as many as 16 confederates. Figure 8.6 shows that the size of the majority matters, but only up to a point. Once three people are in agreement, conformity is not appreciably increased by the addition of more members.

Faction size is more important when normative influence is operating, as was true in Asch’s study, than when informational influence is operating, as was true in Sherif’s study (J. D. Campbell & Fairey, 1989). When a task is difficult and people need the judgments of others to help them make a decision, even one person can exert a lot of social influence. The situation is different when people can clearly see what is right and don’t need the information other people provide. Under these conditions, people find it much easier to hold fast to their opinion when disagreeing with just one other person than when bucking the opinion of a group of three or more. This is one of the reasons why high school cliques and gangs need to be composed of several members to be effective (Latané, 1981; Latané & Wolf, 1981; Tanford & Penrod, 1984).

The Importance of Unanimity. Asch (1955) also examined whether people are more apt to conform to a unanimous majority than to one that lacks unanimity. In a variation on his original study, Asch had one of the confederates give the right answer on the critical trials. Only 6 percent of the participants conformed under these conditions. Clearly, having an ally in dissent freed participants from the normative pressures they faced and allowed them to remain independent.

In fact, conformity drops dramatically even when a fellow dissenter voices an erroneous judgment (V. L. Allen & Levine, 1969). To illustrate using the example shown in Figure 8.5, suppose the first three confederates announce that C is the correct line and the fourth announces that A is the correct line. Even though A is no more correct than C is, you would probably say that B is the correct line rather than go along with the majority. As long as you are not the only one who disagrees with the majority, you will probably not conform in the situation Asch developed.

The Importance of Importance. A final variable to consider with regard to conformity is task importance. In the studies conducted by Sherif and Asch, participants were making judgments of very little consequence. No one’s welfare was at stake, and the participants themselves suffered no negative consequences by caving in to the