



## Asch (1951, 1952, 1956)

**Aim:** To study the social influences on conformity

Crutchfield (1962) described **conformity** as “yielding to group pressure”. According to Aronson (1976) the pressure can be real (involving the physical presence of others) or imagined (involving the pressure of social norms and expectations). Klemm (1958) suggested it can take several forms, including **compliance, conformity, internalisation** and **identification**.

### STUDIES OF CONFORMITY

#### Jenness (1932)

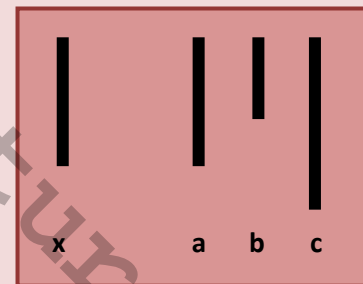
Asked subjects to estimate the number of beans in a bottle, first individually and then as a group. When asked individually again, the subjects showed a shift towards the group's estimation rather than their own. This was, however, a simple experiment

#### Sherif (1935)

Asked subjects to estimate how far a spot of light in a completely dark room moved. Sherif kept the point of light stable, but due to the autokinetic effect illusion (caused by eye movements) each individual reported consistent estimates which differed from other subjects'. However, when subjects were put in groups, their estimates converged towards a central mean, despite not being told to arrive at a group estimate and despite denying that they had been influenced by others in the post-experimental interview

#### Asch (1951, 1952, 1956)

Asch wanted to test conformity under non-ambiguous conditions and, therefore, devised a very simple perceptual task of matching the length of a line to one of three other comparison lines. The test was so easy that all control subjects got it right almost all the time. When done in groups, there were eight people present other than the experimenter, but seven of them were confederates of the experimenter, making only one real test subject. The confederates were instructed to give the same wrong answers on 12 of the 18 tests (such as the test card shown to the right), to see if the subject would match their wrong answer



The average rate of conformity in Asch's original experiment was 32% meaning that this amount of people actually went with what they knew was the wrong answer, because the seven confederates of the experimenter were saying it was one of the wrong answers. 74% conformed at least once over the experiment, so only 26% never conformed.

Asch ran several variations on the experiment to test the conditions influencing group conformity:

- ❖ increasing the group size – Asch found little increase above 3 or 4, but other studies have indicated that conformity does increase with group size, but at a decreasing rate
- ❖ providing support for the subject – Asch provided an ally in this variation, where one of the confederates agreed with the subject's answers, and group conformity dropped to 5.5% - this shows that unanimity of the group is important; if the ally changed to the group's estimates, the subject would follow
- ❖ increasing the difficulty of the task – when the comparison lines were made closer in length, the group conformity increased
- ❖ written answers – in this variation, the subject wrote down their answers to the test on a piece of paper, which caused the rate of conformity to drop