PSYC100 GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Learning Outcomes

I. Attributions

I. Naïve scientist theory
II. Correspondence inference theory
III. Covariation theory
IV. Errors and biases

II. Conformity and Group Influence

I. Internalization vs Compliance
II. Sheriff's Study
III. Asch's Study
IV. Informational vs Normative social influence

III. Obedience

I. Milgram's experiment
II. Puppy and nurse studies
III. Zimbardo's experiment

WHAT IS AN ATTRIBUTION?

How people explain the causes of behaviour (of others and own)

Two main types:

- Internal (dispositional)
- External (situational)

INTERNAL VS. EXTERNAL

- **Internal attribution** – where behaviour is explained as due to something **inside** the person

  e.g. intelligence, personality

- **External attribution** – where behaviour is explained as due to something **outside** the person

  e.g. Luck, task difficulty

THREE CLASSIC THEORIES

I. Heider (1958) – The Naïve Scientist

II. Jones & Davis (1965) – Correspondence Inference Theory

III. Kelley (1967, 1973) – Covariation Theory

I - HEIDER NAIVE SCIENTIST THEORY

Heider & Simmel (1944) hypothesised that:

- People perceive behaviour as being caused
- People give causal attributions even to inanimate objects.
- Heider (1958) asserted people were naïve/lay scientists who used rational processes to explain events.

HEIDER AND SIMMEL (1944)

College students were asked to describe and interpret the motion of three geometrical figures ***(abstract)*** moving in and out of a rectangle, a section of which opened and closed like a door.

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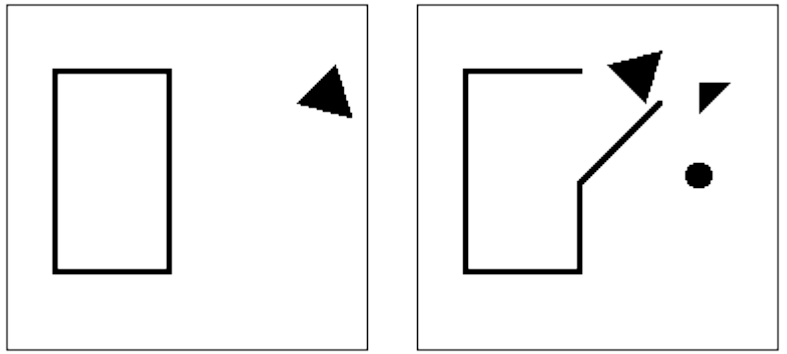


Figures were perceived and systematically interpreted by the participants as persons with particular personality traits and expressing particular needs and dispositions *(e.g. aggression, escape to safety, or rescue).*

II - CORRESPONDENCE INFERENCE THEORY (JONES & DAVIS, 1965)

We use information about another person's behaviour and its effects to draw a **correspondent inference**, in which the behaviour is attributed to a disposition or personality characteristic.

How do we do this?

CORRESPONDENCE INFERENCE THEORY

Were the effects of someone's behaviour intended? We are more likely to draw a correspondent inference if the behaviour appears **intentional** than when it is unintentional.

Intention is important: Individual must know the consequences of their action and have the ability to carry out the action

Were the effects of the behaviour socially desirable? We are more likely to decide there is a correspondence when the effects of the behaviour are **socially undesirable**.

For example, if someone is very rude in a social situation, we conclude that he/she is an unpleasant person.

III - COVARIATION THEORY (KELLEY, 1967; 1973)

Where we have a number of examples of a person's behaviour, we make judgments of covariation to decide how to attribute cause.

Consensus in respect of other people behaving in the same way in response to the stimulus – *how do other people respond to this stimulus?*

Distinctiveness of the stimulus in evoking the behaviour – *does the behaviour generalize to other situations?*

Consistency of the behaviour in the presence of this stimulus – *Is the person's response consistent across time?*

CONSENSUS

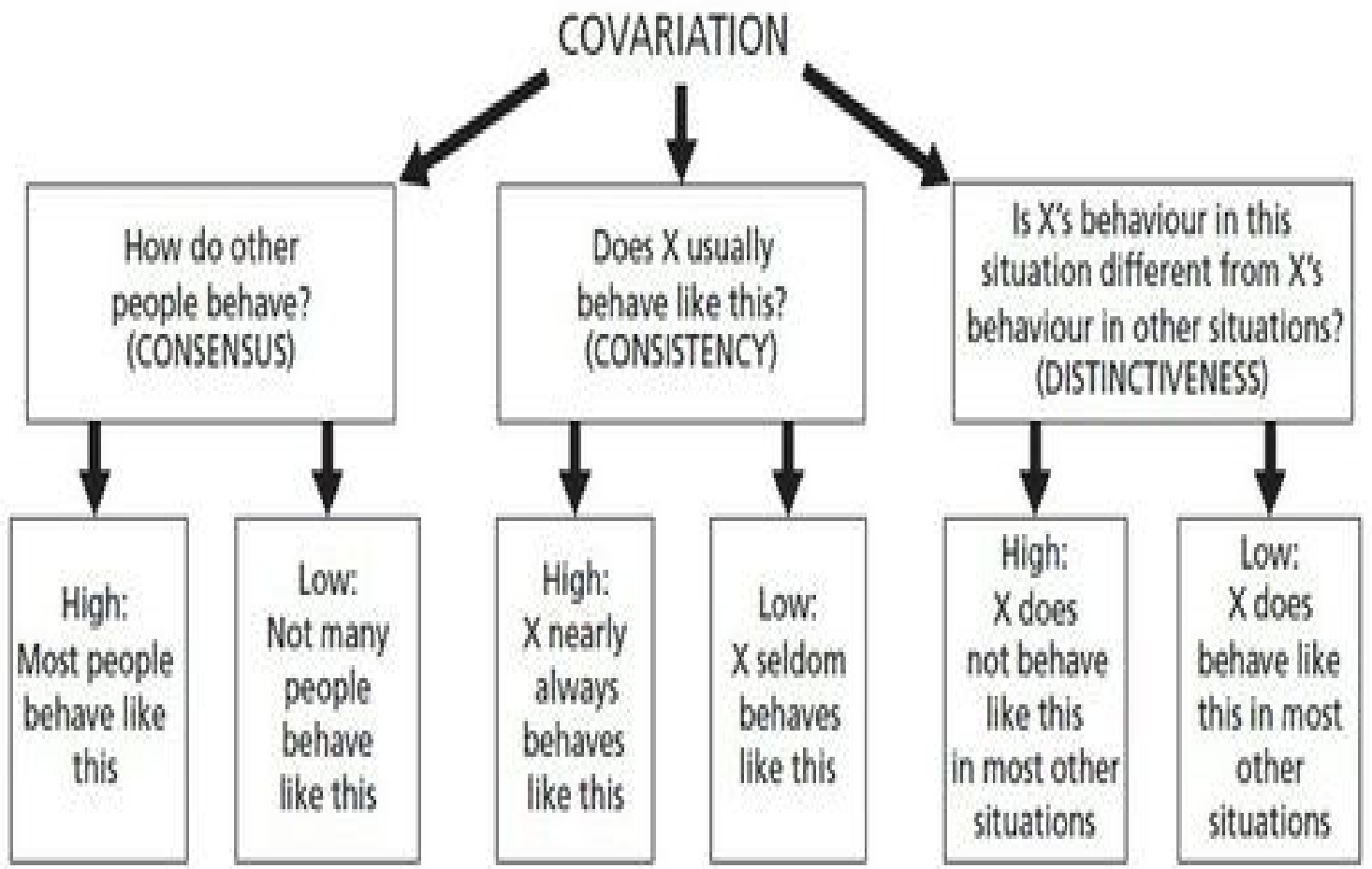
- The generality of behaviours across others
- *Do other people behave in the same way (i.e. like this person) in response to the stimulus (i.e. in similar situations) ?*
  - High consensus is when other people act like the person in question
  - Low consensus is when people act differently than the person in question

DISTINCTIVENESS

- The generality of behaviour across other situations (entities or tasks)
- *How does the person act in similar situations ?*
  - High distinctiveness is when the behaviour is ‘unique’ to this situation – the individual never behaves this way in other situations
  - Low distinctiveness is when the behaviour is ‘typical’ of these situations – the individual behaves this way in most other situations.

CONSISTENCY

- The generality of behaviour across time
- *How has the person responded previously to the situation? - Is the person's response consistent across time?*
  - High consistency when the individual always behaves this way in this situation – when the behaviour has been seen before
  - Low consistency is when this is a new behaviour – the individual never behaves this way in this situation


COVARIATION
How do other people behave? (CONSENSUS)
Does X usually behave like this? (CONSISTENCY)
Is X's behaviour in this situation different from X's behaviour in other situations? (DISTINCTIVENESS)
High: Most people behave like this
Low: Not many people behave like this
High: X nearly always behaves like this
Low: X seldom behaves like this
High: X does not behave like this in most other situations
Low: X does behave like this in most other situations

EXAMPLE OF COVARIATION JUDGEMENT

‘Sarah fails her PSYC100 exam’

- **Distinctiveness:**
  hi = failed only this exam; low = failed other exams.

- **Consistency:**
  hi = failed exams before; low = rarely failed exams before.

- **Consensus:**
  hi = other students failed this exam; low = few other students failed this exam.

ATTRIBUTION BIAS AND ERRORS

- Fundamental Attribution Error
- False Consensus Effect
- Self-Serving Bias
- Actor-Observer Effect

THE FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR (ROSS, 1977)

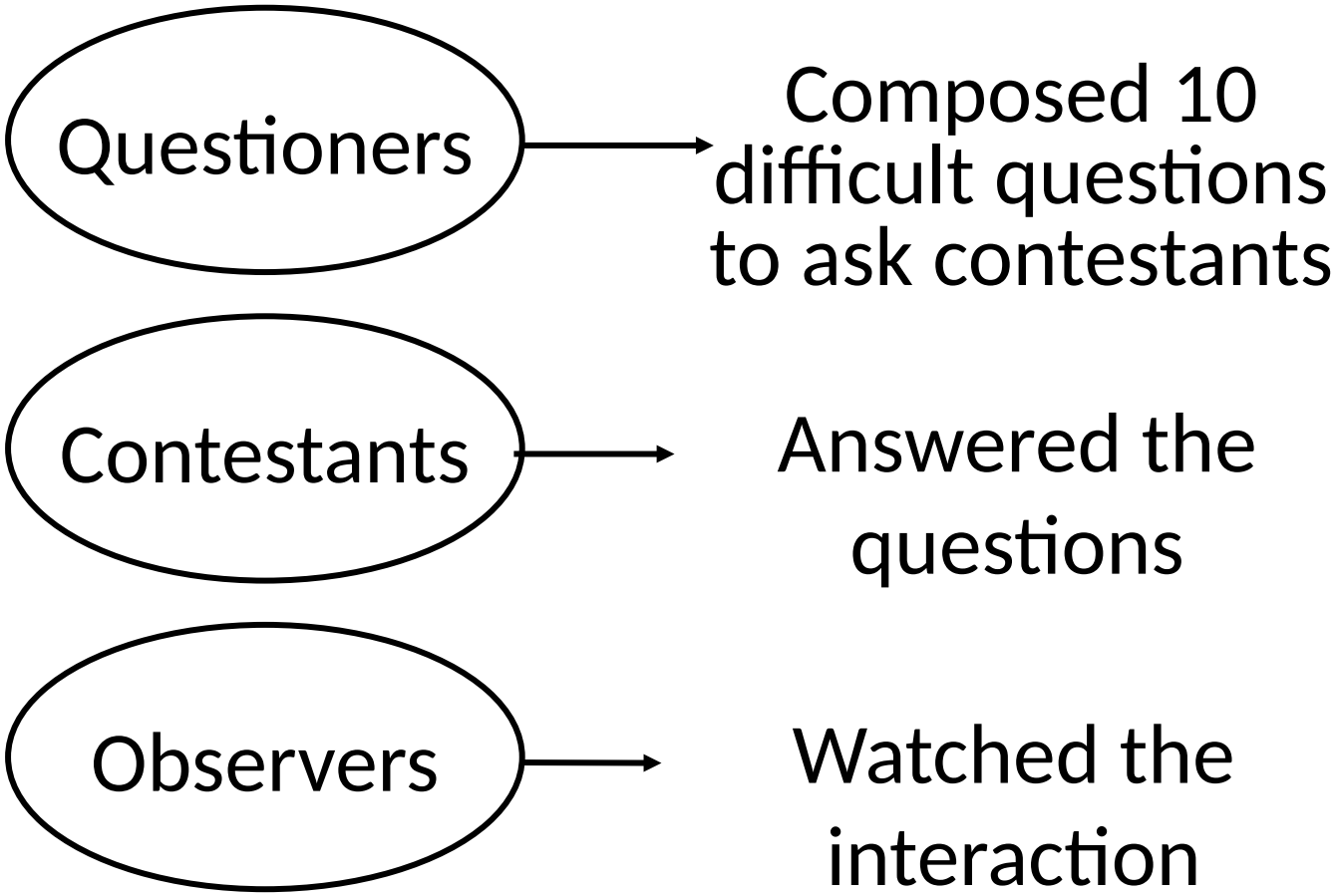
The tendency for people to over-emphasize dispositional, or personality-based, explanations for behaviours observed in others while under-emphasizing the role and power of situational influences on the same behaviour.

In other words, people tend to have a default assumption that what a person does is based more on *what "kind" of person he is, rather than the social and environmental forces at work on that person.*

The Quiz Game Study
Ross, Amabile & Steinmetz (1977)

Three groups of participants:

- Questioners
- Contestants
- Observers



Participants played their role

- asking questions
- answering questions
- observing interaction

Participants then rated the general knowledge of questioner and contestant (0-100).

Results:

- Contestants and observers rated questioner significantly more knowledgeable than contestants.
- Behavior attributed to dispositional qualities, NOT to participants' role in study; Overestimating dispositional factors and Underestimating situational factors

Role of Rater	Rating of Questioner	Rating of Contestant
Contestant	67	41
Observer	83	49
Questioner	54	51

JONES & HARRIS (1967) 'CASTRO STUDY'

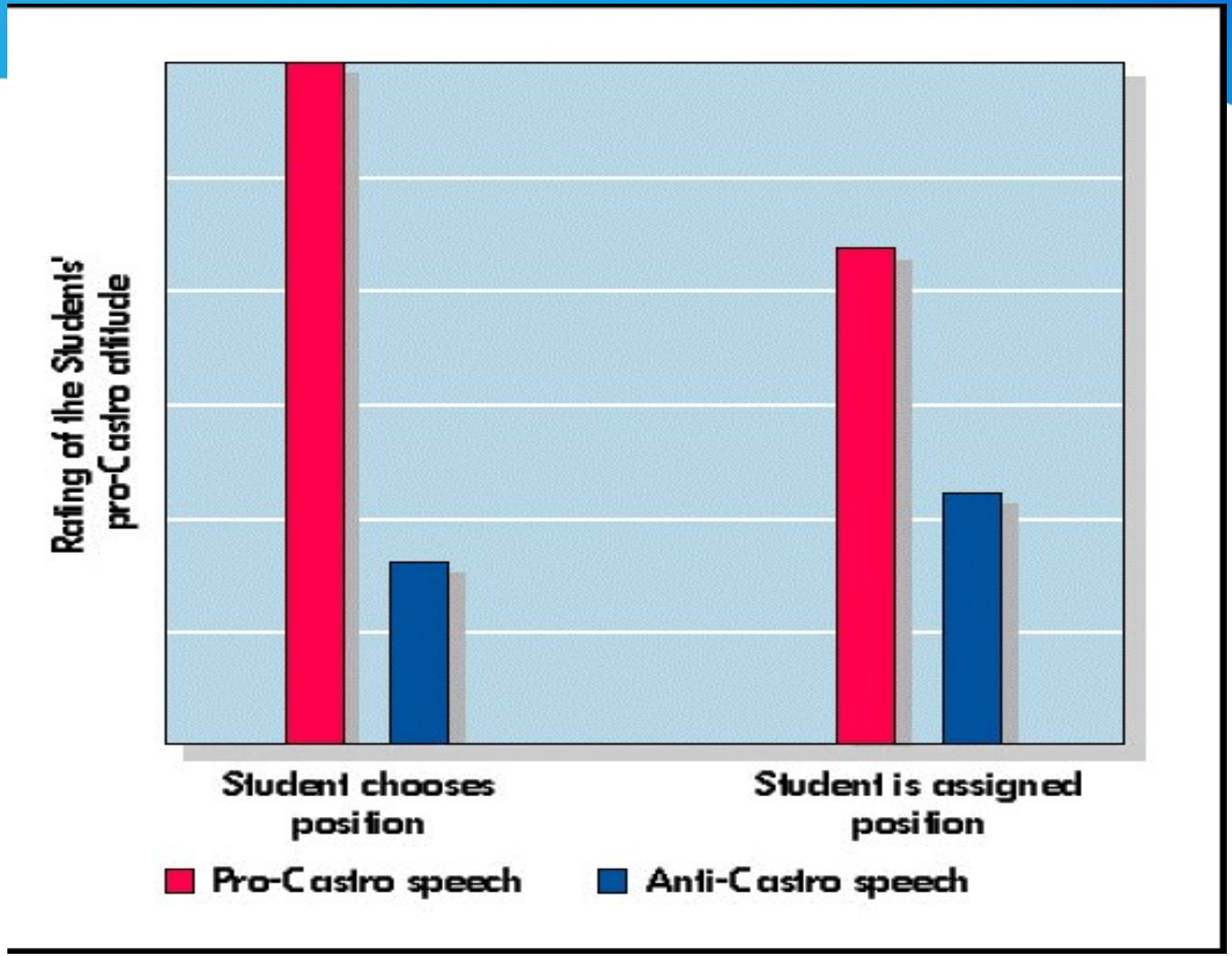
Subjects listened to pro- and anti-Fidel Castro speeches and asked to rate the pro-Castro attitudes of both.

When the subjects believed that the speech makers freely chose which position to take (for or against Castro), they naturally rated the people who gave the pro-Castro speeches as having a more positive attitude toward Castro.

When the subjects were specifically told that the speech makers gave either a pro- or an anti-Castro speech solely as the **result of a coin flip**, the subjects **still** rated the people who gave the pro-Castro speeches as having, on average, a more positive attitude towards Castro than those giving anti-Castro speeches.

JONES & HARRIS (1967) 'CASTRO STUDY'

Thus, even when subjects were aware that the speeches made were solely because of the flip of a coin, they committed the **fundamental attribution error** when it came to judging the motivation behind pro or anti-Castro attitudes of the speech makers.


Rating of the Students' pro-Castro attitude
Student chooses position
Student is assigned position
Pro-Castro speech
Anti-Castro speech

FALSE CONSENSUS EFFECT (ROSS ET AL. 1977)

- Tendency to see own behaviour as more typical than it actually is (tendency to overestimate the degree to which others agree with them).
- Commonly present in a group setting where one thinks the collective opinion of their own group matches that of the larger population.

ROSS, GREENE & HOUSE (1977)

- Participants asked if they would wear a sign around campus and watch reactions of others
- Told did not have to do it
- After participants made choice, they rated how many other students made the same choice as them.

Results:

50% said they would wear a sign

50% said they would not

	Estimate	
Wear sign	63% would	37% wouldn’t
Not wear sign	23% would	77% wouldn’t

Overestimated how many others would behave as they did!

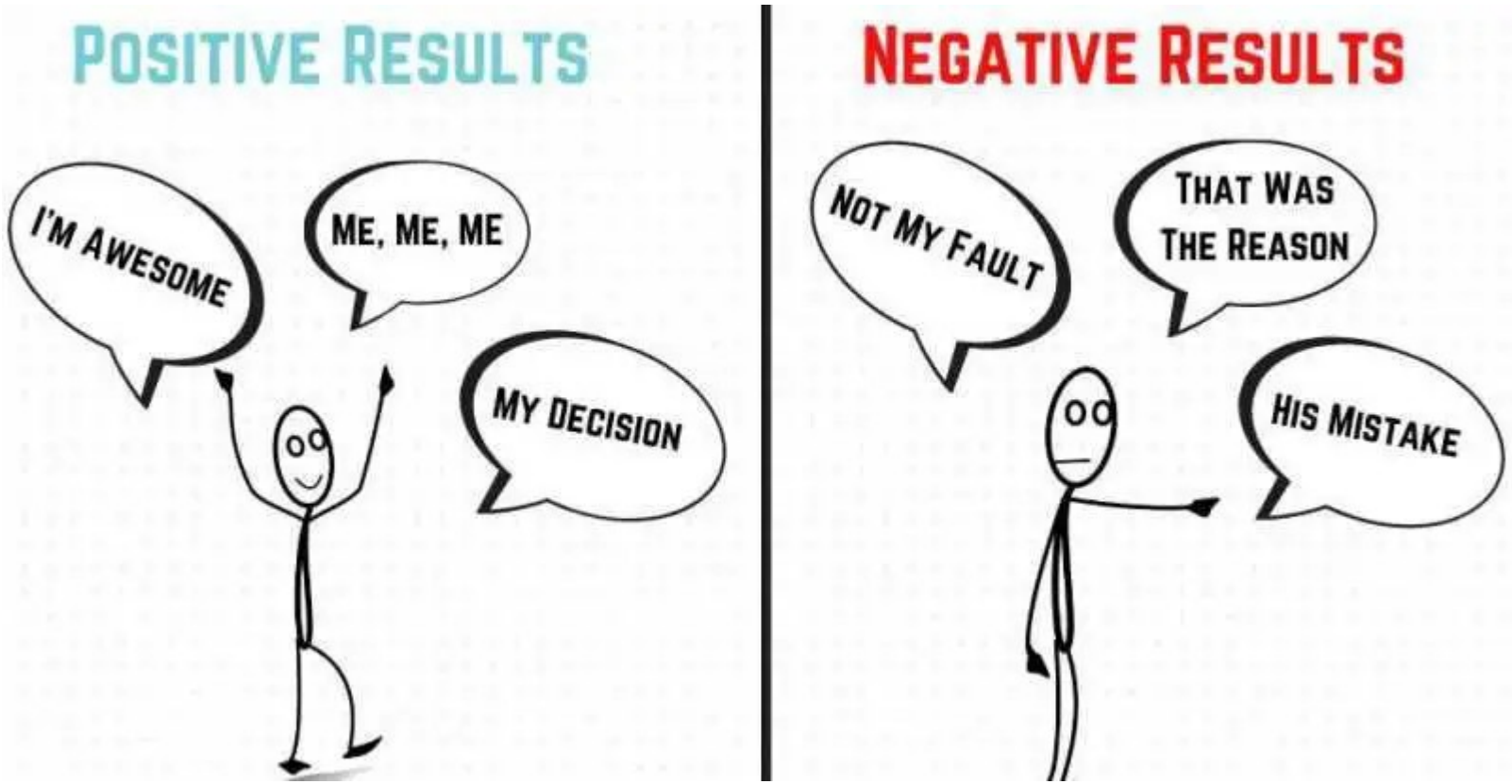
SELF-SERVING BIAS (MILLER & ROSS, 1975)

- This is our tendency to take credit for success (**self-enhancing bias**) and deny any responsibility for failure (**self-protective bias**).

e.g. “I got 90 for my essay!” vs. “The lecturer gave me 40!”

- We want to protect / enhance self-esteem

- We make dispositional (internal) attributions for our successes and situational (external) attribution for our failures.


POSITIVE RESULTS
I'M AWESOME
ME, ME, ME
MY DECISION
NEGATIVE RESULTS
NOT MY FAULT
THAT WAS THE REASON
HIS MISTAKE

THE ACTOR-OBSERVER EFFECT (JONES & NISBETT, 1972)

Although we tend to attribute others' behaviour to personal or dispositional factors, we typically attribute our own behaviour to situational factors.

E.g. you didn't do well on your presentation = you "know" it was because you had three other projects due in the same week, your computer crashed on you twice etc.

Someone else gives a bad presentation = that person does not know his subject well, perhaps lacks intelligence or is terrible at public speaking.

THE ACTOR-OBSERVER EFFECT

The term specifically refers to a difference in the way people explain their own behaviour (when they are in the "actor" role) in contrast to the way they explain other people's behaviour (when they are in the "observer" role).

Actors attribute their actions to the demands of the situation. *'I couldn't help it; I was forced by events*‘ etc.

Observers tend to attribute the actions of the actor to internal, stable, personal dispositions. ‘*He or she is bad tempered, careless, lazy*’ etc.

Actor-observer Bias

ACTORS VS. OBSERVERS

Nisbett, Caputo, Legant, & Marecek (1973): Male participants asked:

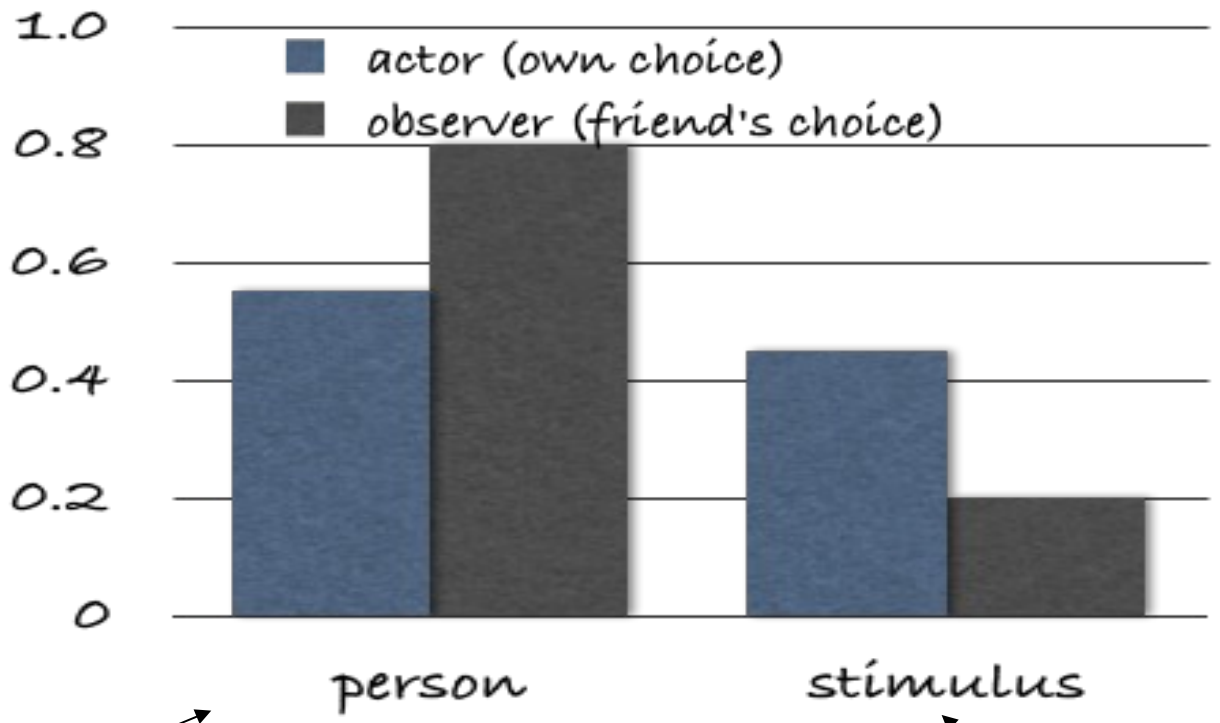
–“Why did you choose your major?”

–“Why did your friend choose his major?”

Actors: “Why did I choose **engineering in particular** ?”

Observers: “Why did **my friend** choose this major?”

Nisbett, Caputo, Legant, & Marecek (1973)



reasons associated with

with

e.g., "My friend wants to make lots of money."

e.g., "Engineering is a high-paying field."

Social Influence

Conformity – is a type of social influence involving a change in belief or behavior in order to fit in with a group. Two types:

- **Internalization** - *changing your real thoughts and feelings* as a result of less direct pressure from others
- **Compliance** – agreeing with other people's opinions and complying with their request publicly *but not changing your real internal opinions*.

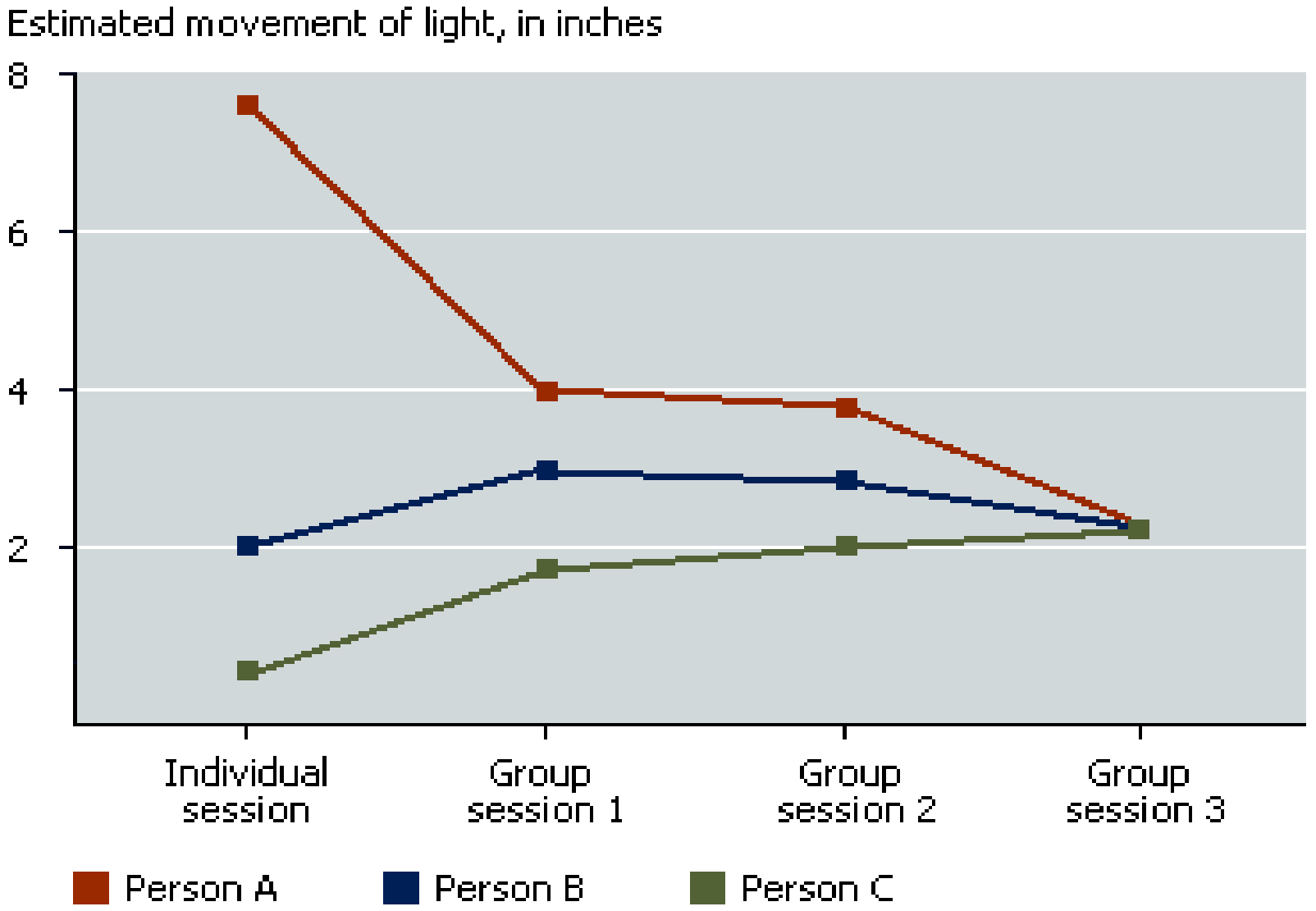
Obedience - a form of social influence where an individual acts in response to a direct order from another individual, who is usually an authority figure. It is assumed that without such an order the person would not have acted in this way.

Conformity 1

Sherif's (1935)
Autokinetic Effect Experiment

Autokinetic effect – when in total darkness we perceive a small stationary bright light as moving.

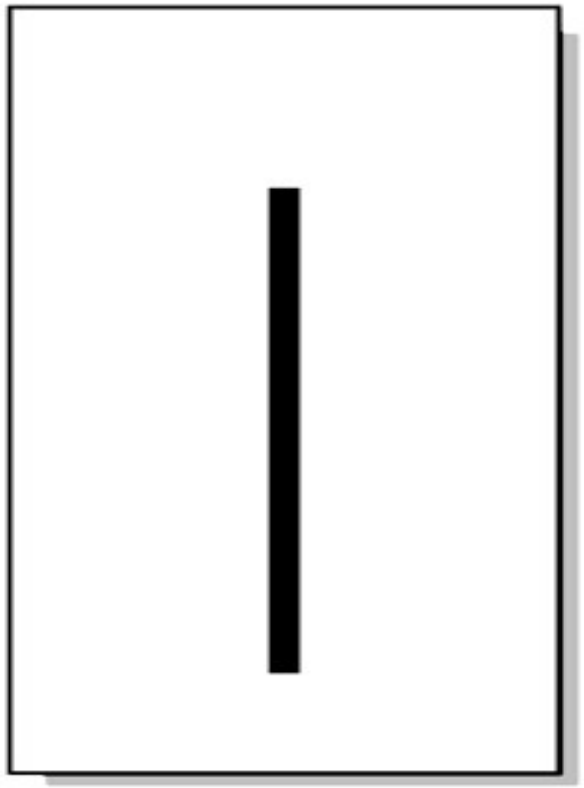
How much did the light move when viewed by themselves and then in groups of 2 or 3.

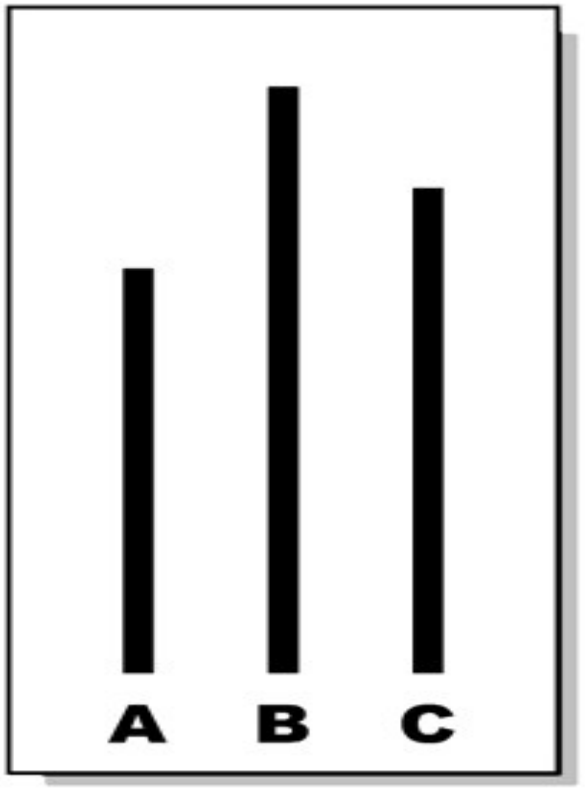


Source: Sherif, M. and Sherif, C.W., *Social Psychology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

Conformity 2

Asch's (1950s)Lines Experiments





- **Control group** – 35/37 people judged the correct line –

- **Experimental group** – judgements out loud
  All but one were confederates (1 + 6)
  The confederates had been prearranged to all give an incorrect answer to the tests.

- **37%** of experimental group gave incorrect response
- Subjects showed extreme discomfort
- Fear of social disapproval
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyDDyT1IDhA

Factors that affect conformity

- Group size:
  - Conformity increases as group size increases
- Presence of a dissenter:
  - One person disagreeing with the others greatly reduces group conformity
- Culture:
  - Greater in collectivistic cultures

Explanations of Conformity

Informational influence – to go with information derived from others, rather than from ourselves, because it removes ambiguity in the situation (desire to be correct) –

Normative influence – The influence of other people that leads us to conform in order to be liked and accepted by them; results in public compliance with the group's beliefs and behaviors, but not necessarily in private acceptance –

Informational vs. NormativeSocial Influence

- **Informational Social Influence**
  - Situation is ambiguous
  - Participant relies on others for information
  - Public response = private acceptance (internalization*)
    - Sherif's study

- **Normative Social Influence**
  - Situation is not ambiguous
  - Participant is looking for social approval
  - Public response ≠ private acceptance (compliance*)
    - Asch's study

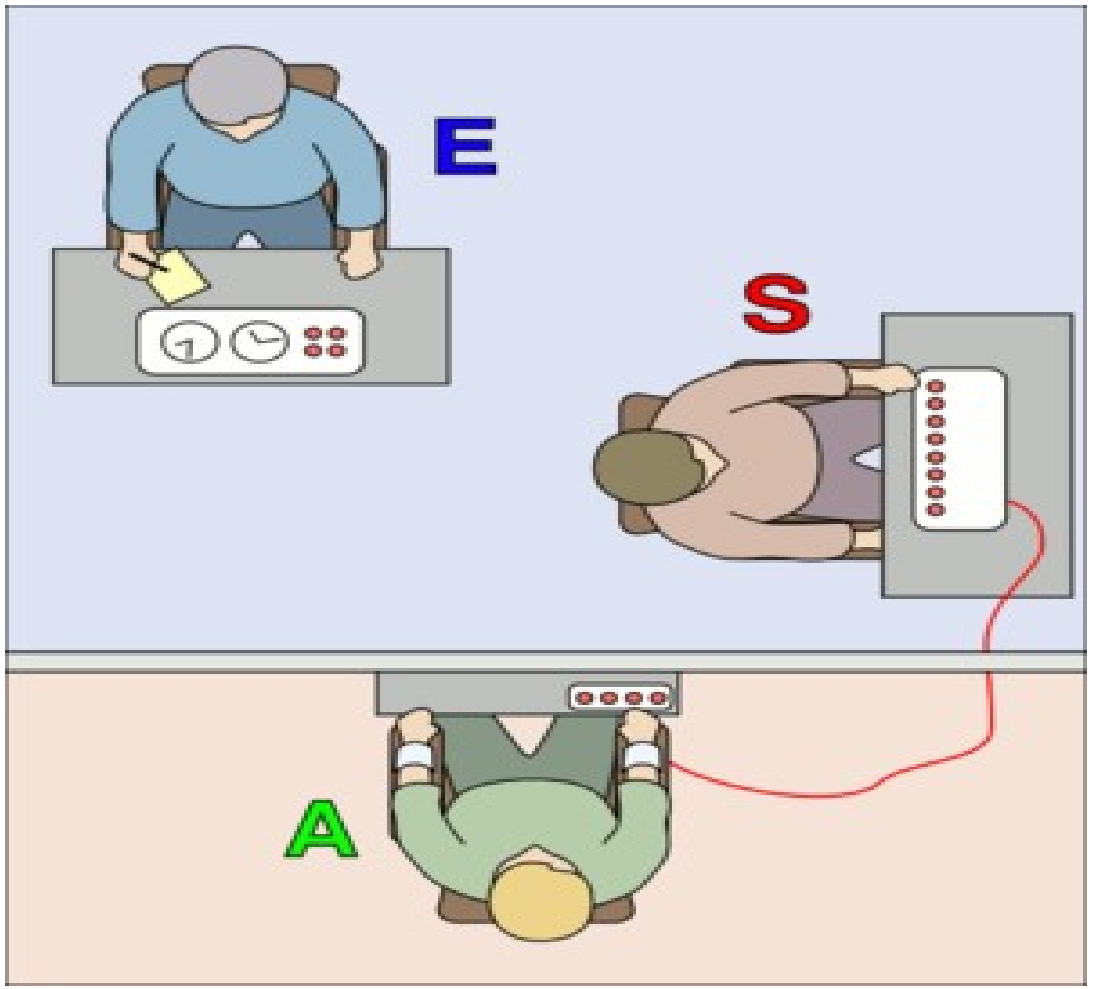
Obedience

Obedience to Authority

- **Milgram's shock generator studies**
- The participant and a confederate (an actor pretending to be another participant) are told by the experimenter that they will be participating in an experiment to test "*the effects of punishment on learning behaviour*".
- Learner or teacher
- Teacher gives, learner receives electric shock

Milgram's (1974) Obedience Experiment

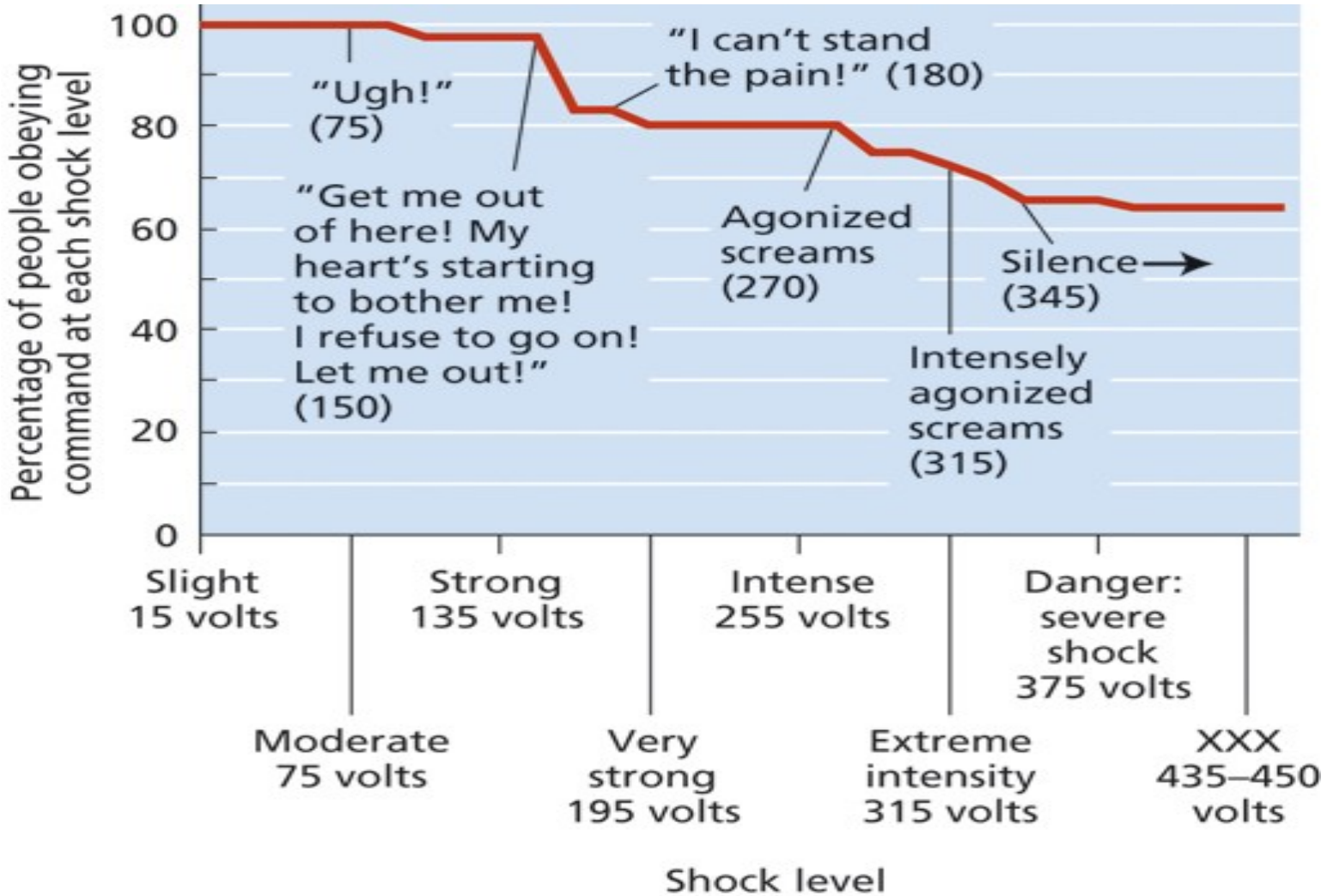
The teacher believes that he is actually giving shocks to the learner participant. In reality, there are NO shocks being given to the learner.



1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
15	.....			75	.....			135	.....			195	.....			255	.....			315	.....			375	.....			435	450
Volts	30	45	60	Volts	90	105	120	Volts	150	165	180	Volts	210	225	240	Volts	270	285	300	Volts	330	345	360	Volts	390	405	420	Volts	Volts
Slight shock	.....			Moderate shock	.....			Strong shock	.....			Very strong shock	.....			Intense shock	.....			Extreme intensity shock	.....			Danger: severe shock	.....			XXX	

- After a certain number of level increases, the actor starts to bang on the wall that separates him from the teacher. After banging on the wall and complaining of his heart condition, the learner gives **no further response** to the questions and no further complaints.

- It is at this point that many people begin to indicate their desire to stop the experiment and check on the subject but they are told by the experimenter to continue – and they do!


Percentage of people obeying command at each shock level
100
80
60
40
20
0
"Ugh!" (75)
"Get me out of here! My heart's starting to bother me! I refuse to go on! Let me out!" (150)
"I can't stand the pain!" (180)
Agonized screams (270)
Intensely agonized screams (315)
Silence (345)
Slight 15 volts
Moderate 75 volts
Strong 135 volts
Very strong 195 volts
Intense 255 volts
Extreme intensity 315 volts
Danger: severe shock 375 volts
XXX 435–450 volts
Shock level

Milgram's (1974) Obedience Experiment

- Before the experiment Milgram asked to fellow psychologists – **only sadists would give the maximum voltage.**

- However, **65%** (26 out of 40) of experimental participants administered the experiment's final 450-volt shock, though many were quite uncomfortable in doing so. No participant stopped before the 300-volt level (average 360-volt).

Milgram's (1974) Obedience Experiment

Shock Level (Volts)	Number of participants	%
300	5	12.5
315	4	10.0
330	2	5.0
345	1	2.5
360	1	2.5
375	1	2.5
450	26	65.0

Less artificial studies:

- Hofling et al (1966) - **nurses** were asked to give potentially lethal injections to patients, and in spite of official guidelines forbidding administration in such circumstances, 21 out of 22 appeared prepared to do it.
  - The study had high levels of ecological validity, due to the fact it was conducted in a real life environment.

- Sheridan and King (1972) - people were asked to give real (but small) electric shocks to a **puppy** (for a learning task). The participants obeyed even though they could see the distress of the animal.

- **Zimbardo's Standford Prison experiment** (1973) - . The SPE demonstrates aspects of conformity, obedience, and, most significantly, the power of social situations on people's behaviour.
- Guards quickly became authoritarian, enforcing harsh rules and humiliating prisoners (e.g., stripping, delousing, sleep deprivation). Prisoners showed passive submission, anxiety, and rebellion. The 2-week plan ended after 6 days due to ethical concerns over escalating abuse and emotional breakdowns.

Lecture summary

- Attribution theories and errors/biases.
- Asch and Sheriff studies; internalization and compliance; informational and normative social influence
- Milgram’s obedience study
- Zimbardo’s prison experiment.