

## Conformity

## The Asch study

- How, and to what extent do social forces constrain people's opinions and attitudes?

## The Asch study

- 7 – 9 "young men all college students"
- Psychological experiment "visual judgment"
- Let majority agree or disagree with participant

## The Asch study



## The Asch study

"Upon him we have brought to bear two opposed forces: the evidence of his senses and the unanimous opinions of a group of his peers. Also, he must declare his judgments in public, before a majority which has also stated its position publicly."

## The Asch study

"The dissenter becomes more and more worried and hesitant as the disagreement continues in succeeding trials; he may pause before announcing his answer and speak in a low voice, or he may smile in an embarrassed way".

### The Asch study

"Whereas in ordinary circumstances individuals matching the lines will make mistakes less than 1 per cent of the time, under group pressure the minority subjects swung to acceptance of the misleading majority's wrong judgments in 36.8 per cent of the selections".

### Things diminishing the influence of others

- The size of the majority (up to N=3)
- Whether the majority is unanimous
- Having a confederate / having had a confederate (of the right kind)
- "As might be expected, an individual's resistance to group pressure in these experiments depends to a considerable degree on how wrong the majority is"

### The Asch study

"That we have found the tendency to conformity in our society so strong that reasonably intelligent and well-meaning young people are willing to call white black is a matter of concern. It raises questions about our way of education and about the values that guide our conduct".

### The Asch study

"Yet anyone inclined to draw too pessimistic conclusions from this report would do well to remind himself that the capacities for independence are not to be underestimated. He may also draw some consolation from a further observation: those who participated in this challenging experiment agreed nearly without exception that independence was preferable to conformity".

### What is wrong with conformity?

### Do as others do

- The bad side of conformity
- The good side of conformity

- Normative / social conformity
- Informational conformity

### Normative conformity

Difference between answers written on paper (individually) and answers said out loud reveals proportion of normative conformity

Strong example of normative social pressure

### Milgram

- "Memory experiment"
- Wrong reply implies electric shock increasing by 15 volts each time
- After a period of time banging on the wall and complaints about heart condition
  - Please *continue*.
  - The experiment requires that you *continue*.
  - It is absolutely essential that you *continue*.
  - You have no other choice, you *must* go on.
- 65% continued until the last 450 volt shock

### Milgram

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yr5cjyokVUs>

### Notice

- This is certainly social pressure but *not* conformity in Asch's sense

Is social or normative conformity always bad?

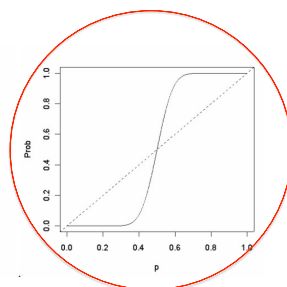
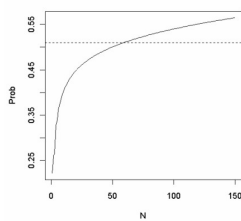
Is social or normative conformity always bad?

Can conformity be good?

### The Condorcet theorem

- Assume a group of people that are to decide whether something is the case or not.
- The probability of each individual reaching the correct answer on his/her own is higher than 0.5
- In this case the majority vote (assuming independent opinions) is better than an individual vote
- And adding people to the group increases its accuracy

### The Condorcet theorem



### Some things that have to apply

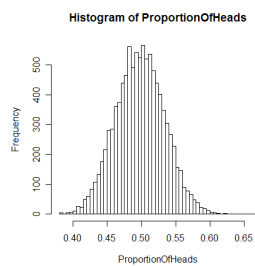
- Independent voters / jurors
- Individual likelihood to be correct has to be *above* chance
- All voters are assumed to have the same likelihood to be correct

### West of England Fat Stock and Poultry Exhibition

### Francis Galton

- 1901 800 visitors guessed the ox's weight
- A guess cost 8 pennies but you could win a nice price
- Galton computed the mean guess – within 1% of the correct answer!
- Better than the individual guesses of experts
- Why?

### The power of the mean



### Who wants to be a millionaire?

Help! I need somebody,  
Help! not just anybody...

### Who do we listen to?

- People that appear to know what they are talking about
  - Expertise
  - Confidence
  - Past performance
  - Arguments
  - What advisors know

When is conformity bad?

Informational cascades

Changing environments

If we include the dynamic perspective

- Sufficient amounts of others have to learn on their own (to detect changes in the environment)
- We have to learn from those sharing our needs / preferences
- We have to have a stable enough environment for conformity to work

"If no one thinks differently we won't get anywhere"

Newton

If I have seen further it is only by standing on the shoulders of giants.

(In a letter to Robert Hooke, apparently)