

You, An Idea Thief? Say It Isn't So.

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The Wall Street Journal:

All good things come to an end. By 1970, the beloved Beatles had decided to go their separate ways.

Within a year, George Harrison reached No. 1 with a solo song, "My Sweet Lord." But his sweet time at the top was short-lived. Within a month, a lawsuit was filed. Harrison's song had original lyrics, but shared a melody and harmony with the 1963 hit song by the Chiffons, "He's So Fine."

Was the Beatles' lead guitarist guilty of plagiarism?

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The psychologist Dan Gilbert calls this *kleptomnesia*: generating an idea that you believe is novel, but in fact was created by someone else. It's accidental plagiarism, and it's all too common in creative work.

In a classic demonstration, psychologists Alan Brown and Dana Murphy invited people to brainstorm in groups of four. They took turns generating lists of sports, musical instruments, clothes, or four-legged animals. Each participant generated four ideas from each category. Next, the participants were asked to write down the four ideas that they personally generated for each category.

Read the whole story: [The Wall Street Journal](#)