

## Script

**Lecturer** In this lecture I want to introduce you to the life and work of a famous psychologist, a psychologist who had a big influence on the field of social psychology. Social psychology deals with group behaviour and the individual as a member of a group, and Solomon Asch made a most important contribution. Solomon Asch worked mostly in the USA, but he was born in 1907 in *Poland*, and he came to the US when he was thirteen. He went to an ordinary high school, and as he had an interest in *human behaviour* he decided to study psychology. He was quite disappointed with his first acquaintance with psychology – it seemed to be all about rats and mice and that didn't interest him at all. However, he persevered and eventually became a professor of psychology. Now, the experiment which made his name is called the *line judgement task*. Participants were asked to compare some simple lines: more precisely, they were given a card with three lines, then were asked to compare another single line and say whether it was longer or shorter than the lines on the card. What a participant didn't know was that in reality, all the other participants were effectively *actors*: that is, they were instructed to give a wrong judgement, and the purpose of the experiment was to see how the single subject would react.

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**Lecturer** The subject would hear the others saying things about the length of the line which were clearly false. Most subjects answered correctly in spite of the incorrect judgements of the others, but a proportion – 32 per cent – conformed to the majority view, the incorrect view. This proportion was much, much higher than anticipated. Before the experiments they'd thought fifteen per cent or lower might do this. To give you a bit more detail, I have an illustration up here on the board. A group of six or seven people were given a card with three lines on it. There is a short vertical line, on the right of which is a longer line, and on the right of that there is another still longer line. However, it's clear that the longest line is the right-hand one, the second longest the middle one, and the shortest is the one on the left. The participants were given a second card with just one line on it. I should add that in these experiments people became very distressed. They found it very hard to deal with a situation where people were telling them things which were against the evidence of their own eyes. One woman became extremely agitated, running about measuring and looking and checking and shouting in a kind of massive anxiety. Now, what experiments which occurred some time later found was that other factors can influence the result. For example, when there were more so-called participants, there was even more conformity. On the other hand, when people were able to respond in secrecy, by writing the result down for instance, they made fewer incorrect judgements about the lines. Subjects gave various

explanations for why they made the decisions they did. Although they weren't put under pressure by the experimenter, many felt that they would somehow spoil the experiment and upset the person running it if they didn't agree, no matter how stupid they felt. More simply, in other cases they said they just wanted to not show themselves in a bad light. Whatever the reason, Asch's experiment has had a long history and ...