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| **LT 2: Conformity: Asch’s (1951) Research** | | |
| **Procedure** | **Findings** | **Asch’s Variations** |
| * Tested conformity by showing two white cards at the same time – on one card was a ‘standard line’ and on the other were three ‘comparison lines’ * One of the three lines was the same length as the standard, and the other two lines were clearly wrong * The participant was asked which of the three lines matched the standard * The participants in this study were 123 American male undergraduates * Each ‘naïve’ participant was tested individually with a group of between 6 and 8 confederates * On the first few trails all the confederates gave the right answer, but then they started making errors. All confederates were instructed to make the same wrong answers * Each participant took part in 18 trials, and in 12 ‘critical’ trials the confederates gave the wrong answer | * The naïve participant gave the wrong answer 36.8% of the time * Overall 25% of the participants did not conform on any trials, meaning 75% conformed at least once * The term *Asch* effect has been used to describe this result – the extent to which participants conform even when the situation is unambiguous * When participants were interviewed afterwards most said they conformed to avoid rejection (NSI) | 1. Group size: Asch found that with 3 confederates conformity to the wrong answer rose to 31.8%. but the addition of further confederates after that made little difference. So a small majority is not sufficient for influence to be exerted, but there is no need for a majority of more than three 2. Unanimity: he introduced a confederate who disagreed with the others – sometimes he gave the right answer and sometimes he gave the wrong one. The presence of a dissenting confederate reduced conformity. The figure was on average 25% conformity. The participant was able to behave more independently 3. Task difficulty: He made the stimulus line and comparison lines more similar in length. Conformity increased in these conditions. This suggests that ISI becomes more important when the task is harder |
| **Evaluation of Asch’s Research** | | |
| **Lacks Temporal Validity**  P: One weakness of Asch’s study is that it lacks temporal validity.  E: For example, Perrin and Spencer (1980) repeated Asch’s original study with engineering students in the UK. Only one student conformed in a total of 396 trials.  E: This is an issue because it may be that in the 1950s (when Asch conducted his research) it was more conformist time in America, and so conforming made sense to establish social norms. However, nowadays we live a much less conformist society where we are more readily encouraged to be independent and individual.  L: As a result this questions the credibility of Asch’s research and it’s applicability to the modern day. | **Lacks Ecological Validity**  P: Another weakness of Asch’s study is that it lacks ecological validity.  E: For example, Asch’s research was conducted in an artificial setting, whereby not only were participants aware that they were being studied and may have shown demand characteristics, the groups they were in and the task they were doing was not that in nature of an everyday task.  E: This is an issue because the findings do not generalise to everyday situations, especially when the consequences of conformity might be more important, and when we interact with other people in groups in a much more direct way.  L: Therefore as a result, the validity of Asch’s research is compromised, and the overall credibility is reduced. | **Gender Bias**  P: A final issue with Asch’s research is that it is gender bias  E: For example, in Asch’s study only men were used (not women).  E: This is an issue because the findings of Asch’s study cannot be generalised to women. It is widely believed that women may respond to conformity differently to men, and that they might be more conformist as they are more concerned about social relationships (and being accepted) than men are.  L: As a result, the credibility of Asch’s research into conformity is weakened. |