

Sherif's Experiment (1935)

Experimentation: SHERIF (1935)

The auto kinetic effect: In this experiment, a single point of light in a dark room seems to move. In the experiment, the subjects are unable to keep their eyes perfectly still and, in the dark, there is no point of reference.

Sherif conducted two versions of this experiment:

1. Individuals were asked to estimate how far they thought the light moved, then tested them together in a group. Estimates in the group converged as they established a 'group norm'. This was close to the average of estimates they gave individually.

2. A group was asked to give estimates of how far they thought the light moved then they were asked to give individual estimates, these were very close to the group estimate.

Sherif claimed that he had shown conformity. The individuals were experiencing informational social influence.

Criticism of Sherif's work:

The 'group' used consisted of three people. They may not have considered themselves to be a group.

There was no right or wrong answer, it was an ambiguous task, and Sherif told them that he was going to move the light, so they were more likely to change their minds anyway.

Factors Affecting Conformity

Factors affecting conformity	Increases/Decreases conformity rate	Explanations for conformity
Size of the majority	INCREASES	Optimum 3, larger group can affect target greater - pressure build up

Task difficulty

INCREASES

More complex looks to copy others

Fear of ridicule

INCREASES

Sacred to be not accepted by the group

Presence of ally

DECREASES

Social support, conformity

Previous
learning

DECREASES

Understanding the situation beforehand

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