

### **Social Validation: The Power of the Group**

In one particular study, researchers had very young children who were terrified of dogs watch a little boy play with his dog for twenty minutes a day. After only four days, 67% of the children were willing to sit in a playpen with a dog and even remain with it when everyone else left the room. The results were lasting too: One month later, the same children were just as eager to play with dogs. In another similar study, children who were afraid of dogs were influenced just as readily by *films* of a child playing with a dog as they were when watching a *live* child play with a dog.<sup>9</sup>

In another study, a group of participants were asked to identify the longer of two lines displayed on a screen. One line was clearly longer than the other, but some had been privately instructed prior to the study to state that the *shorter* line was longer. The surprising results were that several of the unsuspecting participants actually gave in to social pressure and changed their answers! Over the course of the entire study, 75% of the participants gave the incorrect answer at least one time. In a related study conducted by Asch, it was determined that even when the correct answer is obvious, individuals will knowingly give the incorrect answer 37% of the time, just to go along with the consensus.

You know how you often hear all that canned laughter on sitcoms even when there isn't anything really funny happening? Studies prove that using canned laughter actually influences audience members to laugh longer and more frequently, and to give the material high ratings for its "funniness." Even for the portions of the show that seem to have no humor at all, producers use laugh tracks to get us to laugh along. The sad part is that it actually works! There is evidence that canned laughter is most effective when the joke is really bad. When two audiences watch the same show, and one hears a laugh track while the other doesn't, it's always the audience who hears the laugh track that laughs the most!

Another study was set up to see if passersby would stare in the same direction and look up if there was another group of people already doing so. The researchers arranged groups of 1-15 people to congregate in New York City on 33 W 42nd Street. A video camera was set up on the 6th floor to catch the results on tape. Sure enough, the more people in the group who were already gawking and looking into the air, the more passersby who stopped, came over and stared, and looked up themselves!

When participants were asked to view a political debate among George Bush, Bill Clinton, and Ross Perot, it was found that the mere presence of a confederate who cheered for one of the candidates influenced the participant's overall evaluation of that candidate in a positive manner. Obviously, when receiving information in a social setting, the audience can be skewed to perceive the information the way the group tends to hear it.

In yet another study, researchers wanted to see if mothers who had just given birth to their first child would be more likely to adhere to guidelines for their new babies' nutrition when instructed individually or in a group. The mothers were told that it could

be important to give their new babies cod-liver oil and orange juice. The mother's were either taught one-by-one by a nutritionist associated with the hospital or in groups of six. The study found that when taught in a group setting, the mothers were far more inclined to give their babies cod-liver oil and orange juice than those who had been taught individually.

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