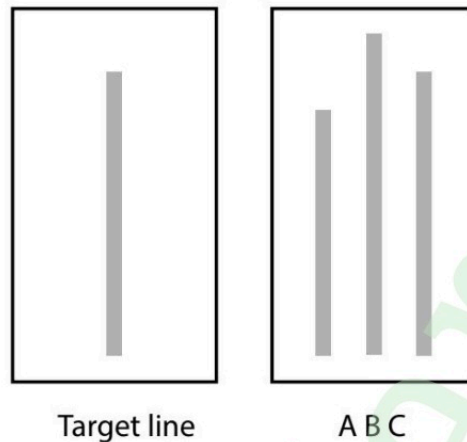


Q. Asch (1951) conducted an experiment to investigate whether social pressure from a majority group could affect conformity rates of others. Asch sampled 50 male students to participate in a 'vision test' using a line judgement task shown in the figure below-



Seven confederates to the study had already been told to give the same response, some accurate and some inaccurate. Asch then put a participant in a room with these seven confederates. Each person in the room had to say which line (A, B or C) was most like the target line. The accurate answer was always obvious. The participant always gave their response last.

The number of times that each participant conformed to the majority view, when it was incorrect, was recorded by Asch. [12]

### Model Answer

Laboratory experiments employ a high degree of control over extraneous variables which gives them good credibility. They also follow a highly standardised procedure which gives them good reliability. However, these experiments typically involve tasks lacking in mundane realism which decreases their ecological validity. Also, they usually collect only quantitative data which makes their findings lack context and detail.

In the given scenario, Asch has maintained a number of controls. For example, participants turn to answer has always been kept last. This ensures that every confederate answers before them, increasing their pressure to conform. The procedure of the study is also highly standardised with exactly seven confederates placed before each participant, the use of the same comparison lines. For each participant, the fixed position of the participants always answering at the end, etc. However, the line task of conformity does not represent real-life conformity tasks such as those involving maintaining silence in a library or waiting for one's turn in a queue. Besides, quantitative data was collected in terms of only the number of incorrect answers given by each participant. No qualitative data such as why participants gave incorrect answers was collected.

The advantage of high degree of control is that internal validity is greatly enhanced. In Asch's study, it could be stated with confidence that conformity was the reason for incorrect answering and nothing else. Standardisation gives the strength of reliability. In the study, the consistency of procedure across participants ensures that every participant is yielding to conformity in exactly the same circumstances. However, the unrealistic nature of the task makes it difficult to conclude with certainty that conformity of the extent seen in this study would be seen in real life scenarios as well. Finally, lack of qualitative insights makes it difficult to understand whether answers of confederates make participants unsure of their own answers; scared of giving wrong responses in their presence or something else.

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