Conformity: Asch’s Research

Asch (1951) (Perring and Spencer 1980 found that with science and engineering students only one participant conformed in a total of 396 trials. Could be because they were more confident, but could also be that 1950s America was a particularly conformist time)

Aims

- To test conformity when the answer is unambiguous.

Procedure

- Showed participants (123 American male undergraduates – other research suggests that women may be more conformist than men. Limited application) two large white cards at a time – one with a “standard line” on and the other with three “comparison lines”. (Artificial and participants knew they were in a research study – demand characteristics. Not generalisable)
- One comparison line was the same length of the standard line and the other two were always clearly wrong.
- The participant was asked to state which comparison line they believed was equal to the standard line.
- Each naïve participant was tested individually and with a group of between six and eight confederates. The naïve participant was not aware that they were confederates. (Ethics – deceived because they did not know these were confederates. BUT ethical issues vs the benefits from the study)
- On the first few trials, the confederates gave the right answer but then they began to make errors.
- Confederates were instructed to give the same wrong answer.
- Participant took part in 18 trials and on 12 ‘critical trials’ the confederate gave the wrong answer.

Findings

- The naïve participant gave the wrong answer 36.8% of the time.
- 25% of participants did not conform on any trials.
- 75% conformed at least once.
- When interviewed afterwards, most said they conformed to avoid rejection (NSI)