

# **Social Psychology**

## **Lesson 6: Conformity and Obedience Part 1**

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# Topics:

- ☑ Conformity and its Types
- ☑ Muzafer Sherif's Studies of Norm Formation
- ☑ Solomon Asch's Study of Group Pressure
- ☑ Reasons for Conforming
- ☑ Factors that Influence Conformity
- ☑ Resisting Conformity

# Expected Learning Outcomes

- ☑ Identify the landmark experiments in conformity and provide a breakdown of the methodologies used.
- ☑ Identify the factors that affect and promote conformity.
- ☑ Differentiate the two major reasons for conforming.
- ☑ Explain the mechanisms on how we can resist conformity.

# CONFORMITY

- A change in behavior or belief as the result of real or imagined group pressure.
- adjusting one's behavior or thinking to coincide with a group standard

*People often choose to conform to society rather than to pursue personal desires – because it is often easier to follow the path others have made already, rather than forging a new one.*

# CONFORMITY

It is

... at times good

... at times bad

... at times inconsequential




# CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

## Western culture

- Submission
- Compliance

## Eastern culture

- Communal sensitivity
  - Responsiveness
  - Cooperative team play
- 

# Types of Conformity

- **ACCEPTANCE** – involves both acting and believing in accord with social pressure.
  - You exercise, as millions do, because you accept that exercise is healthy.
  - You stop at red lights because you accept that not doing so is dangerous.
- **COMPLIANCE** – involves outwardly going along with the group while inwardly disagreeing.
  - You followed your school dress code even though you thought it was dumb, because that was better than detention.
  - **OBEDIENCE** – compliance with commands given by an authority figure.

# CLASSIC CONFORMITY AND OBEDIENCE STUDIES

- Muzaffer Sherif's Studies of Norm Formation
- Solomon Asch's Study of Group Pressure
- Stanley Milgram's Study of Obedience

# SOCIAL NORMS

- Patterns of behaviors that are accepted as normal, and to which an individual is expected to conform in a particular group or culture.
- They guide behavior but without the force of laws.
- Norms are the unwritten rules that govern how we behave.

# Key Functions of Norms

1

They help reduce uncertainty about how to behave properly.

2

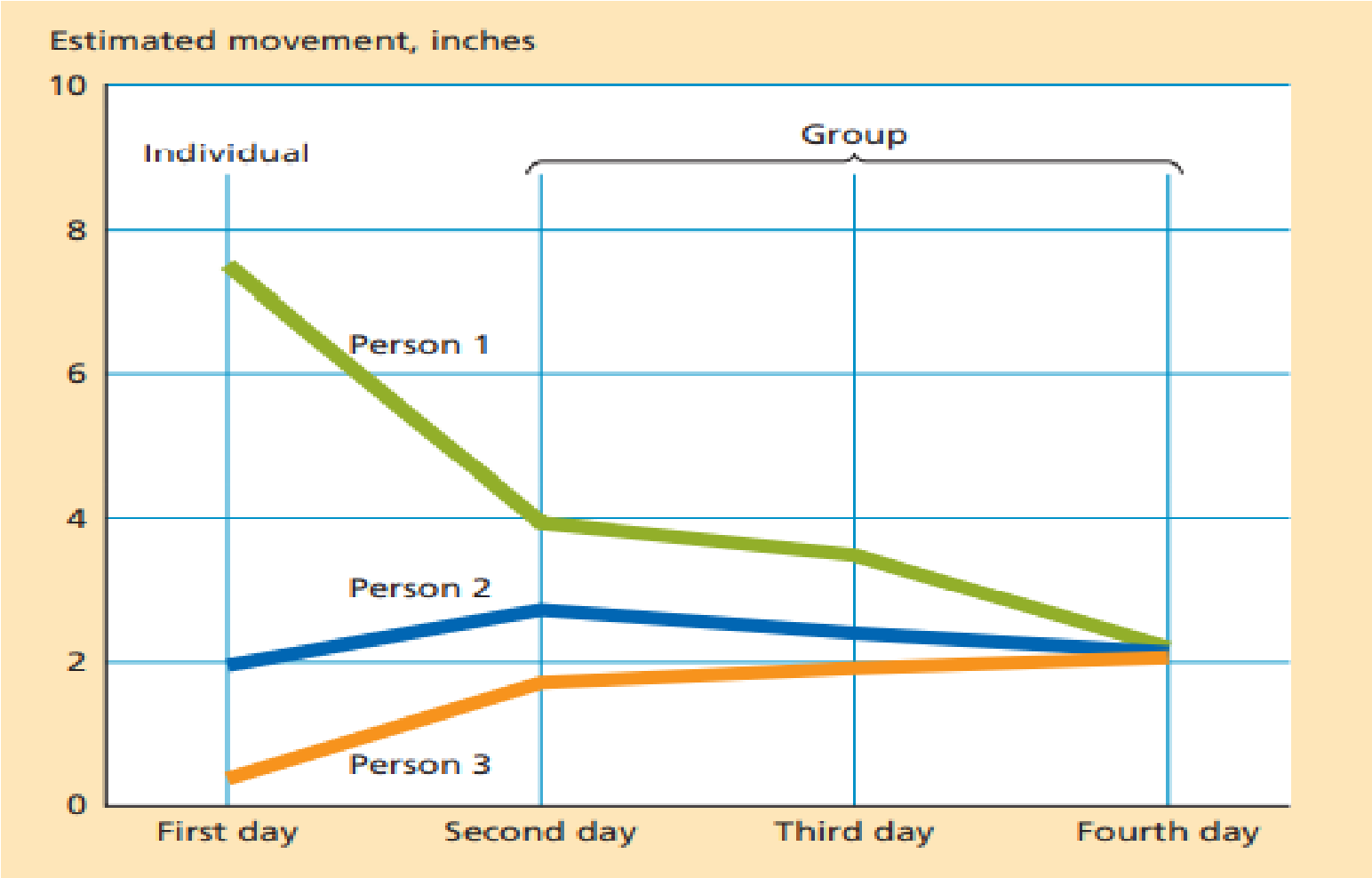
They help to coordinate individual behavior.

3

They help with the distribution of outcome.

# A. MUZAFER SHERIF'S STUDIES OF NORM FORMATION

- **Aim:** Demonstrate that people conform to group norms when they are put in an ambiguous situation.
- **Autokinetic phenomenon** (auto – self; kinetic – motion) – an optical illusion; the apparent movement of a stationary point of light in the dark.
- **Procedure:**
  - Day 1:** Participants were alone; they estimated how far a stationary point of light moved
  - Days 2 – 4:** Participants were put in a group of three; they estimated how far a stationary point of light moved.



Source: Sherif, 1935, as cited in Myers & Tewenge, 2016

# Re-testing result:

- A year later, Sherif retested the participants alone again. Participants continued to give the "group" answer rather than returning to their original individual estimates.

# Lesson of the Experiment:

*“Our views of reality  
are not ours alone.”*

# Limitations of Sherif's Experiment:

1. The study involved extreme ambiguity
2. The study was conducted in an artificial laboratory setting
3. The study involved limited and homogeneous sample
4. The task involves no social consequence
5. Lack of proper debriefing

# CHAMELEON EFFECT



Source: <https://sk.pinterest.com/pin/244953667213457998/>

- Coined by Tanya Chartrand & John Bargh (1999)
- The tendency to nonconsciously mimic the behaviors (e.g., postures, mannerisms, facial expressions) of someone with whom one is interacting

# Chameleon Effect Experiment

**1**

Students interacted with confederates who smiled frequently, rubbed their faces, or shook their feet.

**Result:** Participants automatically mimicked these behaviors.

**Findings:** The effect is unconscious; when questioned, no participants realized they were imitating the other person.

**2**

Confederates either subtly mimicked participants or remained neutral.

**Result:** Participants who were mimicked liked the confederate more and rated the interaction as smoother.

**Findings:** Mimicry acts as social glue, building rapport and signaling that people are "in sync" without saying a word.

**3**

Researchers measured participants' empathy levels before observing their mimicry habits.

**Result:** Individuals with high empathy scores mimicked others significantly.

**Findings:** Being "tuned in" to others' emotions increases the likelihood of automatic physical mirroring.

# Yawn effect



- “We yawn when others yawn”.
- Robert Provine (2005) exposed people to a five-minute video of a man yawning repeatedly and a man smiling repeatedly.

## **Result:**

- 55% of people watching a video of a man yawning yawned
- 21% of people watching a video of a man smiling yawned

# YAWN EFFECT

- Seeing a yawning face stimulates “mirror neurons” in the brain.
- These neurons are responsible for our as mimicking witnessed actions.
- Provine also found that even "thinking" about yawning triggers it at almost the same rate (approx. 55%) as actually seeing one.

# WERTHER EFFECT



- an imitative suicidal behavior
- It is named after the protagonist of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's 1774 novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, in which the lead character dies by suicide.

Colored engraving of Werther and Lotte,  
<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/1/1b/WertherLotte.jpg/250px-WertherLotte.jpg>

- **Meta-analysis:** Stack (2003) used logistic regression analysis to analyze 293 findings from 42 studies on the impact of publicized suicide stories in the media on the incidence of suicide in the real world and found that:

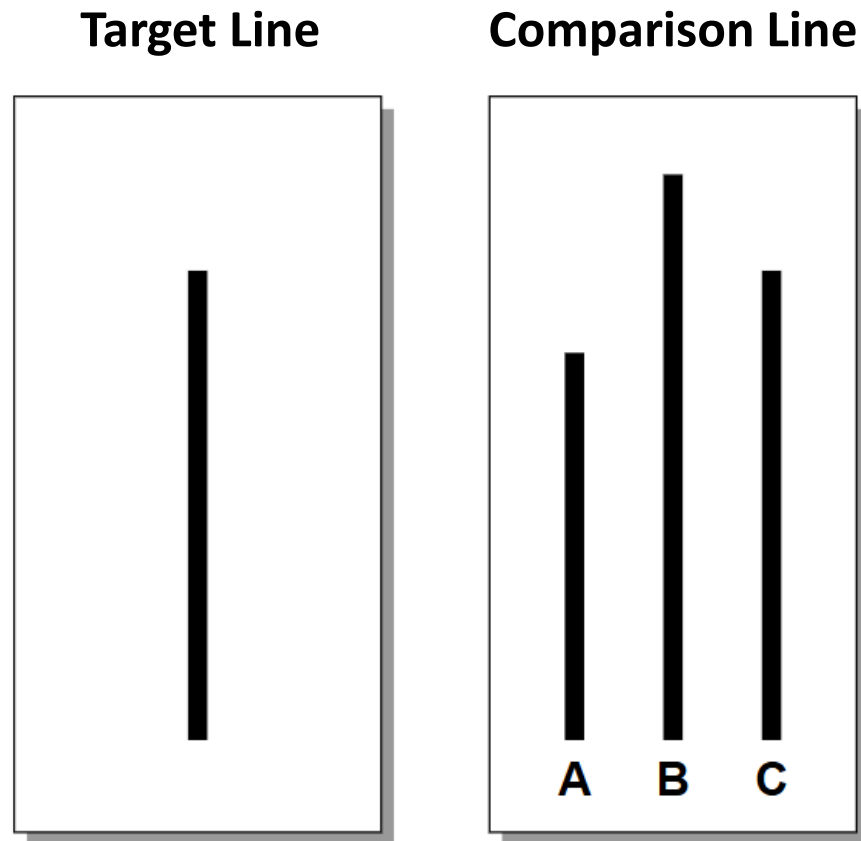


1. Entertainment or political celebrity suicide stories were 14.3 times more likely to find a copycat effect.
2. Real stories were 4.03 times more likely to uncover a copycat effect as opposed to fictional story.
3. Research based on televised stories was 82% less likely to report a copycat effect than research based on newspapers.

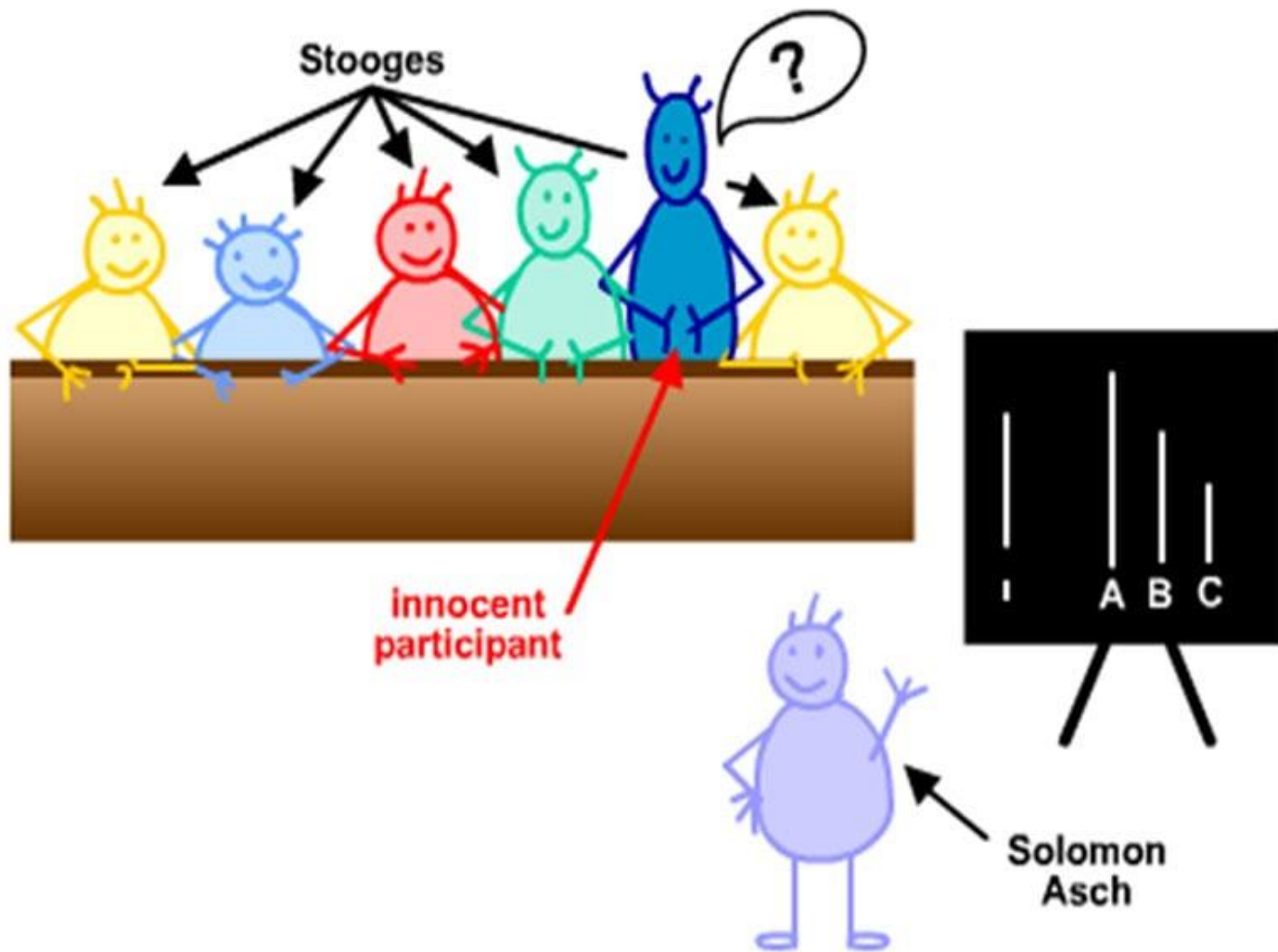
# PLURALISTIC IGNORANCE

- Type of norm misconception that occurs when each individual in a group privately rejects the norms of the group, but believes that others accept them.
- Example: After a teacher finishes explaining a difficult concept during a discussion, he ask if anyone has questions. While the majority of the students may feel completely lost, they look around and see their peers sitting quietly or nodding. Each student privately assumes that everyone else has mastered the material and that they are the only ones struggling. Fearing social stigma or appearing "unintelligent," every student remains silent to protect their image. In reality, the entire group shares the same internal experience of confusion, yet they collectively create a false impression of total comprehension.

# B. ASCH'S STUDY OF GROUP PRESSURE



- Subjects were shown two cards: one with a Target Line and another with three Comparison Lines (A, B, and C).
- A participant was placed in a room with seven other people who were confederates.

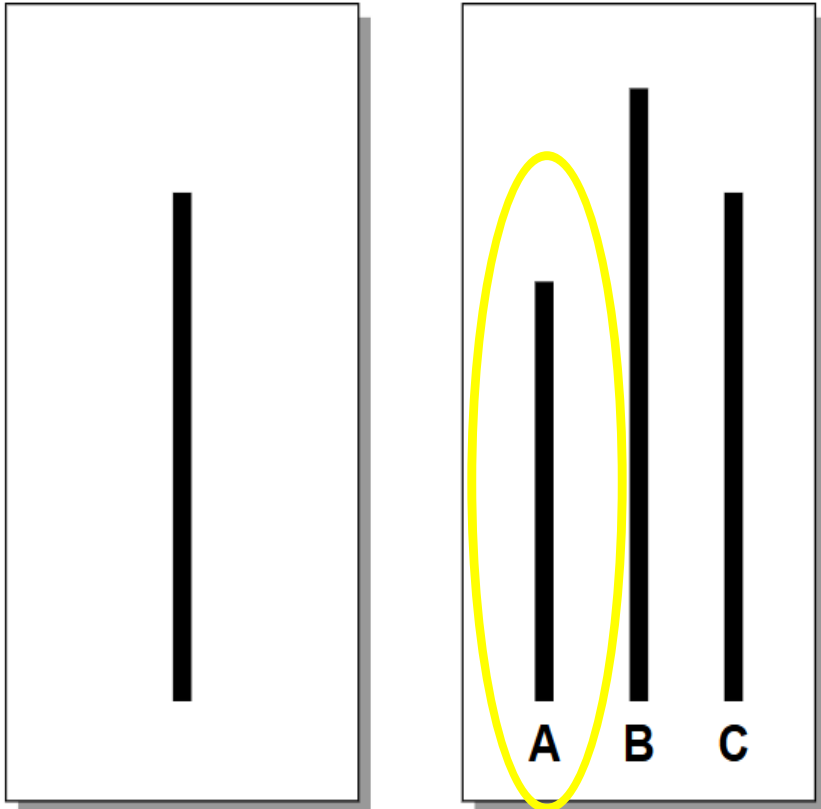


- Each person had to say aloud which comparison line matched the target line.
- The real participant always answered last or second-to-last. In saying their answers.

Source: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/wp-content/uploads/asch-experiment.jpg>

# RESULT:

Most confederates chose A, not C.



- When alone, 95% of the participants got the correct answer.
- When in group, subjects were most likely to follow confederates and choose wrong answer (74%)
- Asch found that people were willing to ignore reality and give an incorrect answers in order to conform to the rest of the group.

# Limitations of Asch's experiment:

1. Use of a biased sample (participants were all male of the same age group).
2. The task at hand was artificial, unrelated to real life situations.
3. Experiment results reflected the specific socio-cultural conditions of 1950s America.
4. The deliberate deception of participants was an ethical issue.

**Hamlet:** Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in the shape of a camel?

**Polonius:** Tis like a camel indeed

**Hamlet:** Me thinks it is a weasel

**Polonius:** It is backed like a weasel

**Hamlet:** Or like a whale?

**Polonius:** Very like a whale



**Why does  
Polonius so  
readily agree  
every time  
Hamlet changes  
his mind?**



# 1. NORMATIVE CONFORMITY

- Results from a person's desire to gain approval, to fit with the group or to avoid rejection
- There may be a severe price to pay if normative behavior is not respected
- Caused by concern for social image

## 2. INFORMATIONAL CONFORMITY

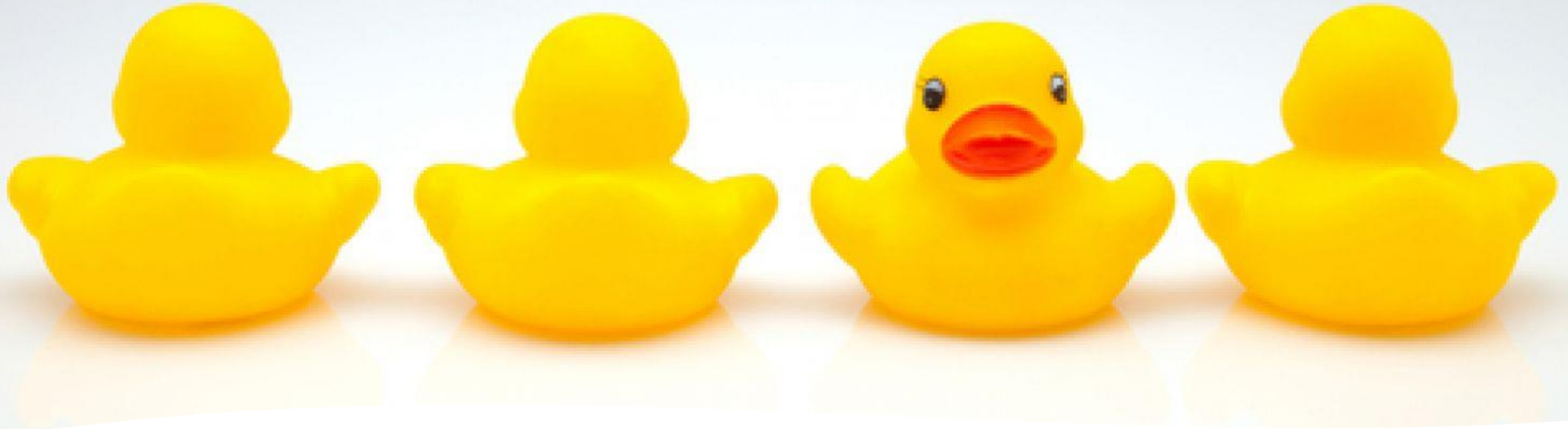
- Occurs when situation is ambiguous and you're not sure what to do
- Occurs when immediate action is necessary during a crisis
- Heightened when unsure of opinions or abilities
- Caused by the desire to be correct

### *Example:*

If a fire alarm sounds but you see no smoke, you'll likely follow others: staying put if they do, or running if they flee.

# FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CONFORMITY

1. The group is at least three members
2. The group is unanimous
3. The person admires the group
4. The person feels incompetent
5. Responses are public, not anonymous
6. One had made no prior commitment
7. Demographic variables – age, gender and culture



**How to resist conformity?**

# A. Finding an Ally

- Ally is anyone who provides social support by not going along with the crowd.
- Having just one other person agree with you (or even just disagree with the majority) undermines the unanimity.

## B. Motivation

- People who are motivated to maintain their integrity or autonomy are the ones who are likely to resist to conformity or group pressure.
- People who are primarily motivated to gain social approval are likely the ones who easily conform and give in to group pressure.

## C. Minority Influence

- At times, one person or a small group actually flips the script and convinces the majority to change their minds.
- Seen in the 1986 People Power Revolution (EDSA Revolution)

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