majority. Perhaps, some researchers suggested, people are less conforming when judgmental errors are made more costly.

R. S. Baron, Vandello, and Brunsman (1996) conducted an investigation to examine the manner in which task importance affects conformity. Recognizing that most psychology students have heard about Asch’s study, Baron and colleagues devised a new method of assessing conformity. They told participants they were measuring the accuracy of eyewitness testimony, and that the participants would view a slide of an alleged perpetrator and then identify the perpetrator from a lineup of several other men. Notice how this is similar to Asch’s study, in that participants first view a standard and are then asked to match the standard against several alternatives. Moreover, as in Asch’s study, experimental confederates were trained to give wrong answers on several trials, thereby allowing the investigators to see whether participants conformed to the erroneous judgments of others.

Two variables were experimentally manipulated in this study. First, some participants viewed the slides twice and had five seconds to look at them before making a judgment. This made the discrimination task rather easy, creating a situation similar to the one Asch’s participants faced. Other participants viewed the photographs only once and were given only half a second to see them. This made the task quite difficult, creating a situation similar to the one Sherif’s participants faced. The second variable was the importance of making a correct identification. Some participants were told the task was unimportant and their performance didn’t mean anything, whereas others were told the task was quite important and that the person who made the most correct identifications would be eligible to win a $20 prize.

Figure 8.7 shows the rates of conformity in Baron and colleagues’ study as a function of these experimental manipulations. When the task was low in difficulty, participants were less apt to conform to the erroneous majority when the task was important than when it was unimportant. This suggests that the participants in Asch’s study may have gone along, at least in part, because there was no good reason to dissent. The situation is quite different when the task was difficult. Here, people were more apt to conform when importance was high than when it was low. Apparently, when the task is difficult and the stakes are high, we reasonably err on the side of caution and use the judgments of others as important sources of information.

**FIGURE 8.7**
Conformity, Task Difficulty, and the Importance of Making a Correct Decision

High importance **decreased** conformity when the task was relatively easy (and normative influence was operating), but **increased** conformity when the task was relatively difficult (and informational influence was operating).

Source: R. S. Baron, Vandello, and Brunsman (1996).