

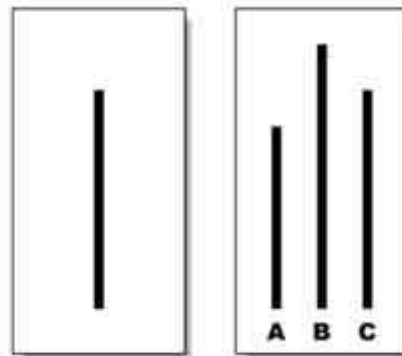
Asch (1951): Study Summary

Aim: Solomon Asch (1951) conducted an experiment to investigate the extent to which social pressure from a majority group could affect a person to conform.

Procedure: Asch used a lab experiment to study conformity, whereby 50 male students from Swarthmore College in the USA participated in a 'vision test.' Using a line judgment task, Asch put a naive participant in a room with seven confederates.



The confederates had agreed in advance what their responses would be when presented with the line task. The real participant did not know this and was led to believe that the other seven participants were also real participants like themselves.



Each person in the room had to state aloud which comparison line (A, B or C) was most like the target line. The answer was always obvious. The real participant sat at the end of the row and gave his or her answer last.

There were 18 trials in total, and the confederates gave the wrong answer on 12 trials (called the critical trials). Asch was interested to see if the real participant

would conform to the majority view. Asch's experiment also had a control condition where there were no confederates, only a "real participant."

Results: Asch measured the number of times each participant conformed to the majority view. On average, about one third (32%) of the participants who were placed in this situation went along and conformed with the clearly incorrect majority on the critical trials.

Over the 12 critical trials, about 75% of participants conformed at least once, and 25% of participant never conformed. In the control group, with no pressure to conform to confederates, less than 1% of participants gave the wrong answer.

Conclusion: Why did the participants conform so readily? When they were interviewed after the experiment, most of them said that they did not really believe their conforming answers, but had gone along with the group for fear of being ridiculed or thought "peculiar." A few of them said that they really did believe the group's answers were correct.

Apparently, people conform for two main reasons: because they want to fit in with the group (normative influence) and because they believe the group is better informed than they are (informational influence).