Lecture 2: Basic Principles, Theory, Methods

Part I: Basic Principles

Part II: Theories

Part III: Methods

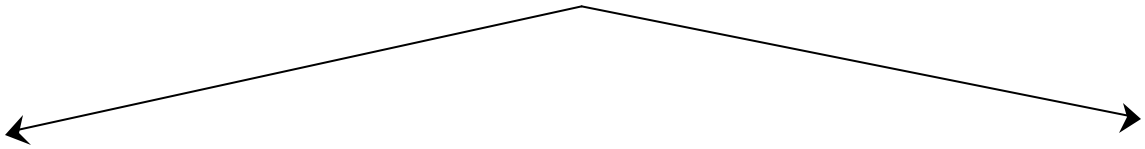
Part I: Basic Principles of Social Behavior

1. Social behavior is goal-oriented.

2. Social behavior represents a continual interaction between the person and the situation.

Social Goals

The goals of our social behaviors function at different levels



Proximate

- day-to-day
- current
- conscious

Ultimate

- big picture
- long-term
- not always conscious

Social Goals

At the broadest level (*ultimate*), we can categorize social goals into fundamental motives

To establish and maintain social ties

To understand ourselves and others

To gain and maintain status

To defend ourselves and those we value

To attract and retain mates

Person-Situation Interactions

By person, psychologists mean the features or characteristics that individuals carry into social situations.

By situation, psychologists mean the environmental events or circumstances outside the person.

Persons and situations influence one another in a number of ways.

Part II: Theory

- **Theory**: an integrated set of principles (or concepts) that explain and predict observed events (or facts).
- **Hypothesis**: a testable proposition that describes a relationship that may exist between events.

A Good Theory:

1.) Effectively summarizes a wide range of observations

2.) Makes clear predictions that we can use to:

a.) Confirm or modify a theory

b.) Generate a new explanation

c.) Suggest practical application

3.) Is parsimonious and wide in scope?

Parsimony and Scope

- **Parsimony**: the simplest theory that explains the most events or facts.

- **Scope**: How much of human social life does a theory explain? A *general theory* might shed light on a very wide range of behaviors, whereas a *middle-range* theory explains a smaller domain of behavior.

Theories in Social Psychology

- Social psychology is comprised of a few general theories and numerous middle-level theories.
- The textbook is organized by **themes**, or categories of behavior (self, groups, prejudice, groups). There are numerous assumptions and theoretical approaches found within every chapter.
- **Numerous social and biological "forces" may be important to different degrees.**

Macro-level Theory

- Attention given to “forces” that involve group-level or large-scale phenomena.

1.) Physical Environment

2.) Socio-cultural environment

A.) Society

B.) Culture (rules)

Environment

- Non-social environmental factors such as climate, geography, soils, pollution.

- Examples: 1.) Climate/geography and Native American social organization 2.) lithium in water supply lowering rates of violence.

A.) Society (Social Structure)

- The “relational” component of social systems, or how people associate or interact with one another.

- Examples: 1.) The proportions of poor and rich individuals living and interacting in a given population. 2.) How many people know each other in a particular population and how they are “connected” (e.g., social networks).

B.) Culture

- The shared values, beliefs, knowledge and rules of a population of individuals.

- Example: Ethnic groups in U.S. with different beliefs about how many children people should have, or the types of foods people should eat or should not eat.

B.) Culture (Rules)

- Rules are cultural prescriptions of behavior that should be followed. Rules are evidenced by the SANCTIONS (rewards and punishments) they produce when behavior is violated or exceptionally upheld.

Examples of Societal Rules (Norms)

- ATM lines
- Eye contact/distance of communication
- Surfing rules
- Bathroom rules?

Socio-cultural Theory

- Generally incorporates MACRO forces (Society, Environment, Culture).

- Assume human behavior influenced by society, culture and environment, thus it is problematic to find “universal” behavior among different groups.

Sociocultural Perspective

Sociocultural theorists often ask:

"What are the differences in social behavior & rules between groups?"

Micro-Level Theories

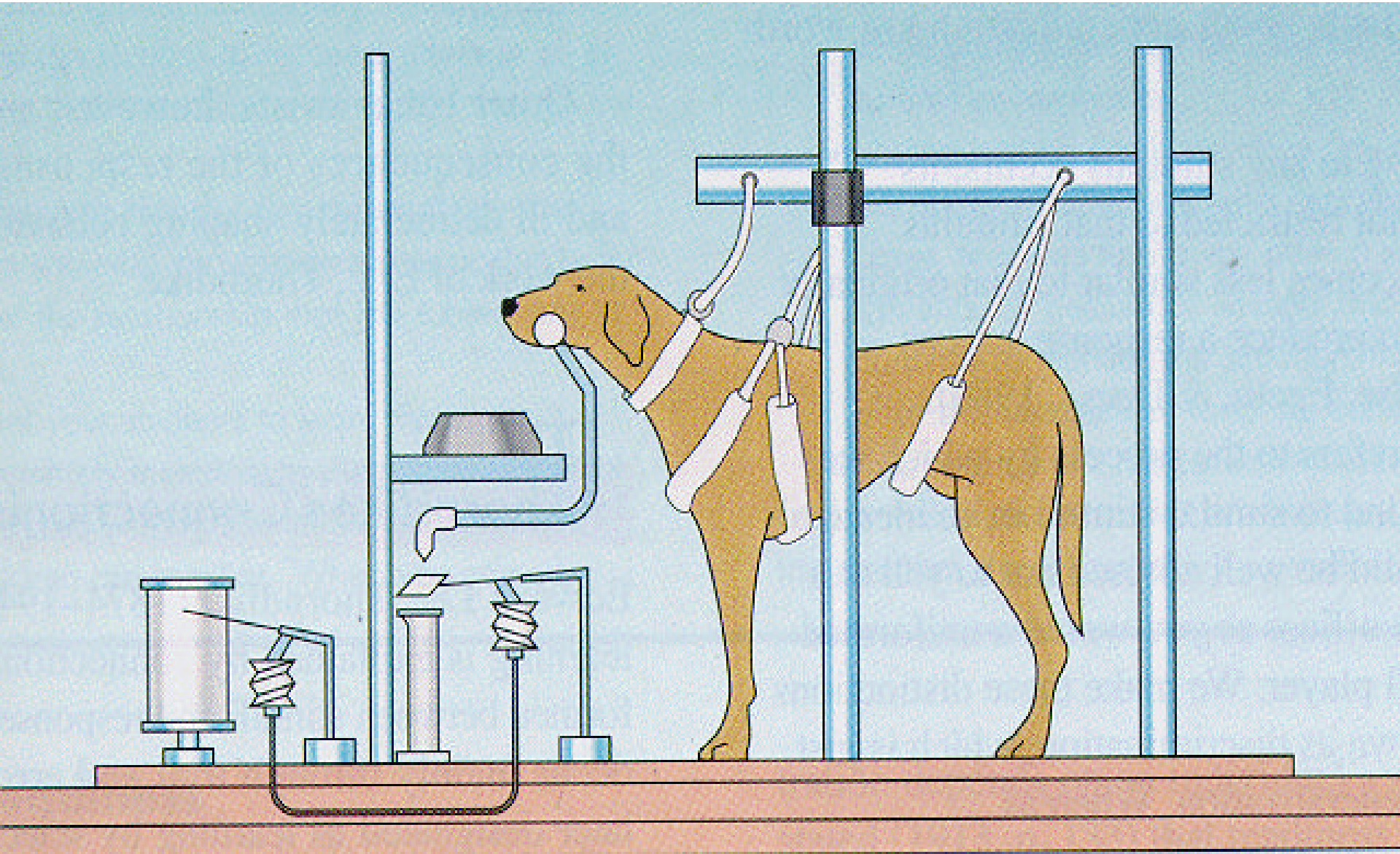
- These theories generally make assumptions about human “nature” at the individual level.

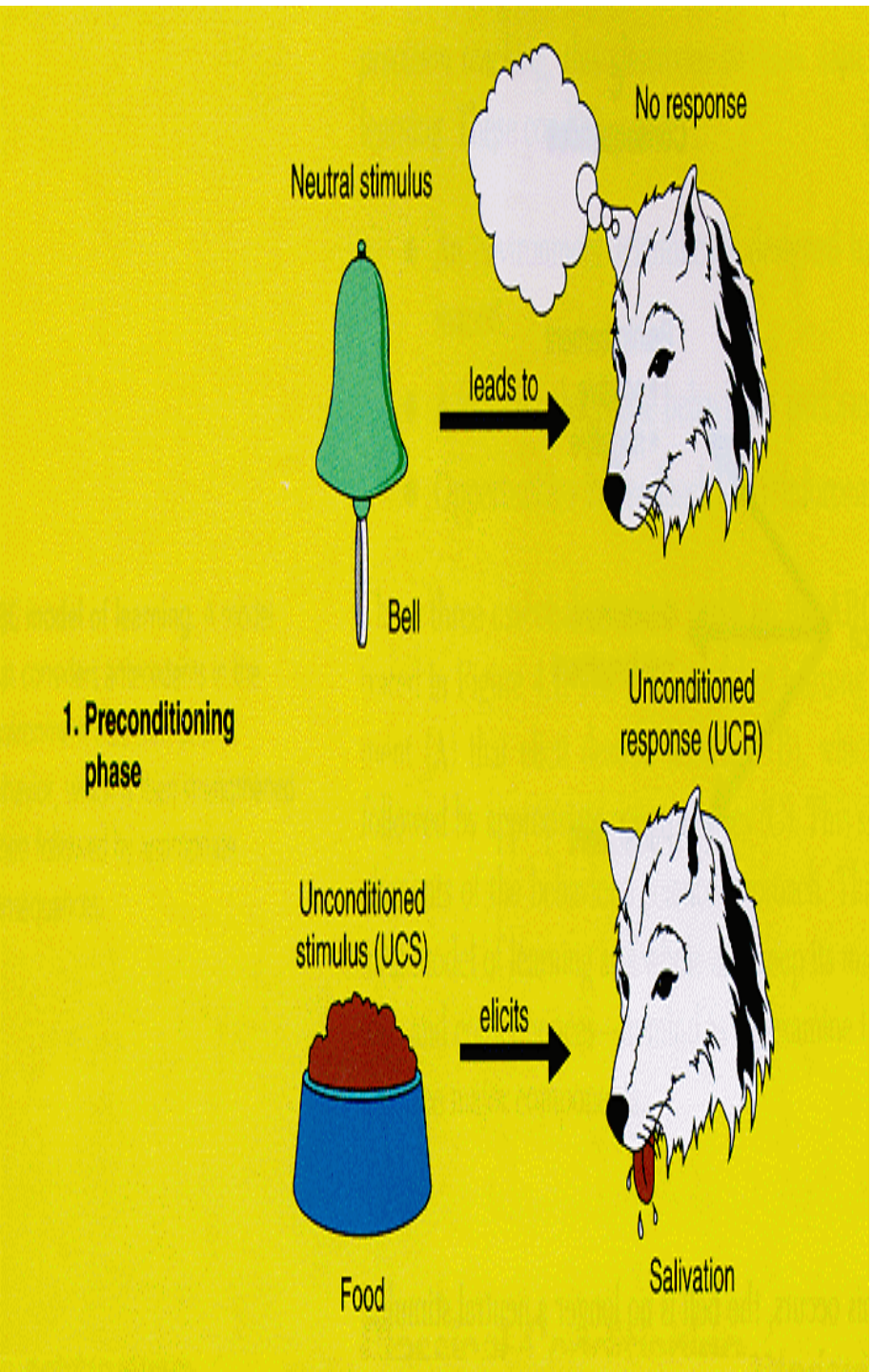
1.) Social Learning Theory
2.) Social Cognition Theory
3.) Evolutionary Theory
4.) Symbolic Interactionism

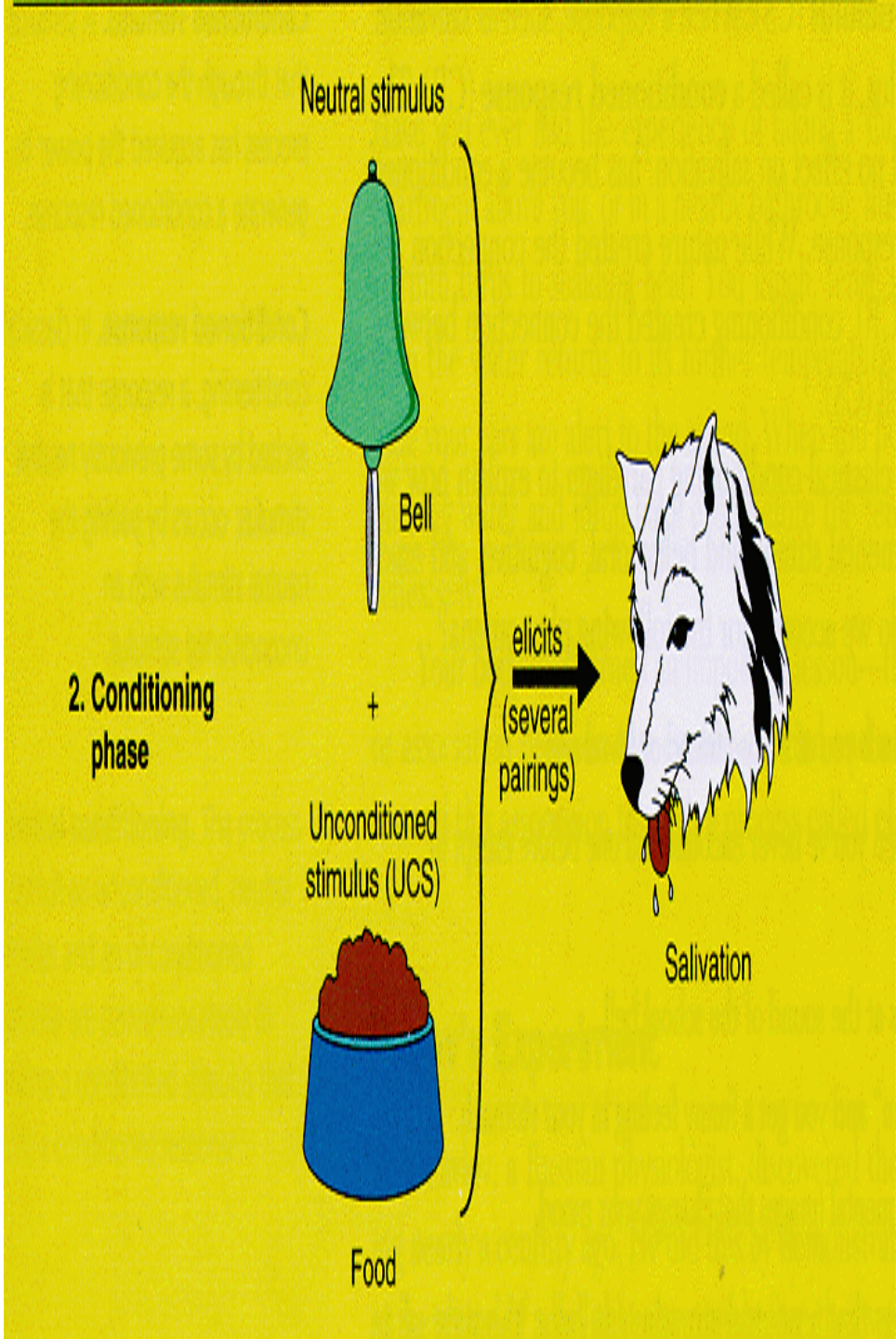
1.) Social Learning Theory

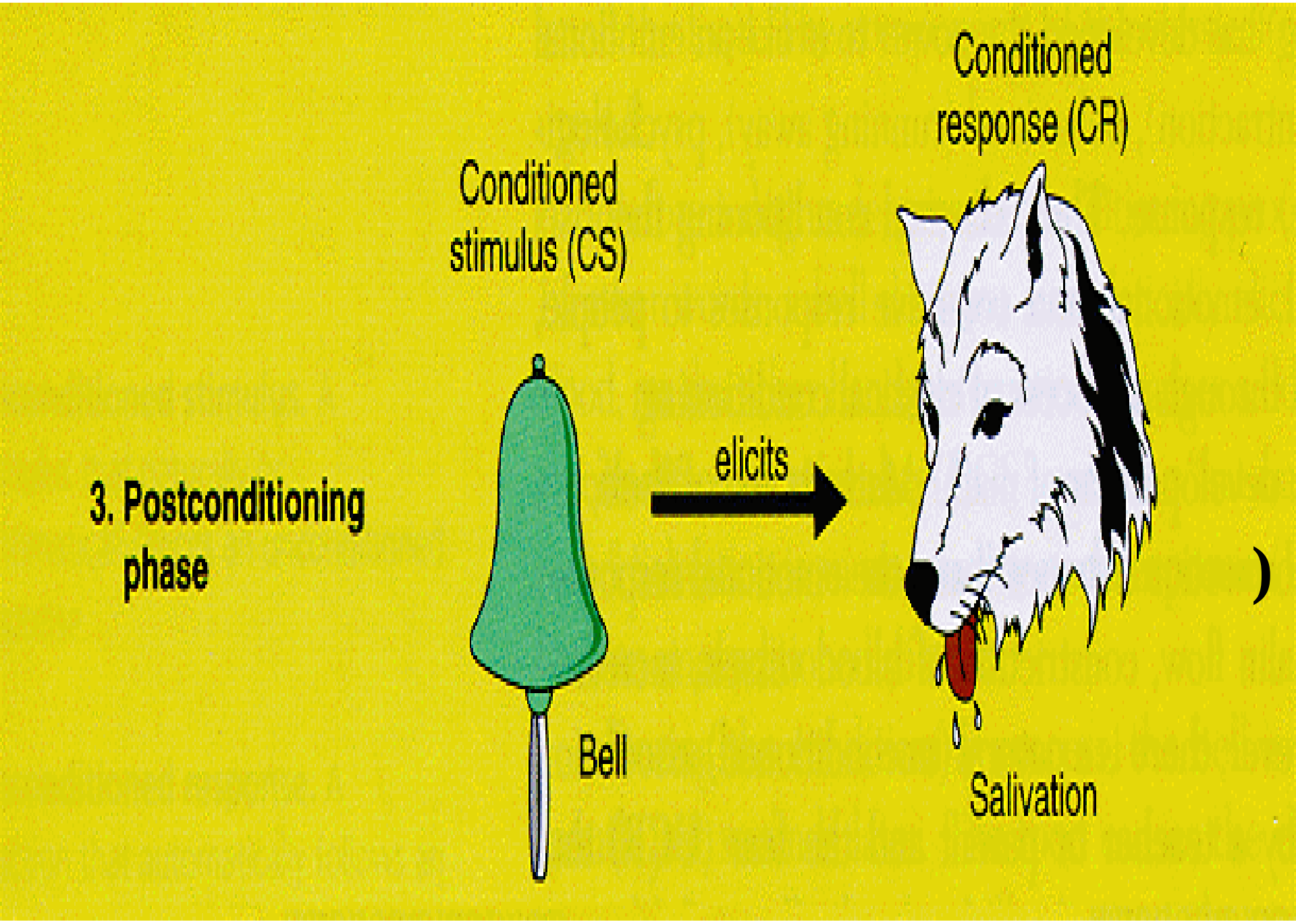
- Human brains, instead of being comprised of innate structures for specific realms of behavior, may be generalized learning “machines”.
- What matters is the stimulus we receive from the environment and how this influences future behavior.
- Examples of two types of learning: *Conditioning* and *Imitation*

CLASSIC CONDITIONING: “two stimuli become associated by repeated pairing”




No response
Neutral stimulus
leads to
Bell
1. Preconditioning phase
Unconditioned response (UCR)
Unconditioned stimulus (UCS)
elicits
Food
Salivation


Neutral stimulus
Bell
2. Conditioning phase
+
Unconditioned stimulus (UCS)
Food
elicits (several pairings)
Salivation


Conditioned response (CR)
Conditioned stimulus (CS)
3. Postconditioning phase
elicits
Bell
Salivation

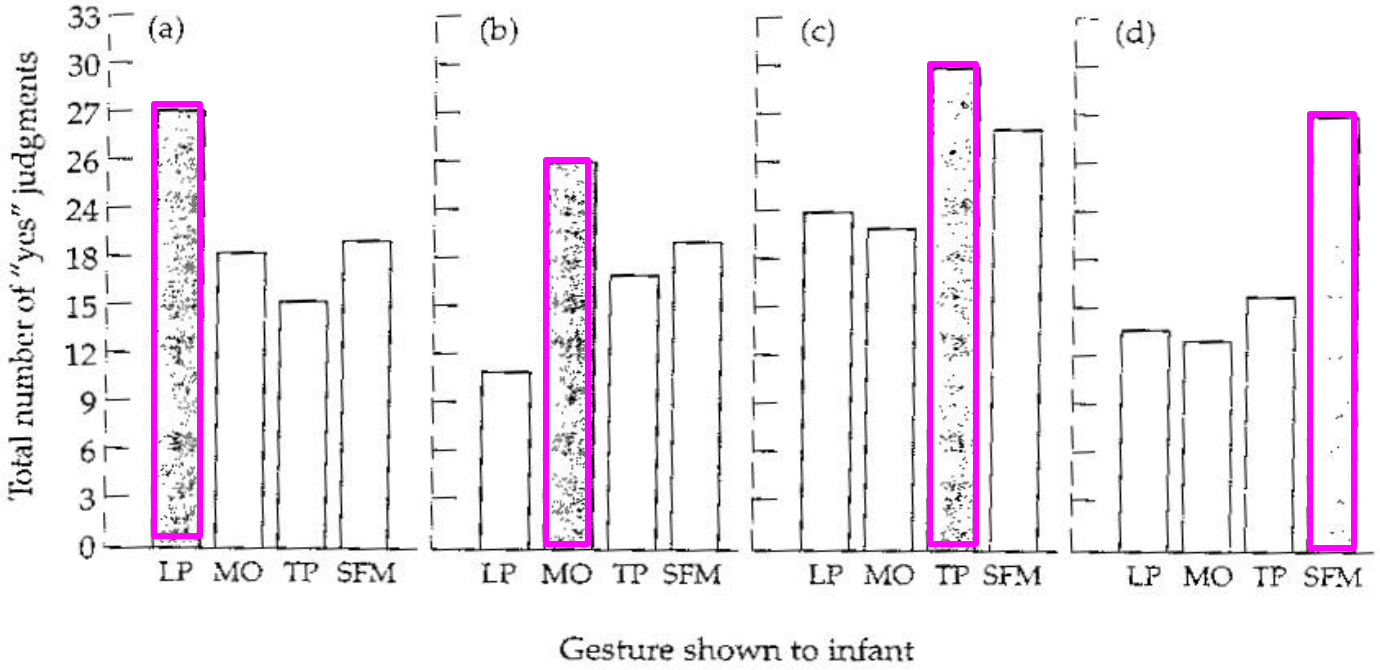
Imitation: "*learning to do an act from seeing it done*".

early social interaction… imitation



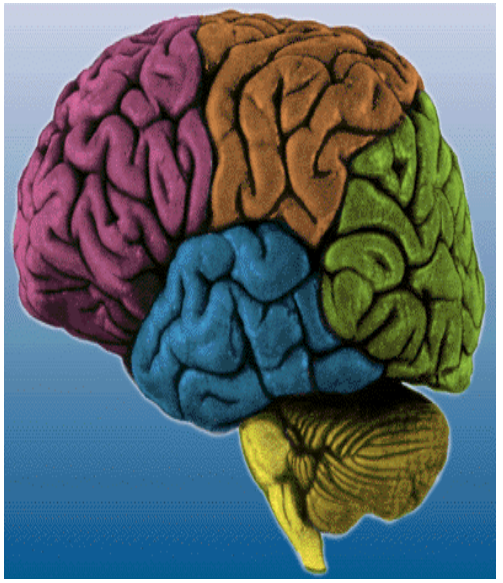



early social interaction… imitation



2.) Social Cognition Theory

- **The cognitive approach focuses on how people structure and process information**



What do we **notice?**

How do we **interpret** information?

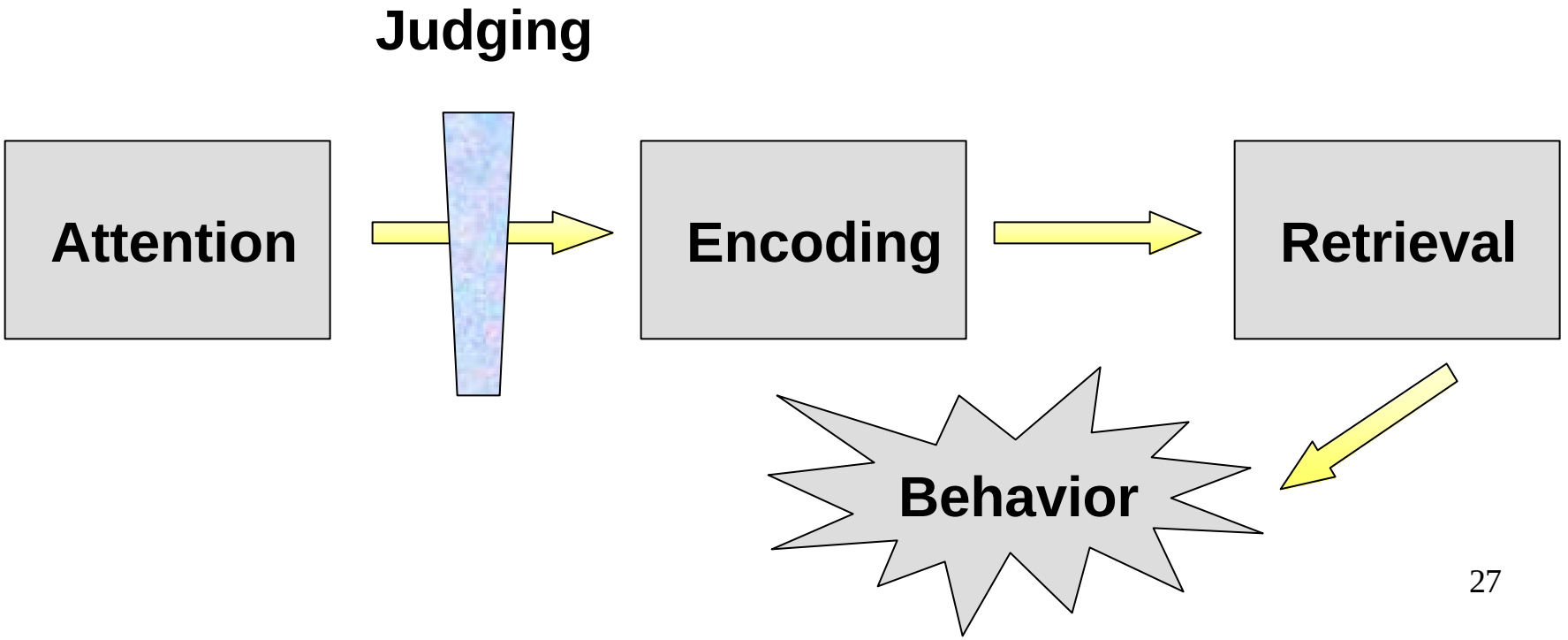
How do we **judge** social situations?

What do we **retrieve** from memory?

Cognitive Processing

- **Categories**: we perceive the world in bundles or categories of information. (a shelve of books rather than each book; an ethnic group rather than a number of distinct individuals.
- Thus, the objective world often less important than the interpretive or subjective world.

Social cognitive theorists often ask:
"What types of information are going in and out of our brains?"



3.) Evolutionary Theory

- Genetic predispositions that promoted our ancestors' survival and reproduction continue to influence our behavior
- What kinds of predispositions?
  - Competition with others for resources and mates, showy displays to attract mates, nurturing of young
- What sub-theories explain these?
  - Natural selection, kin selection

4.) Symbolic Interactionism

- A theoretical approach from sociology. Similar to cognitive theory; attention is paid to how humans perceive and interpret their social worlds. **The human world is not objective, but is subjective**.
- Approach differs from cognitive theory in that how we interpret meaning comes from the process of interacting in a **symbolic** world.
- Symbols allow people to name objects in the world, but this is a complex and ongoing process.

Example from Goffman's "Stigma"

- "How hard and humiliating it is to bear the name of an unemployed man. When I go out, I cast down my eyes because I feel myself wholly inferior. When I go along the street, it seems to me that I can't be compared with an average citizen, that everybody is pointing at me with his finger."

Contrasting Theories with an Example

Situation: At 3 am one morning police see a high school dropout, Larry, coming out of the back entrance of a liquor store with a bag of money.

The officer tells Larry to stop, but Larry shoots the officer in the leg.

Larry is later apprehended and will spend much of his life in prison

Socio-cultural Theories

- Culture and social rules influence human behavior.

- Maybe Larry is part of a youth gang that encourages robbery and the violent resolution of disputes. An analysis of Larry's beliefs, traditions, social norms, and other aspects of "gang culture" might help explain his actions.

Social Learning Theory

- Larry has had bad experiences with police and has learned that violence is usually a good solution to problems. Thus, he shot at the police officer.

Social Cognition Theory

- How did Larry perceive his actions in taking the money? When the officer told Larry to stop, how did he perceive the situation?

Evolutionary Theory

- Larry, a young male with few material resources, is willing to engage in risky behavior to acquire symbolic and material resources. Such a decision may be rational from an evolutionary sense; Larry can impress a woman with his risky stunt, get married, and pass on his genes by having children.

Symbolic Interactionism

- After, dropping out of school, Larry's peers, parents, and teachers may have behaved differently towards him. Believing everybody thinks he is a "loser", Larry becomes more and more deviant until he commits the robbery.

Part III: Research Methods

How do psychologists study social behavior?

- *Descriptive methods* → involve attempts to measure or record behaviors, thoughts or feelings in their natural state
- *Experimental methods* → involve attempts to manipulate social processes by varying some aspect of the situation.

Descriptive Methods

There are 4 major types of descriptive methods.

Case Studies

Archives

Surveys

Psychological Tests

Descriptive Methods

Case Studies

Involve intensive examination of a single person or group

Advantages

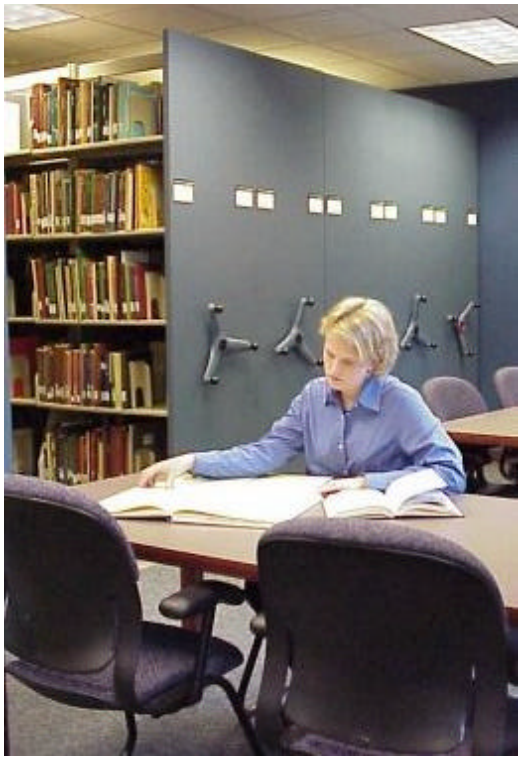
- rich source of hypotheses
- allows studies of rare behaviors

Disadvantages

- observer bias
- difficult to generalize
- impossible to reconstruct causes from complexity of past events

Descriptive Methods

Archives



Involve gathering public records of social behaviors

Advantages

- easy access to large amounts of pre-recorded data
- little worry as to ethical issues

Disadvantages

- many interesting social behaviors are never recorded
- time consuming

Descriptive Methods

Surveys

Involve asking people questions about their beliefs and behaviors

Advantages

- allows study of difficult-to-observe behaviors, thoughts and feelings
- easy to distribute to large groups

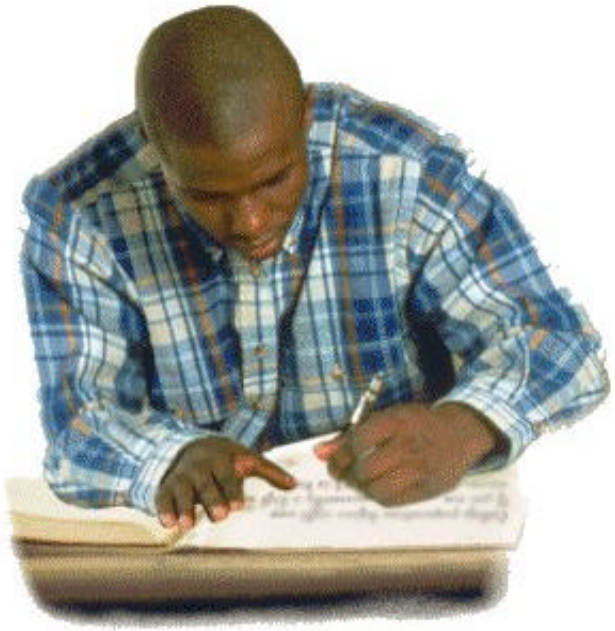
Disadvantages

- people who respond may not be representative
- responses may be biased or untruthful

Descriptive Methods

Psychological Tests

Involve attempts to assess an individual's abilities, cognitions, motivations, or behaviors



Advantages

- allows measurement of characteristics not easily observable

Disadvantages

- tests may be unreliable
- tests may be reliable but not valid

Descriptive Methods

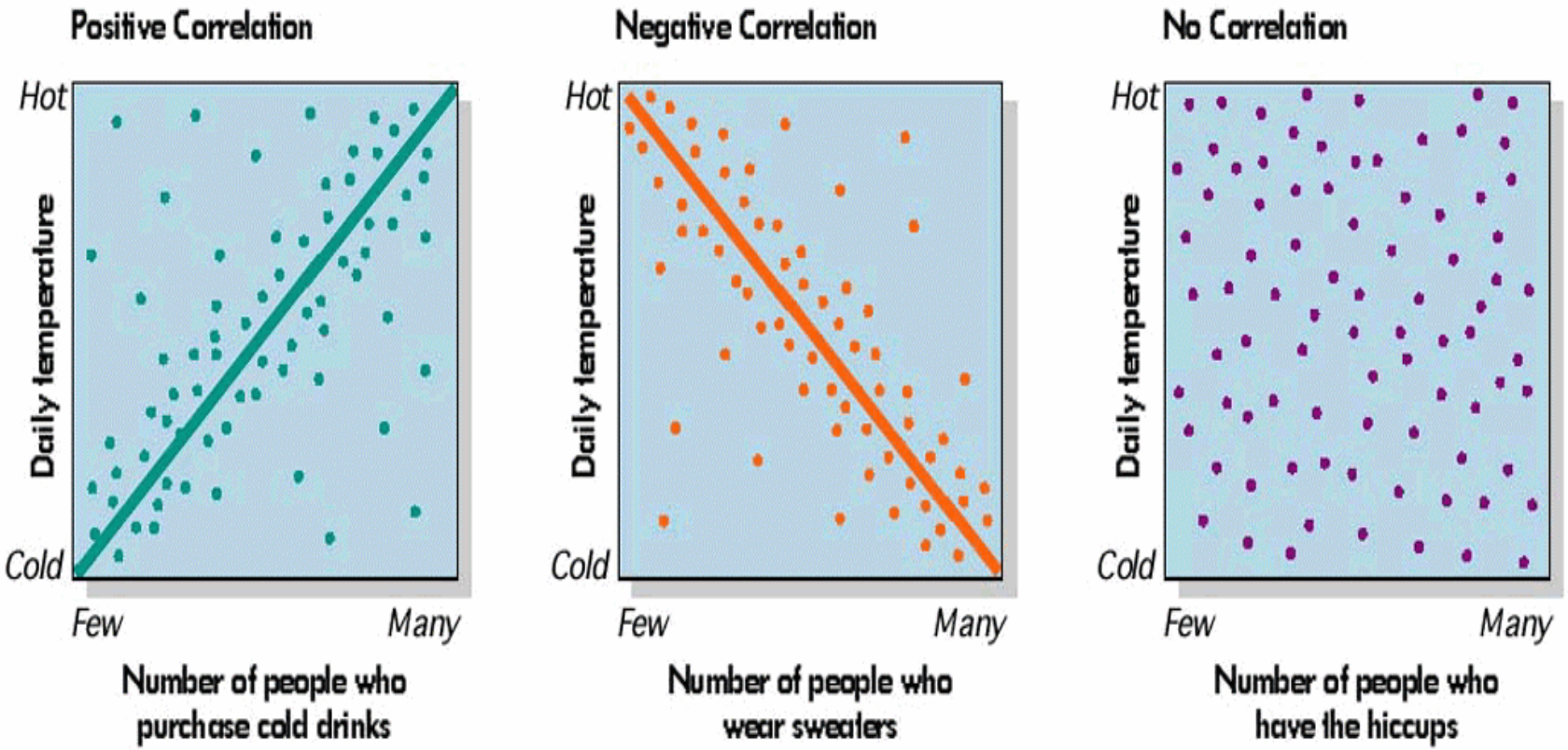
- Useful for determining correlation

Correlation → the extent to which two or more variables are associated with one another.

If two variables are highly correlated (e.g., drug use and grad school applications), can we determine the causal relationship between them?

F I G U R E 2 . 1 Correlations: Positive, Negative, and None

Correlations reveal a systematic association between two variables. Positive correlations indicate that variables are in sync: Increases in one variable are associated with increases in the other, decreases with decreases. Negative correlations indicate that variables go in opposite directions: Increases in one variable are associated with decreases in the other. When two variables are not systematically associated, there is no correlation.



Question:

- **If we know two variables are highly correlated (e.g. ice cream sales are up on days when drowning incidents are highest), can we determine the causal relationship between them?**

Correlation

Variable A could cause variable B.

(Eating ice cream could cause cramps, which could lead to drowning)

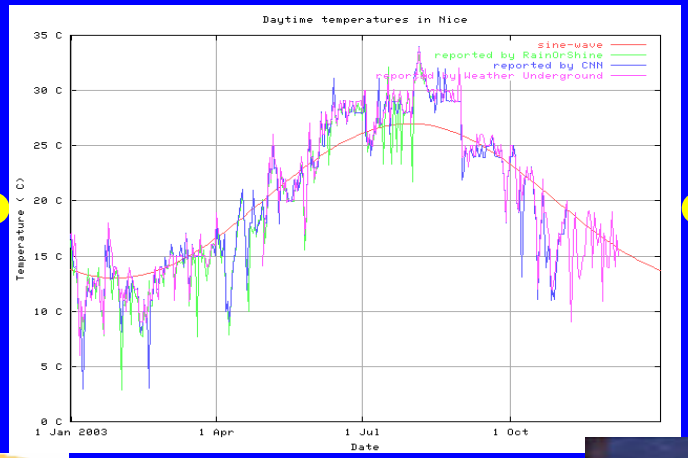
Correlation

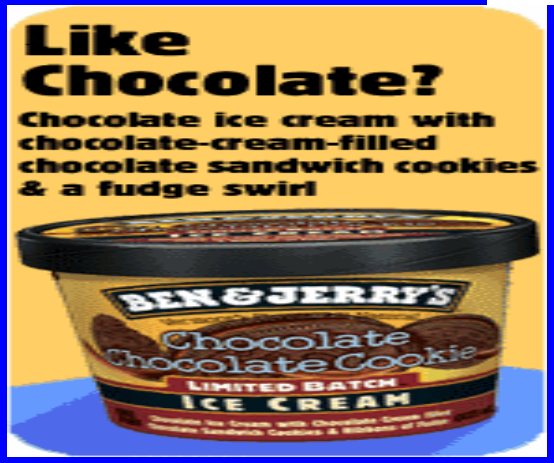
Variable B could cause variable A.

Parents could buy kids more ice cream to console them after their friends drown

Correlation

Or a third variable could cause A and B.





Heat leads people to eat ice cream and to swim, but the two aren't directly linked

Experimental Methods

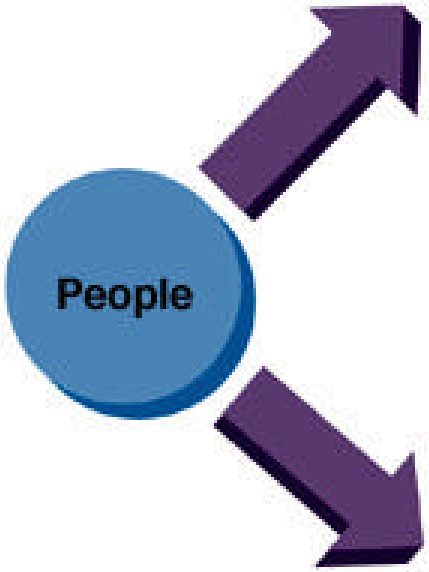
- In order to determine causality, we must use experimental methods.

Experiment → research method in which the researcher sets out to systematically manipulate one source of influence while holding others constant.

Experimental Methods

- *Random assignment* → the practice of assigning subjects to treatments so each subject has an equal chance of being in any condition.
- *Confound* → A variable that systematically changes along with the independent variable, potentially leading to a mistaken conclusion about the independent variable.
- *Demand characteristics* → cues that make subjects aware of how the experimenter expects them to behave.

Random Assignment

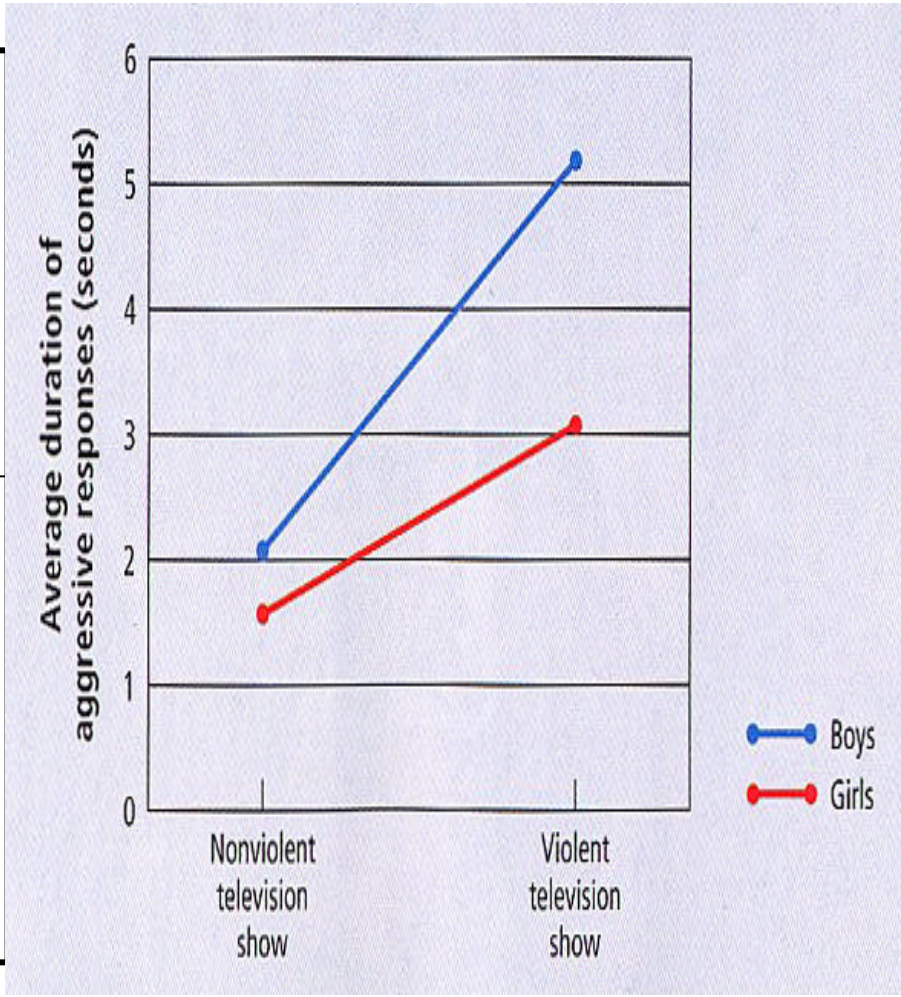


Condition	Treatment	Measure
Experimental	Violent TV	Aggression
Control	Nonviolent TV	Aggression

1.) Start with 120 students.

2.) Randomly assign students to each box.

Experiment	Violent (boys) N=30	Violent (girls) N=30
Control	Non-Violent (boys) N=30	Non-Violent (girls) N=30



Experimental Methods

- *Independent variable* (IV) → variable manipulated by the experimenter
- *Dependent variable* (DV) → variable measured by the experimenter

2 TYPES

Lab **Field**

Experimental Methods

Laboratory experiments

Involve the direct manipulation of IV's and the observation of their effects on the behavior of DV's.

Advantages

- allows cause-effect conclusions
- control of extraneous variables

Disadvantages

- artificial situations may not represent natural events (participants know they are being observed)
- lack of generalizability

Experimental Methods

Field experiments

Involve the manipulation of IV's using unknowing participants in natural settings.

Advantages

- allows cause-effect conclusions
- subjects give more natural responses

Disadvantages

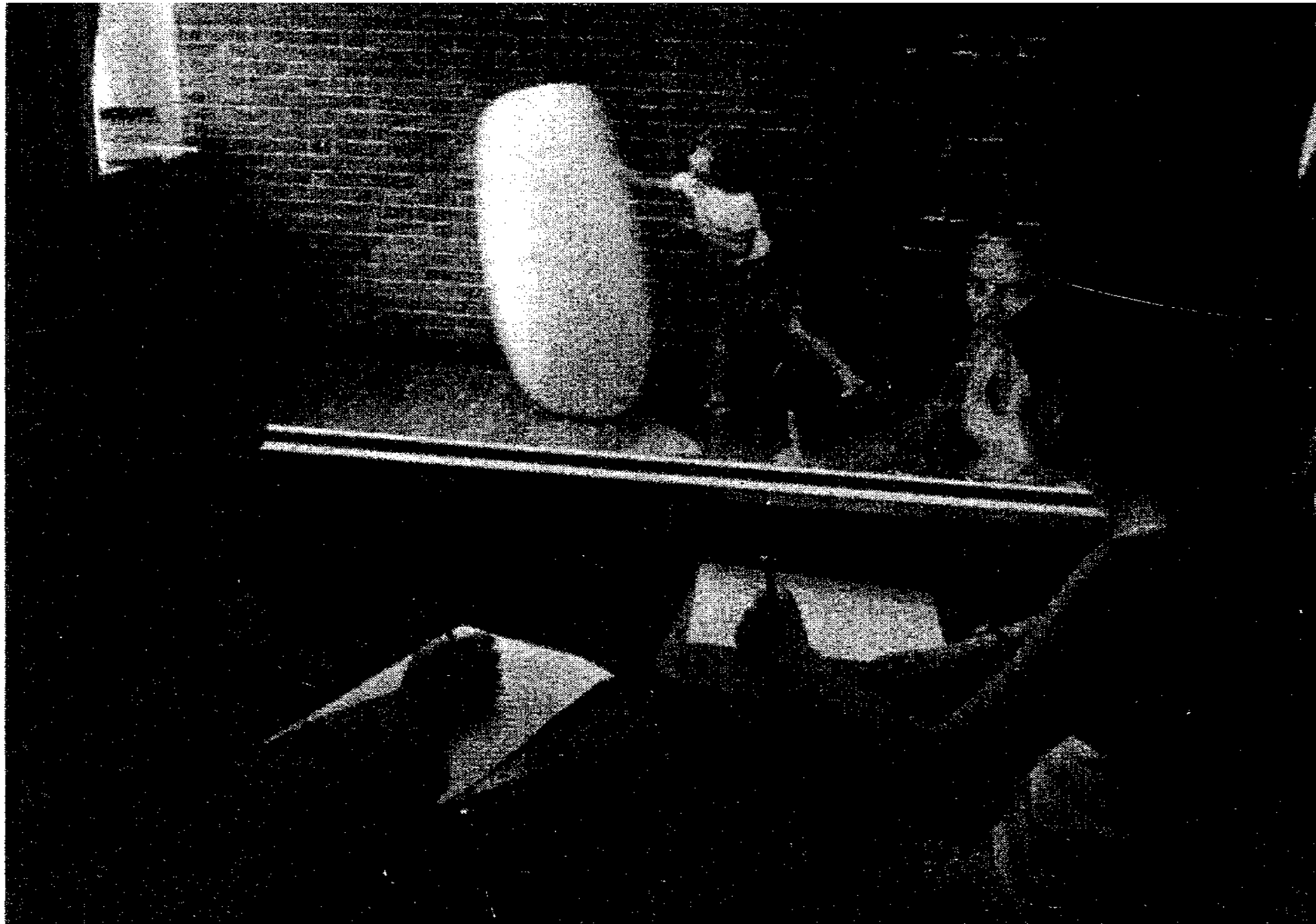
- situations may still be somewhat artificial
- less control of extraneous factors

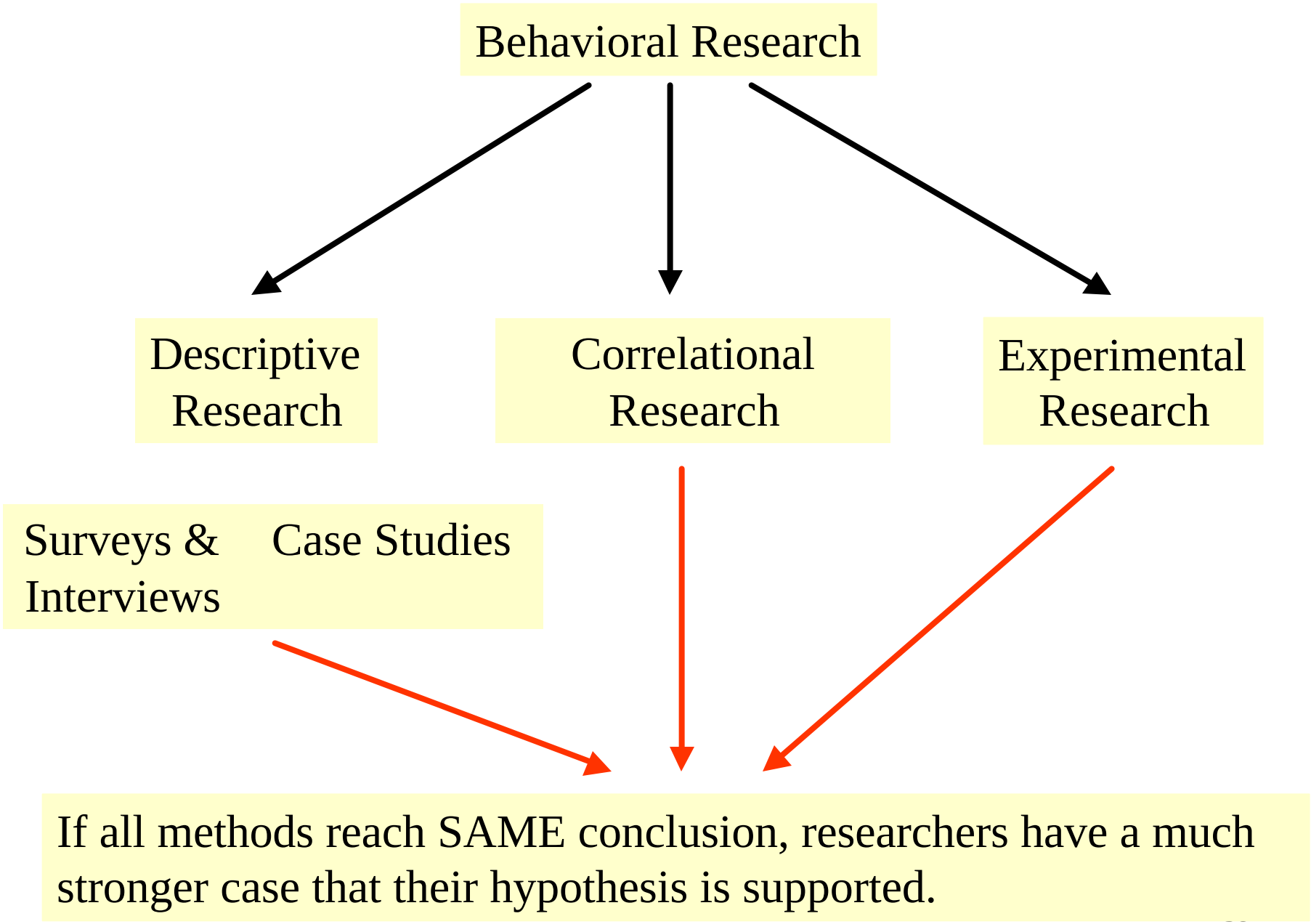
Experimental Validity

- *Internal validity* → the extent to which an experiment allows confident statements about cause and effect.

- *External validity* → the extent to which the results of an experiment can be generalized to other circumstances.

Is the experimenter watching me??????????????????



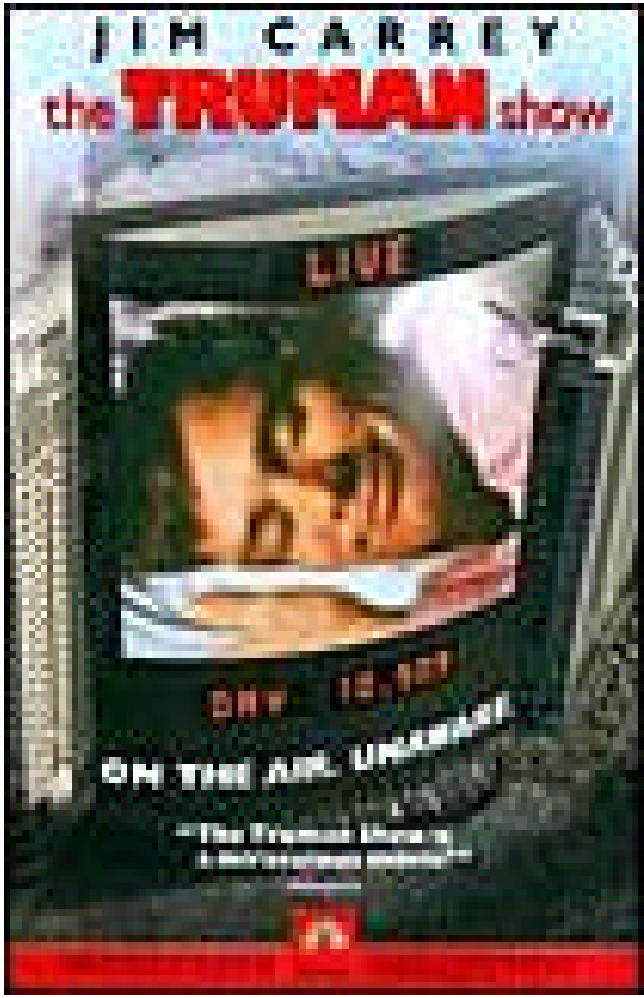

Behavioral Research
Descriptive Research
Correlational Research
Experimental Research
Surveys & Interviews
Case Studies
If all methods reach SAME conclusion, researchers have a much stronger case that their hypothesis is supported.

Ethical Issues in Psychological Research

Thought Experiment

- What types of studies “could be” designed with unlimited funding, and without concern for the important issue of ethics.

- Example: Conduct a “Truman Show” experiment. Have a hundred human clones live in secluded environments where culture, society, and learning is CONTROLLED



Ethics: Example from Carney Landis

- Carney Landis, a noted psychologist of the 1920s and 1930s, conducted a series of studies dealing with the experience and expression of emotion.

Example 1

- One situation involved dropping a lit firecracker underneath an unsuspecting subject's chair, whereas another involved showing participants pornographic (for their day) photographs and photos of horribly disfiguring skin diseases.

Example 2

- "The table in front of the subject was covered with a cloth. A flat tray and a butcher's knife were placed on the cloth. A live white rat was given to the subject. He was instructed, 'Hold this rat with your left hand and then cut off its head with the knife.'...In five cases where the subjects could not be persuaded to follow directions the experimenter cut off the head while the subject looked on."

Ethical Issues

American Psychological Association's (APA) ethical guidelines for research include:

1. Obtaining informed consent

   Informed consent → A research subject's agreement to participate after being informed of any potential risks and his or her right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Ethical Guidelines

2. Fully debriefing participants after the research is completed.

   Debriefing → A discussion of procedures, hypotheses, and subject reactions at the completion of the study.

Ethical Guidelines

3. Evaluating the costs and benefits of the research procedures.

   Does the end justify the means? Are there times when we're justified in putting participants in harm's way?

TABLE 2.1 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF RESEARCH METHODS

	METHOD				
	Survey	Observational Study	Archival Research	Laboratory Experiment	Field Experiment
Internal Validity	Moderate	Low	Low	High	Moderate
External Validity	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	High
Investigator Control	Moderate	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate
Intrusiveness of Measures	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low
Difficulty of Conducting Study	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate	High
Ethical Problems	Few	Many	Few	Some	Some

Note: Entries in the table indicate the strength of the research methods with respect to the various concerns (validity, control, intrusiveness, and the like).