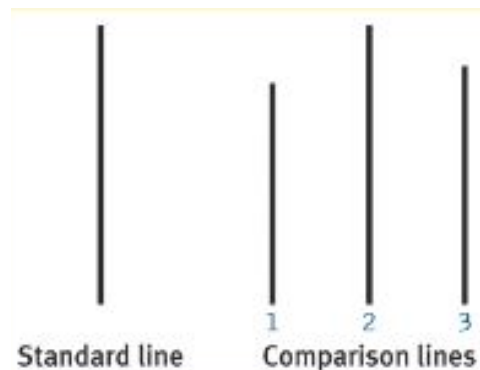


Culture & Norms Research - Berry

Aim - Investigate cultural differences in the pressure to conform

Procedure

- This study involved three groups of participants - the Temne of Sierra Leone (a society based on rice farming), the Inuit people of Northern Canada (a society based on hunting and fishing), and Scottish people (as a reference group). Each group consisted of around 120 participants
- Each participant was shown a series of cards. Each card had one line indicated as the "Standard Line", and several lines indicated as "Comparison lines". Participants had to select which of the Comparison lines matched the Standard line in length. (See the picture below for an example of this - the correct answer is Line 2)



- After completing the task with two cards, on the third card, participants were told, "Here's a hint: most Temne / Inuit / Scottish people think that the correct answer is Line ___", as the experimenter points to a particular line. On this card, the experimenter points to the correct line.
- For the next three cards (cards 4-6), the experimenter repeats the "Hint", except points to the **wrong line**. The point of the study was to see whether participants ignore the faulty advice and choose the correct line, or follow their group in choosing the incorrect line

Findings

- The Temne had the highest rate of conformity, choosing the incorrect line when they believed that most Temne had also chosen that line, even when it was obviously the wrong answer
- The Inuit had the lowest rate of conformity, tending to choose the correct line even when they believed that other Inuit had chosen a different line

Conclusion

- This study suggests that cultures vary in the pressure to conform. The Temne culture is the most conformist, while the Inuit culture is the most individualistic

- The researchers speculate that the reason for this difference is how each culture produces food. The Temne are a rice farming society, and planting rice requires the co-ordination of many people, making it especially important to conform to the group's decisions. On the other hand, the Inuit are a society of hunters and fishers, which is primarily done individually - making conformity less crucial for survival

Evaluation

- This study uses a simple yet effective way of measuring conformity, which is otherwise difficult to quantify. The results of the study are easy to replicate, and the sample size (120 participants from each group) is quite robust
- Matching two lines in length in an experiment is an artificial task, and one which has no real-life consequences for the participants. It is debatable whether this task accurately represents conformity in real life, and so the ecological validity of this study is questionable
- Since this is a correlational study, it is impossible to know for sure *why* some cultures appear to conform more than others. The researchers explain the difference in terms of rice farming vs. hunting cultures, but there may be other factors that could explain the difference