

Solomon Asch: A Prominent (though Unintended) Social Psychologist

Solomon Asch is remembered today as a notable figure in social psychology. His work on conformity is cited in most Introductory Psychology texts, and in social psychology he is known for contributing to and influencing the areas of social cognition, social influence, and group dynamics. While Asch's influence today is noted primarily in social psychology, he viewed himself more as a Gestalt Psychologist working on problems in basic psychology areas such as perception, learning, thinking, and judgment. His application of Gestalt principles to "social" contexts was well received and Asch played a major role in shaping the social psychology of the 1950's. Asch's holistic (Gestalt) perspective has stimulated constructive theoretical debates in social psychology long after his retirement in 1979.

I. Background

- a. Born in Poland, immigrated to U.S. in 1920 at age 13
- b. Education
- c. mentored by Max Wertheimer
- d Faculty appointments

II. Gestalt Psychology

- a. Theorizing
- b. Areas of research
- c. Asch's unique application – social stimuli (people, context)

III. Research related to Social Psychology

- a. Impression formation (1946): Central Traits (Warm vs. cold)
- b. Conformity in the line judgment task (1956)
- c. Asch's work in today's Psychology

IV. Impact on others

- a. Few graduate students, but did mentor Stanley Milgram
- b. 1952 Textbook
- c. Large numbers of researchers in social cognition and social influence have been impacted - either to extend his work (social cognition; conformity/majority influence) or to oppose it (reductionist views of cognition; minority social influence)
- d. Did Asch view his work differently from how it is remembered/extended?

V. Cross-cultural Issues

- a. Importance of "context" - culture as context
- b. International relations
- c. Solomon Asch Center for Ethnopolitical Conflict

VI. Future Impact (I need to work on this!)

References

- Asch, S. E. (1932). An experimental study of variability in learning. *Archives of Psychology*, *143*, 1-55.
- Asch, S. E. (1940). Studies in the principles of judgments and attitudes: II. Determination of judgments by group and by ego-standards. *Journal of Social Psychology*, *12*, 433-465.
- Asch (1946). Forming impressions of personality. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, *41*, 258-290.
- Asch, S. E. (1946). Max Wertheimer's contribution to modern psychology. *Social Research*, *13*, 81-102.
- Asch, S. E. (1952). *Social Psychology*. Upper Saddle River, NJ:Prentice-Hall.
- Asch, S. E. (1955). Opinions and social pressure. *Scientific American*, *193*, 31-35.
- Asch, S. E. (1956). Studies of independence and conformity: I. A minority of one against a unanimous majority. *Psychological Monographs*, *70*(9, Whole No. 416).
- Asch, S. E. (1968). Wolfgang Kohler: 1887-1967. *American Journal of Psychology*, *81*, 110-119.
- Brehm, S. S., Kassin, S. M., and Fein, S. (2005). *Social Psychology* (6th edition). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Kendler, T. S., & Kendler, H. H. (2003). A woman's struggle in academic psychology. *History of Psychology*, *6*, 251-266.
- Levine, J. M. (1999). Solomon Asch's legacy for group research. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *3*, 358-364.
- Leyens, J. P., & Corneille, O. (1999). Asch's social psychology: Not as social as you may think. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *3*, 345-357.
- McCauley, C., & Rozin, P. (2003). Solomon Asch: Scientist and humanist. In G. A. Kimble & M. Wertheimer (Eds.), *Portraits of Pioneers in Psychology: Vol. V* (pp. 249-261). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Myers, D. G. (2005). *Psychology* (7th Ed.). Worth Publishers.
- Rock, I. (Ed.). (1990). *The Legacy of Solomon Asch: Essays in Cognition and Social Psychology*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Taylor, S. E., Peplau, L. A., & Sears, D. O. (2003). *Social Psychology* (11th Ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.