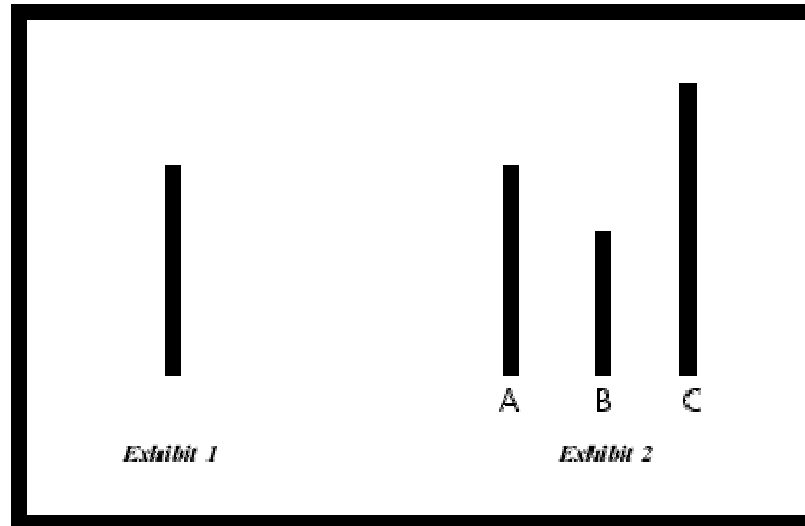


Asch Experiments

The Asch Dilemma



The experimenter asks all of you, one at a time, to choose which of the three lines on the right card matches the length of the line on the left card. The task is repeated several times with different cards. On some occasions the other "subjects" unanimously choose the wrong line. It is clear to you that they are wrong, but they have all given the same answer.

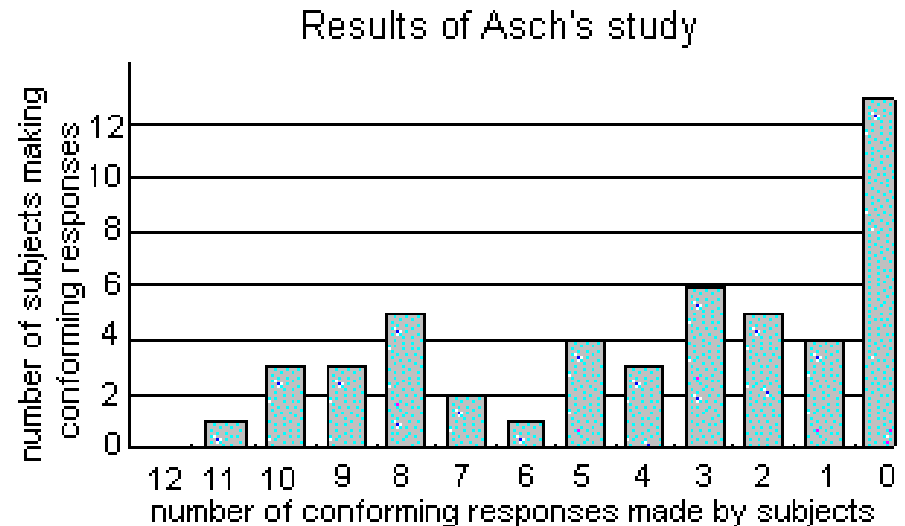
What would you do? Would you go along with the majority opinion, or would you "stick to your guns" and trust your own eyes?

Asch Experiment

- First conducted in 1951
- Asked groups of 8-10 college students to participate in “visual perception” experiment
 - Only 1 person is really subject
 - Others were actors asked to give wrong answer 2/3rds of the time
 - Answers given aloud; subject is 2nd from last to answer
 - 18 trials (out of which the actors give wrong answer 12 times)

Asch Results

- 25% were unaffected by hearing wrong answers
 - 75% gave wrong answer at least once
- 30% gave wrong answers in at least 50% of trials in which peers gave wrong answers
- Subsequent experiment showed that conformity was less when asked to write down right answer



The chart shows that no one made twelve conforming responses and that thirteen subjects made no conforming responses at all. However, of fifty subjects, the average subject conformed to 32% of the trials. When Asch tested individual subjects alone, none made errors.

(source Dobson et al. (1981))

Factors ...

- Contextual
 - Group size
 - Conformity increases with group size up to about 5
 - Social support
 - Just need one ally to stand ground
- Individual
 - Status
 - Higher status individuals conform less
 - Gender
 - Women conform more than men in face-to-face groups

Gender & Conformity

- Fisher and Alexander, 2003. Journal of Sex Research
- Women asked about the number of lifetime sex partners they had had
- Women divided into three groups:
 - One group attached to polygraph lie detector
 - Another group given questionnaire by experimenter who stayed in sight of resp
 - Another group filled out questionnaire in private
- Results
 - Group 1 reported almost twice as many partners as group 3

Reasons for Conformity

- Need for social respect & acceptance
 - Groups will reject deviants
- Using others as data points and triangulating
 - Evolutionary advantage in making use of group wisdom
- Norms of behavior develop that affect how we think, feel and act
 - Internalized
 - Sherif moving-light test