

# Types of Conformity & Explanations for Conformity

Welcome to our exploration of social influence in psychology. This presentation covers the types and explanations of conformity for AQA A-Level Psychology.

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# Three Types of Conformity

## Compliance

A superficial change where one publicly agrees but privately disagrees.

Example: Laughing at a joke you don't find funny.



## Identification

Moderate conformity to fit into a valued group.

Example: Adopting behaviours of a sports team's fanbase.

## Internalisation

The deepest form where beliefs become part of one's own values.

Example: Continuing vegetarianism after leaving an animal rights group.

# Explanations for Conformity

## Informational Social Influence

Driven by the desire to be right. Occurs in ambiguous situations.

Leads to internalisation as beliefs are truly adopted.

Example: Following another student's answer when unsure.

## Normative Social Influence

Driven by the desire to be liked or accepted by others.

Leads to compliance as changes are often superficial.

Example: Dressing a certain way to fit in with peers.

# Jenness (1932) – Beans in a Jar Study

## Aim:

To investigate whether individual judgments are influenced by group discussion (ISI).

## Procedure:

- Participants were asked to privately estimate the number of beans in a jar.
- They then discussed their estimates in a group and came to a group estimate.
- After the discussion, participants were asked to give a second private estimate.

## Findings:

- The second estimates were closer to the group estimate than their original guesses.
- This showed evidence of conformity, particularly due to informational social influence — participants believed the group was more likely to be correct.

## Conclusion:

People are likely to conform in ambiguous situations, where they lack confidence in their own judgment and look to others for guidance.



# Evaluation and Discussion

Schultz et al. (2008) reported that hotel guests who were exposed to a Normative Social Influence (NSI) message about hotel guests (75%) who reused their towels (to help save energy) actually increased their own towel reuse.


Wittenbrink and Henley (1996) reported that subjects exposed to a negative message (Informational Social Influence or ISI) about African Americans (and who presumed it was the majority view) later reported themselves to have a negative view toward Black individuals.

Can NSI be detected? Research found that subjects reported their neighbors' behaviors toward energy use had not influenced their own energy use. However, results suggested this had the biggest impact, indicating people under-detect the influence of NSI.

# Asch (1956)

## Aim

Aim: To see if people would conform to a group, even when the answer is clearly wrong.

Participants: 123 male American students believed they were doing a visual test (deceived about true aim).  Task: They saw a "standard line" and three comparison lines. Asked: "Which comparison line matches the standard line?"

## Procedure

Group Setup: The real participant was placed in a group with 6–8 confederates. The confederates were told to give the same wrong answer on certain trials. The real participant always answered last or near last.

Trials: 18 trials total, 12 "critical trials" where confederates gave wrong answers. Control Group: A group who answered without confederates made hardly any mistakes. This showed the task was easy and the errors in the main group were due to social pressure, not confusion.

Standard Line

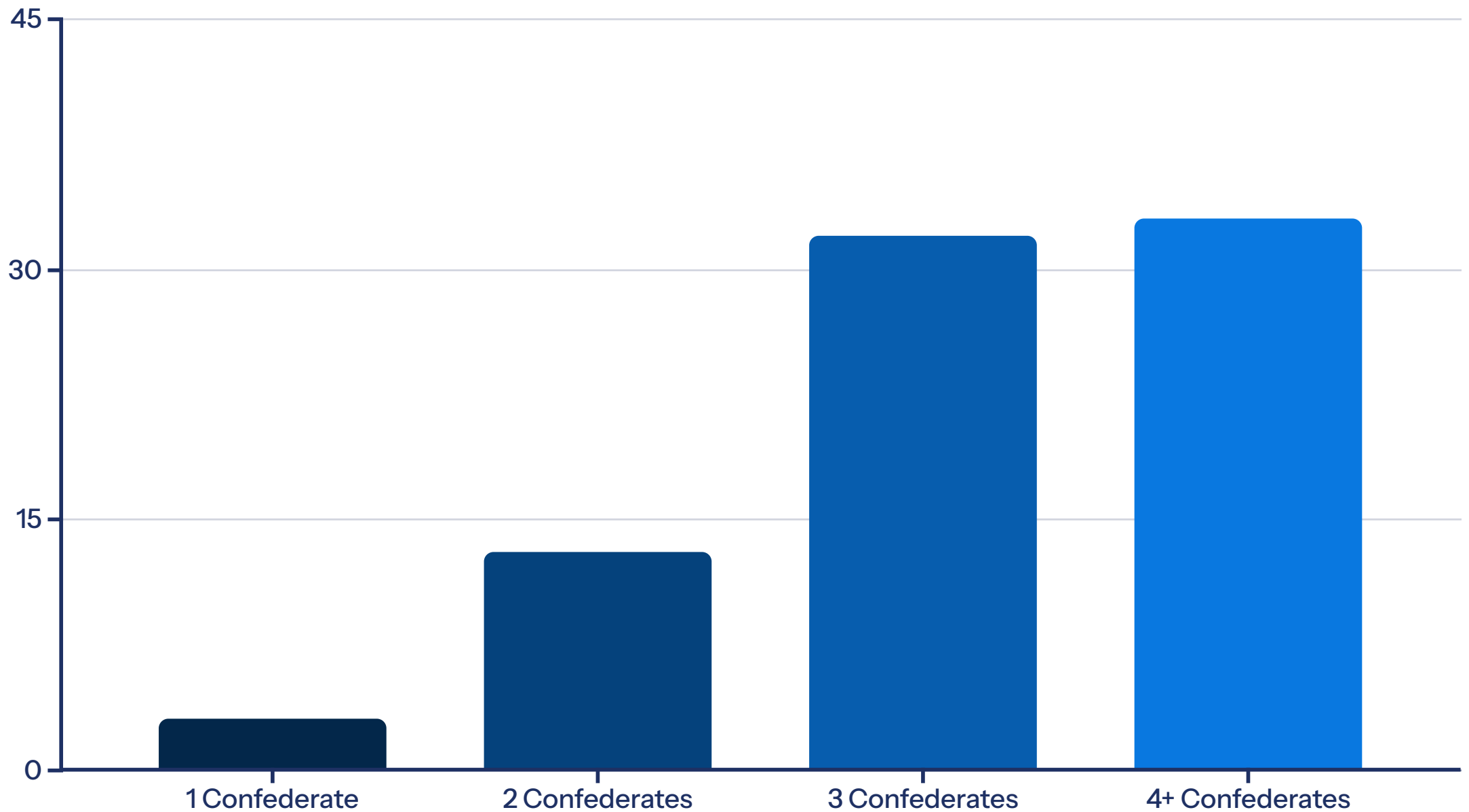


Standard Line

Comparison Lines



# Group Size Effect on Conformity



Asch found that conformity increases with group size but plateaus after three confederates.

This suggests a small majority is sufficient to create pressure to conform.



# The Impact of Unanimity

**37%**

## Unanimous Group

Conformity rate when  
all confederates gave  
wrong answers

**5.5%**

## Non-Unanimous Group

Conformity rate when  
one confederate gave  
correct answer

**32%**

## Reduction

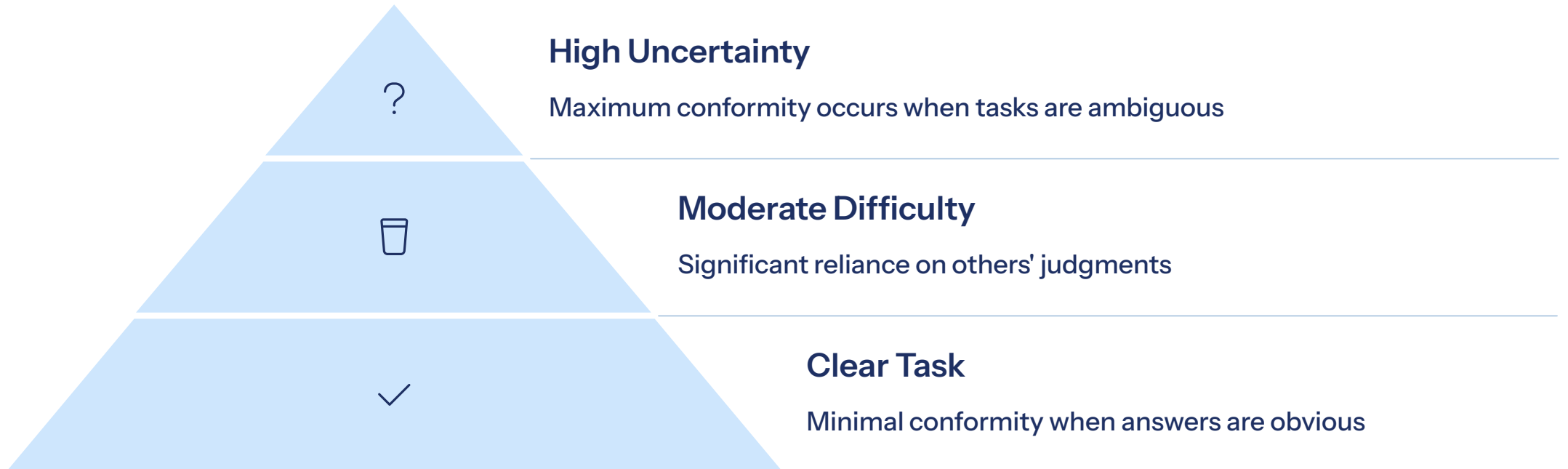
Percentage drop in  
conformity with just  
one dissenting voice

A single 'dissenter' dramatically reduces pressure to conform. This highlights the power of social support in resisting group influence.





# Task Difficulty and Conformity



When comparison lines were made more similar, conformity increased. This supports the role of Informational Social Influence.

People look to others when they feel uncertain about their own judgments.



# A Evaluation of Asch's Conformity Research

## Strengths

- Controlled laboratory study with high internal validity
- Identified key variables affecting conformity
- Provided measurable, quantitative data

## Limitations

- Artificial task lacks ecological validity
- Gender bias: only male participants
- Cultural bias: only American participants
- Historical validity: 1950s era more conformist

## Modern Applications

- Understanding peer pressure in schools
- Social media influence and online conformity
- Group decision-making in professional settings

# Further Evaluation and Discussion

A 'child of its time'. McCarthyism in the 1950s was rife in the USA (a strong anti-Communist period) where people were scared to go against the grain and more likely to conform. Perrin and Spencer (1980) repeated Asch's research in the UK and found only one conforming response out of 396 trials (where the majority gave a unanimous wrong answer). However, when using teenagers on probation as the subjects (with prison guards as the confederates), they found similar results to Asch's research in the 1950s.

Cultural differences were found by Smith et al. (2006) who analyzed Asch-type research and found conformity levels varied significantly across different cultures (average rate 31.2%). Findings showed that in individualistic cultures (USA and Europe), conformity was around 25%, whereas in collectivist cultures, conformity was around 37%. Markus and Kitayama (1991) argued that higher conformity in collectivist cultures is due to the 'social glue' that binds communities together.



# Questions

What was the aim of Ash's research? (2)

Explain the role of group size in relation to conformity. (4)

Outline the procedure and findings of Asch's study. (6)

Describe and evaluate research into conformity. (16)