this: “the action or practice of publicly expressing opinions or sentiments intended to demonstrate one’s good character or the moral correctness of one’s position on a particular issue.”

And not one of those fancy people wearing black to honor our rapes would have lifted a finger had it not been so. I have no time for Hollywood fakery, but you I love, .@AsiaArgento #RoseArmy <https://t.co/9e0938y5sI>

– rose mcgowan (@rosemcgowan) [January 8, 2018](#)

If one chooses to participate in symbolic campaigns of this kind, that is all well and good. But we should resist the temptation to shame those who don’t. (This logic would apply to people who choose not to stand for a flag, too.)

Sometimes people just don’t want to wear the damn ribbon. And that’s okay.

“This is America,” Kramer says. “I don’t have to wear anything I don’t want to wear.”

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[Image Credit: Twitter | [@blancablanco](#)]