

El

Professor Wiggins

ENGL 1101 Composition and Rhetoric

30 October 2024

The Asch Experiment and Social Pressure

Solomon Asch's social conformity experiment, widely known as "The Asch Experiment," was a study in which participants compared the lengths of different lines within a group of selected people. Most members were in on the experiment and were instructed to provide incorrect answers, testing whether or not the subject would change their answers to conform with the rest of the group. Throughout the experiment, it was shown that people fall victim to social conformity, which is the tendency to be influenced by others and adopt their views, behaviors, and ideas to fit in (Haoming et al. 2023). The test subjects often hesitated to answer the prompt, as everyone else's answers seemed incorrect. However, they almost always ended up conforming to fit in with the other subjects in the experiment. This concept has affected many people in ways such as fashion trends, academic hierarchy, and cultural norms, leading us to rethink how often people change their opinions, biases, and personalities just to conform to society's norms. This raises questions about how truthful people's statements truly are.

When planning my attempt at the Asch experiment, I decided not to change much from the source material and opted to give it a more diverse and modern twist. I displayed three different line prompts on the living room TV and switched between them as we progressed through the exercise. The difference came when choosing the participants. I made all the contestants female to contrast Asch's original experiment, which consisted of mostly male

participants, as well as selecting subjects with different ages and education levels to vary the results as much as possible. The four participants included my mom, who is 35 with very little education, my sister, who is 20 with a college education, and my two little cousins, who are 11 and 7 with early K-12 education. With these factors in consideration, I chose my sister as the target of this experiment since she is in the middle of the scale between education and age seeing if that would affect her social facilitation, the phenomenon in social psychology that relates to how the presence of others may increase a person's efforts and efficiency in a given task (Dziak and Mark 2023). I privately instructed the other participants to choose incorrectly with every prompt and later instructed them all as a group to answer a series of "simple" questions for an experiment. I informed them that I was going to record with my cellphone, secretly observing whether my sister would conform or stray from "social norms," which are rules and standards understood by members of a group that guide and/or constrain social behavior without the force of laws (Carrillat et al. 2022).

When beginning the experiment, I lined them up in a single-file line and told them to each answer one by one. I strategically placed my sister third in line, causing her to hear the wrong answers first, creating a sense of doubt throughout the exercise. As the first line prompt began, my sister immediately showed signs of confusion and irritation as the other subjects in front of her answered incorrectly with a confident demeanor. Although she looked confused, she opted to stick with her gut and answered correctly. As the second line prompt appeared, the other subjects repeated the process and answered incorrectly. This time, my sister spoke out and said, "Are y'all like, dumb...?" and proceeded to answer correctly. She definitely questioned whether or not she genuinely just didn't understand the exercise but decided to stick with her gut. The last

and final line prompt came up, and my other subjects repeated their instructions again. My sister looked visibly nervous and confused. As her last turn to answer came up, she caved in and socially conformed, giving an incorrect answer to the prompt. After all prompts were answered, she stated, “At this point, I think I’m either too smart or just dumb.” The other subjects kept their cool and stayed silent, while my sister simply walked away.

COMPARISON CHART		
MY EXPERIMENT	SIMILARITES	ASCH'S EXPERIMENT
<p>Consisted of mainly women</p> <p>subject only conformed once 33%.</p> <p>3 different prompts</p> <p>subject answered correctly twice before conforming</p> <p>Experiment consisted of 4 participants</p>	<p>Prompts and questions were exactly the same.</p> <p>In both experiments, subjects conformed at least 1 time.</p> <p>subjects often stated their opinions Before/After giving their answer</p> <p>other subjects kept their cool and answers incorrectly</p>	<p>Consisted of mostly men.</p> <p>75% of the time, subjects conformed</p> <p>2 different Prompts</p> <p>The experiment regularly consisted of 6+ people</p> <p>subjects usually confirmed with every question</p>

All things considered, the Asch experiment perfectly describes how social conformity can take a toll on our beliefs, opinions, and personalities based on our surroundings as a whole. When researching and comparing both experiments, I found that the panopticon theory holds that people can be controlled when they believe themselves to be under constant surveillance, even if no one is watching (Cole 2023). This theory could suggest that the pressure of being recorded, as well as the pressure from others' answers, could have affected the subjects’ results within each prompt. In contrast to Asch’s original experiment, as the prompts went on, social

loafing—defined as the reduction in motivation and effort when individuals work collectively compared to when they work individually or coactively (Liu et al. 2024)—could have been a key factor in why my sister decided to conform much later in the experiment than the subjects in Asch's, since my sister is an introvert and doesn't like group settings. In retrospect, these small choices could affect our daily lives in ways that could be detrimental to our future and what we hope to accomplish.

Works Cited

- Dziak, M. "Social Facilitation." *Salem Press Encyclopedia*, 2023. EBSCOhost, <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=cd83051d-e50c-320b-a89e-0232d9152a5f>. Accessed 29 Oct. 2024.
- LIU, X., et al. "A Functional Model of Social Loafing: When and How Does Social Loafing Enhance Job Performance?" *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 194, no. 3, 2024, pp. 731–745. DOI: 10.1007/s10551-023-05599-3. Available at: <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=dd0d95ce-b980-36da-af8d-6fb18f627c49>. Accessed 29 Oct. 2024.
- Melnyk, V., Carrillat, F. A., and Melnyk, V. "The Influence of Social Norms on Consumer Behavior: A Meta-Analysis." **Journal of Marketing**, vol. 86, no. 3, 2022, pp. 98–120. doi:10.1177/00222429211029199. Accessed 29 Oct. 2024.

"What Is a Panopticon? Definition & Concept." Study.com, Study.com,

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-a-panopticon-definition-concept.html#:~:text=>

[The%20 Panopticon%20theory%20">The%20 Panopticon%20theory%](#) Accessed 29 Oct. 2024.

Zhang, H., et al. "Social Conformity Is Associated with Inter-Trial Electroencephalogram Variability." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, vol. 1523, no. 1, 2023, pp. 104–118. DOI: 10.1111/nyas.14983. Available at:

<https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id> Accessed 22 Oct. 2024.