

The Devil's Advocate

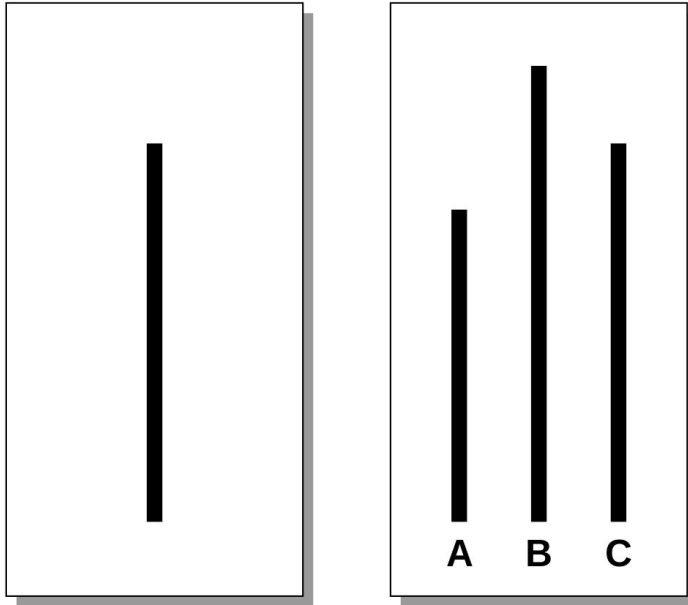
Or, the Perils of Conformity

Solomon Asch

- Solomon Asch was a pioneering Gestalt psychologist.
- Gestalt psychologists emphasized that organisms perceive entire patterns or configurations, not merely individual components.
- Asch is famous for his studies of Impression formation, and also on conformity Bias, which is our topic today.



Solomon Asch's Conformity Experiments



Which of the three lines A, B, C, in the right box, is closest in length to the line in the box on the left?

Solomon Asch and Conformity Experiments-2



- Type of Conformity
 - Informational Conformity
 - Normative Conformity
- Unanimity casts a spell...
- Anonymity breaks the spell of Unanimity

Video 1: Click the picture to play video, or use this URL <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOBhKR4MK3w&t=1s>

Muzafer Sherif's Autokinetic Experiment

- Muzamer conducted an experiment to test conformity.
- He asked usher college students to go into a dark room which was equipped with a stationary spot light.
- Without any frame of reference, which the experiment had none, such a light appears to move spontaneously, an illusion called the **autokinetic effect**.



Muzafer Sherif's Autokinetic Experiment-2

- At the beginning each subject was asked individually to judge the light's movement.
- The range reported was wide, some would say inches, others feet.
- He would establish a narrow range that the individual would report seeing.
- Sherif would then put these individuals into a room with other participants.
- Their estimates would still vary widely but soon each group would create a standard range.

Muzafer Sherif's Autokinetic Experiment-3

- After being in a **dark room** with a **spot light** individually and then with a group Sherif would put the individual back into seclusion again.
- He would then ask the participant to make estimates of the lights movement.
- The participants judgments would than resemble the group established normal range.
- Sherif's experiments show that most people conform to group-think...
- ...and this is automatic or subconscious.

The Pull of the Group!



Video 2: Click the picture to play video, or use this URL <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyDDyT1IDhA&t=1s>

Devil's Advocate and the Rate of Canonization

- In the 15 years tenure (1963-1978) of Pope Paul VI, 16 new saints were created.
- Pope John Paul II stopped the practice of “Devil’s Advocate” in 1983.
- In the 26.5 years tenure (1978-2005) of Pope John Paul II, 80 new saints were created.
- The rate of canonization increased by more than 3 times.

Source: https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/barro/files/saints_paper_020910.pdf

The Message

- **Question:** How can a group harness the benefits of team work while avoiding Conformity bias?
- **Answer:** Turn by turn, all team members must play the Devil's Advocate.

Appendix: URLs of videos.

Just in case the video does not get embedded properly, you can visit these links:

Video 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOBhKR4MK3w&t=1s>

Video 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyDDyT1IDhA&t=1s>

Video 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DolxN6B4PQ>

Solomon Asch and Conformity Experiments-2

