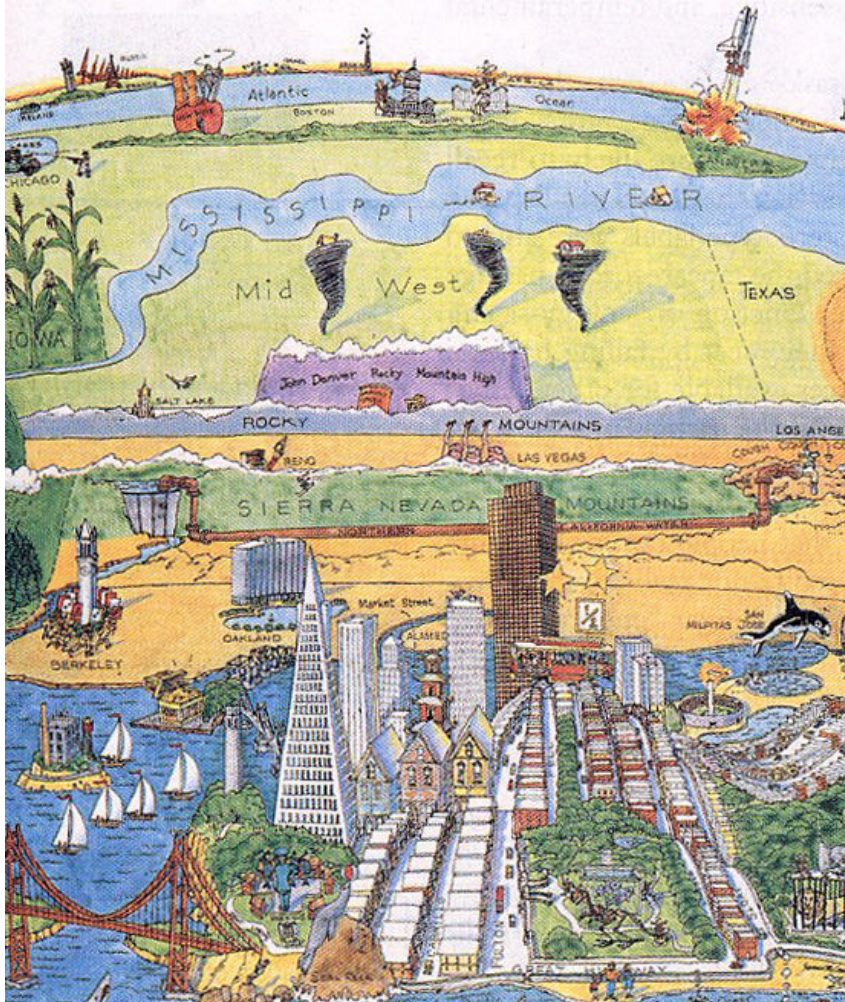


# SAN FRANCISCO

A VIEW OF THE WORLD



## Lecture 6: Social Cognition (Seeking Accuracy)

Part I: Non-verbal communication

Part II: Attribution

# Social Perception

A fundamental process through which people come to understand their social world.

It allows us to *explain, predict, and control* the behaviors of others.

Understanding the behavior of others is important in many social situations, and helps individuals control their lives and make important decisions.

Such factors make us more “adaptive.”

(e.g., should I marry him/her?; What class should I take?; What career should I choose?).

# Part I: Nonverbal Communication

Understanding a person's **temporary emotional state** can be important for deciding how best to act toward that person.

# Communication

- Verbal—messages “given”
- Non-verbal—messages “given off”
  - Particularly powerful at communicating our emotions to others
- Conduits of non-verbal communication
  - Quality of voice
  - Eye contact
  - Facial expressions
  - Gestures
  - Body movements
  - touching

# How Does She Feel?



# What are these babies experiencing?



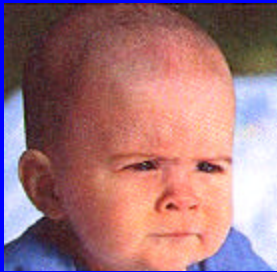
Happiness



Sadness



Fear



Anger



Disgust

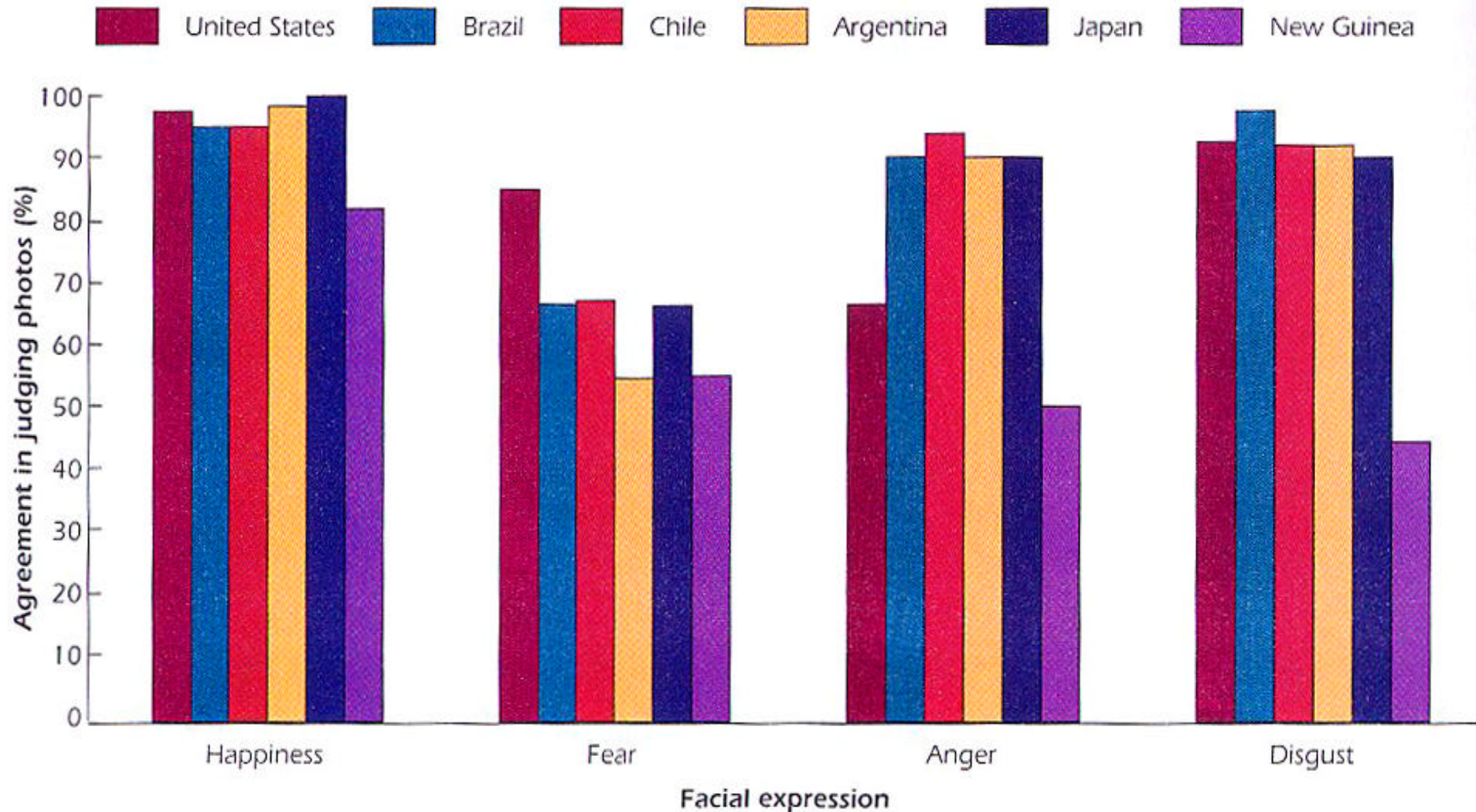


Surprise

# Recognition is Swift

- Darwin
  - ‘it has often struck me as a curious fact that so many shades of expression are instantly recognized without any conscious process of analysis on our parts’ (p. 359).
- Cross-cultural recognition—all humans experience, and recognize, a similar set of emotions. Suggests “human universals” with respect to non-verbal communication.

# Across many cultures, emotions are displayed and interpreted similarly . . .



# Deception

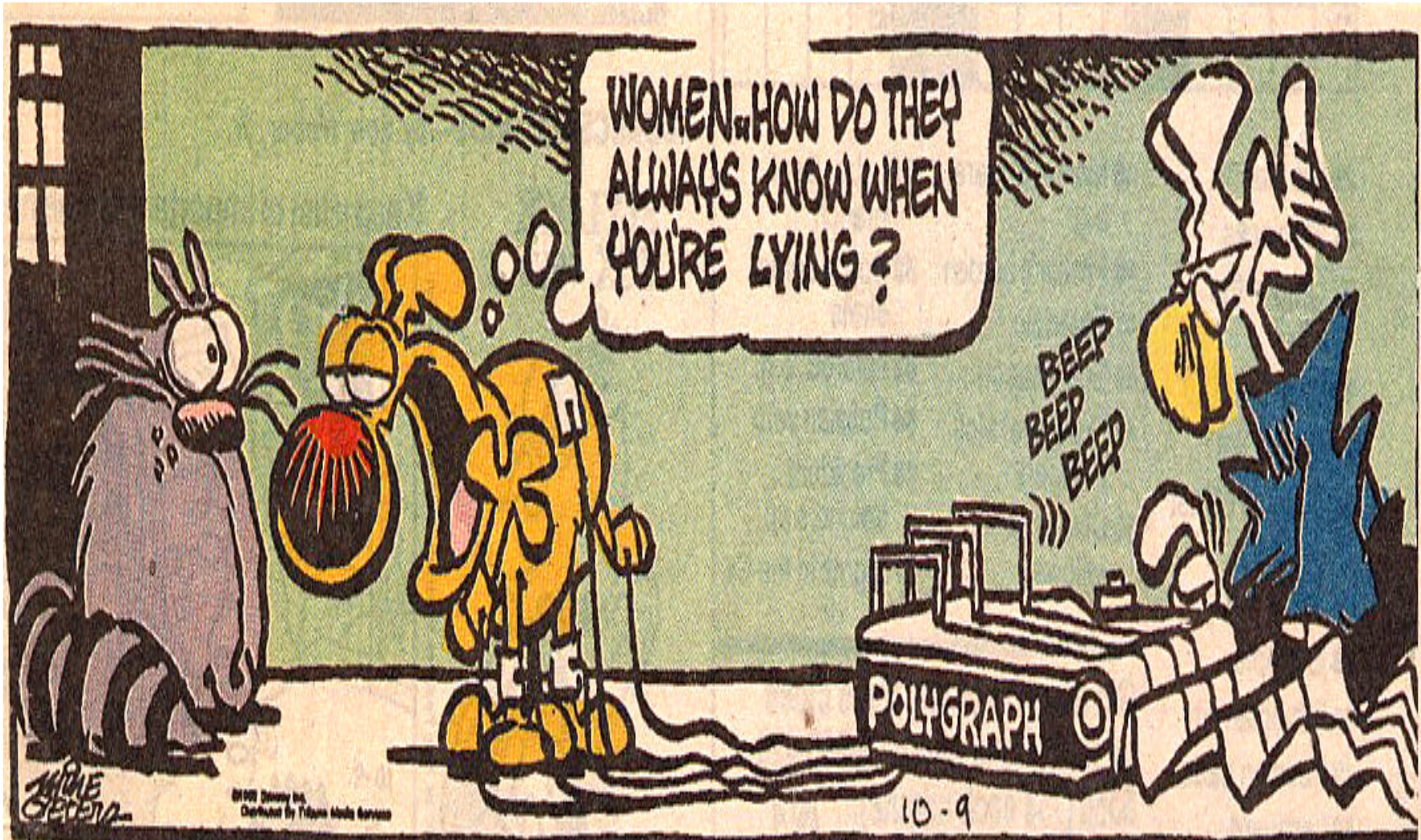
- Can people hide an emotion?
- Can people fake an emotion?
- Most controllable nonverbal channel—facial expression
- Least controllable channels—voice quality and body movements
  - More “leakage” of underlying emotion

### **TABLE 4.1 Can the “Experts” Catch a Liar?**

Lie-detection experts with experience at making judgments of truth and deception were shown brief videotapes of ten women telling the truth or lying about their feelings. Considering that there was a fifty-fifty chance of guessing correctly, the accuracy rates were remarkably low. Only a sample of U. S. Secret Service agents posted a better-than-chance performance. *(Ekman & O’Sullivan, 1991.)*

<b>Observer Groups</b>	<b>Accuracy Rates</b>
College Students	52.82
CIA, FBI, and military	55.67
Police investigators	55.79
Trial judges	56.73
Psychiatrists	57.61
U. S. Secret Service agents	64.12

Women are better encoders and decoders of nonverbal cues.



# Universal Courting Cues

- David Givens and Timothy Perper—observed men and women in bars picking each other up
- Noticed 5 stages of courtship

# Stage 1: “Attention Getting”

- Men
  - Establish a territory
  - Direct attention to themselves
    - Roll their shoulders, stretch, stand tall, shift from side to side, exaggerate body motions (e.g., laughter)
  - Swagger—how they move across the room
  - Preen—pat their hair, adjust their clothes, tug their chins

# “Attention Getting”

- Women
  - Establish a territory
  - Draw attention to themselves—play with their hair, tilt their heads, look up coyly, giggle, raise their brows, flick their tongues, lick their upper lips, blush, hide their faces
  - Walk—may arch their back, sway their hips, and “strut”

# Stage 2: Recognition Stage

- Starts when eyes meet eyes; then one acknowledges the other with a smile or slight body shift, and they move into talking range
- Important to send the signal that you are both interested and a “safe” person to approach.

# Stage 3: Talk

- A major escalation point
- Usually involves idle, often meaningless conversation (“grooming talk”)
  - Voice become higher, softer, and more “singsongy”
- “I like your watch”, “How’s your food?” (icebreakers); compliments and questions
- HOW you say it is critical—higher pitched, softer  
“hello” = I am interested Lower pitched, matter of fact  
hello = disinterest
- If successful, they begin to actively listen to each other, and move to stage 4

# Stage 4: Touch

- Begins with “intention cues”—leaning forward, resting an arm on the table, moving a foot closer to the other, stroking one’s OWN arm; then...the touch!
  - Usually the woman touches first, grazing her hand along the man’s body in a casual way
- The body is very sensitive to touch
  - Withdraw or flinch = the moment is over
  - Lean forward and smile, or return touch, then things are going well

# Stage 5: Total Body Synchrony

- Keeping Time
  - As comfort level increases, people will pivot or swivel until their shoulders become aligned, their bodies face-to-face
  - The man and woman begin to move in tandem
    - Lifting drinks at same time; crossing legs; smoothing hair—moving in perfect rhythm
  - Couples that leave the bar together tend to achieve total body synchrony

# **Part II: Attribution:**

## **Uncovering the Stable Causes of Behavior**

Often we wish to know more than the temporary causes of a person's behavior. We wish to know if behavior is due to enduring characteristics of the person that might allow predicting behavior in the future.

## TABLE 9.3. Attributional Style Questionnaire

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Please try to vividly imagine yourself in the situations that follow. If such a situation happened to you, what do you feel would have caused it? While events may have many causes, we want you to pick only one—the *major* cause if this event happened to *you*. Please write this cause in the blank provided after the event. Next we want you to answer some questions about the *cause*.

Sample Item 1: You've been looking for a job unsuccessfully for some time.

---

1. Write down the *one* major cause \_\_\_\_\_

2. Is the cause of your unsuccessful job search due to something about you or something about other people or circumstances?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Totally due to other people or circumstances						Totally due to me

3. In the future when looking for a job, will this cause again be present?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Will never again be present						Will always be present

4. Is the cause something that just influences looking for a job, or does it also influence other areas of your life?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Influences just this particular situation						Influences all situations in my life

**Sample Item 2: You meet a friend who compliments you on your appearance.**

---

1. Write down the *one* major cause \_\_\_\_\_

2. Is the cause of the compliment something about you or something about other people or circumstances?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Totally due to other people or circumstances						Totally due to me

3. In the future when you see your friend, will this cause again be present?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Will never again be present						Will always be present

4. Is the cause something that just influences this one aspect of your life, or does it also influence other areas of your life?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Influences just this particular situation						Influences all situations in my life

---

# Causal Attributions

- Causal attribution theories are a group of theories that describe **how people explain why a given behavior occurred.**

# Early Concepts

- **Internal attribution**
  - An attribution to a personal characteristic of an actor (e.g., ability, mood, personality, etc.)
- **External attribution**
  - An attribution to a situational factor, outside the actor (e.g., luck, task, etc.)

# Attribution Theories: Commonsense Attributions

**When** do we make dispositional inferences?

- 1. Intentional Behavior:** we are less interested in behavior that is beyond the control of an individual (e.g., acting very silly when drugged after going to dentist)
- 2. Non-Common Effects**
  - Behaviors seen as unique
  - Behaviors seen as out of role or deviant

# Commonsense Attribution: The Covariation Model

Kelly argues that a basic distinction that we need to make is between *internal* causes and *external* causes.

**Example: John smiled at Sarah on Tuesday.**

Why did John smile?

Is it something about John? (thus, is it **internal** to John?)

Or is it something about Sarah, or about that specific day? (Thus, is the behavior **external** to John.)

According to Kelley's model, we use three types of information to help us decide whether an event was caused by internal or external factors:

- Consensus
- Consistency
- Distinctiveness

*Consensus* refers to the extent to which other people have acted in the same way as the person under consideration.

*Consistency* is the extent to which this person has acted this way in the past.

*Distinctiveness* is the extent to which this person acts the same way under different circumstances or in response to other people or stimuli.

What happens if:

- 1.) consensus is *low* (no one else smiled at Sarah on Tuesday)
- 2.) consistency is *high* (John smiles at Sarah all the time)
- 3.) distinctiveness is *low* (John smiles at just about everyone)

We should make an **internal** attribution. In this case, we attribute the behavior to John's pleasant disposition.

What happens if:

1.) consensus is *high* (everyone smiled at Sarah on Tuesday),

2.) consistency is *high* (John smiles at Sarah all the time)

3.) distinctiveness is *high* (John smiled only at Sarah),

We should make an **external** attribution. In this case, we attribute the behavior to Sarah's pleasant disposition. Thus, has little to do with John's traits.

# Attribution Biases

- Models of attribution assume people make attributions in a **rational way**.
- But do people always make attributions according to these logical models?
- **No**, people often make **BIASED** estimates when attributing causes of behavior.

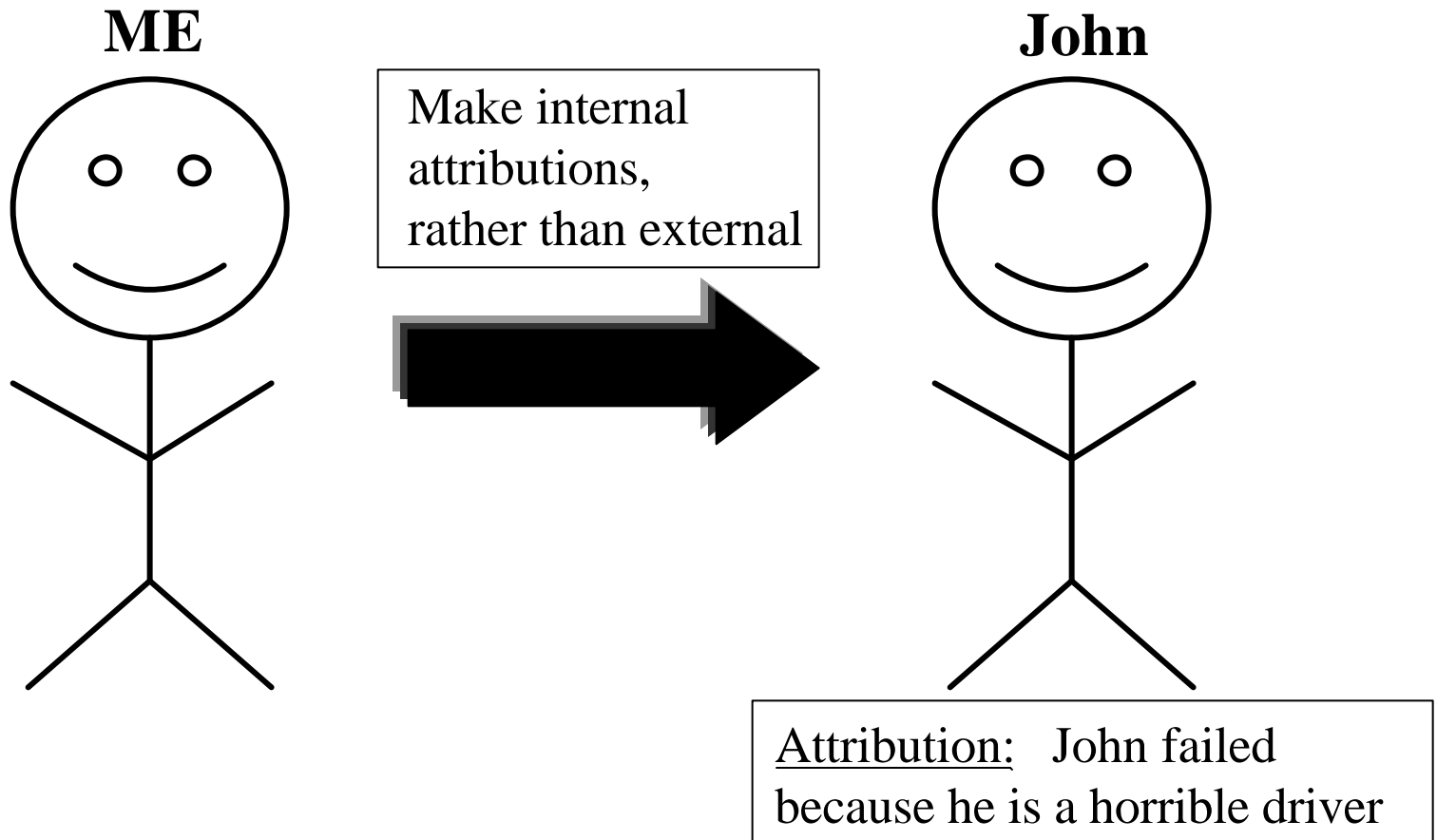
# *Fundamental Attribution Error*

The fundamental attribution error (correspondence bias) is the tendency to make more dispositional attributions than the available information warrants.

Thus, despite its basis in the desire to accurately explain, predict, and control the social world, the attribution process has some important **biases** that result in potentially undesirable outcomes

# Fundamental Attribution Error (it is about others)

Example: John failed his driving exam. Why?



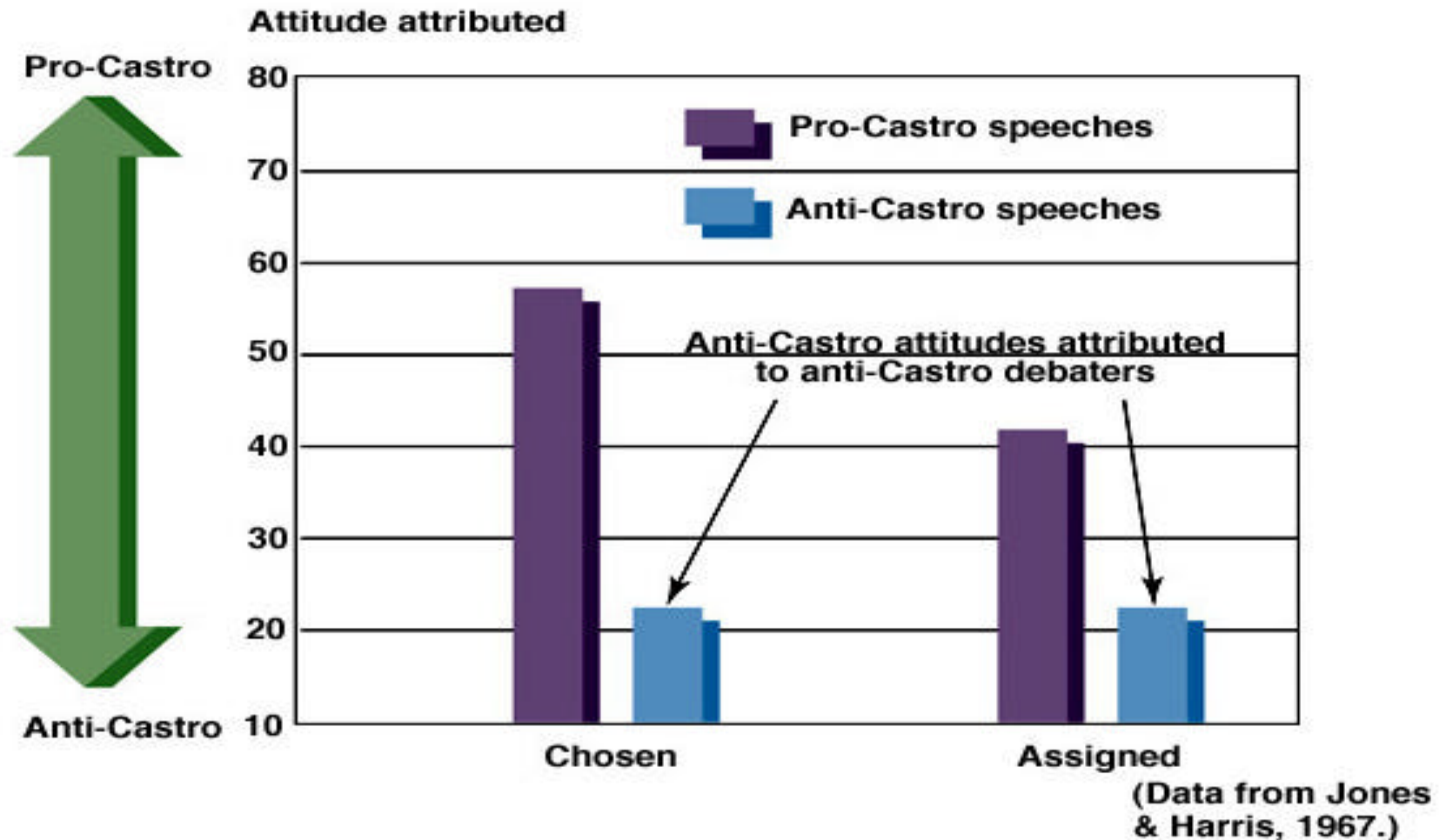
## **Experiment 1:**

One of the first demonstrations of this tendency was conducted by Jones and Harris (1967). Participants read Pro-Castro or Anti-Castro speeches they were told had been written by other students. Some participants were told the student chose the topic; others were told it was assigned to them.

Estimates of the essay writer's attitude were influenced by speech content more than choice.

David G. Myers, *Social Psychology*, 6ed. Copyright © 1999. The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

## Fundamental Attribution Error-ex. 1



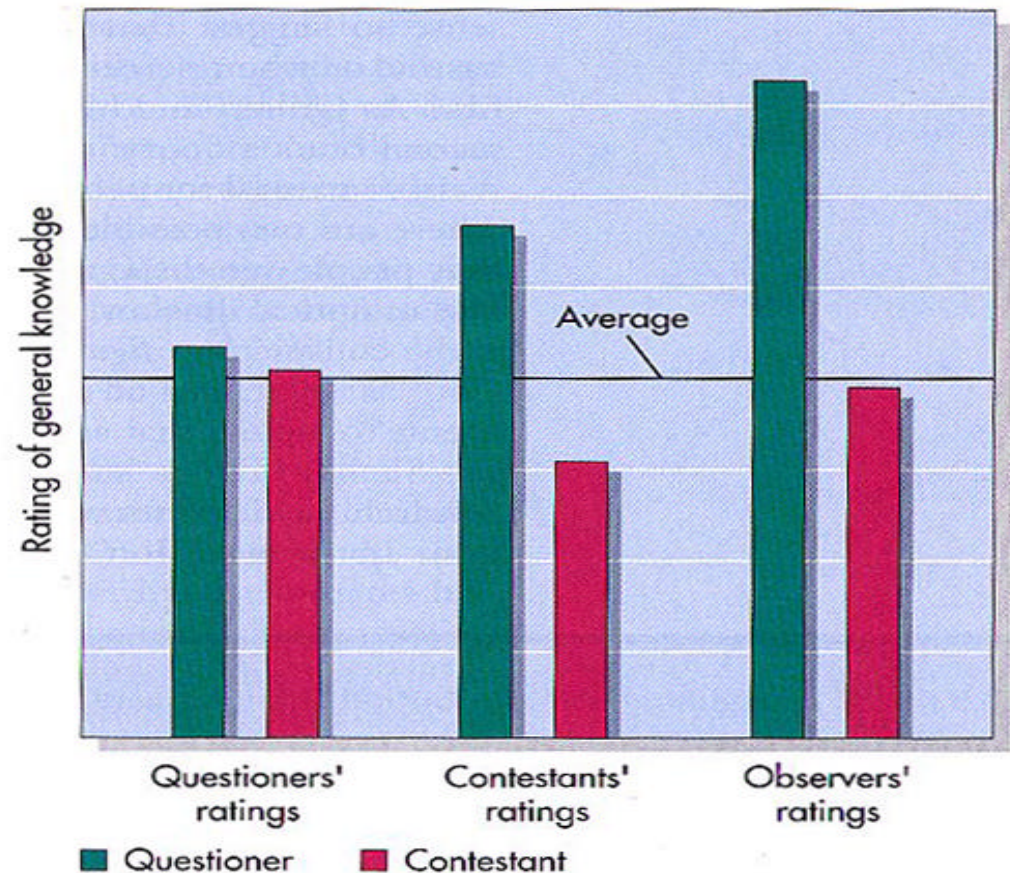
## **Experiment 2:**

Ross et al. (1977) conducted a simulated quiz show. By the flip of a coin, two participants were assigned the role of either questioner or contestant. The questioner was instructed to write ten challenging questions for the contestant, who tried to answer them in front of some spectators. All participants rated the general knowledge of the questioners and contestants.

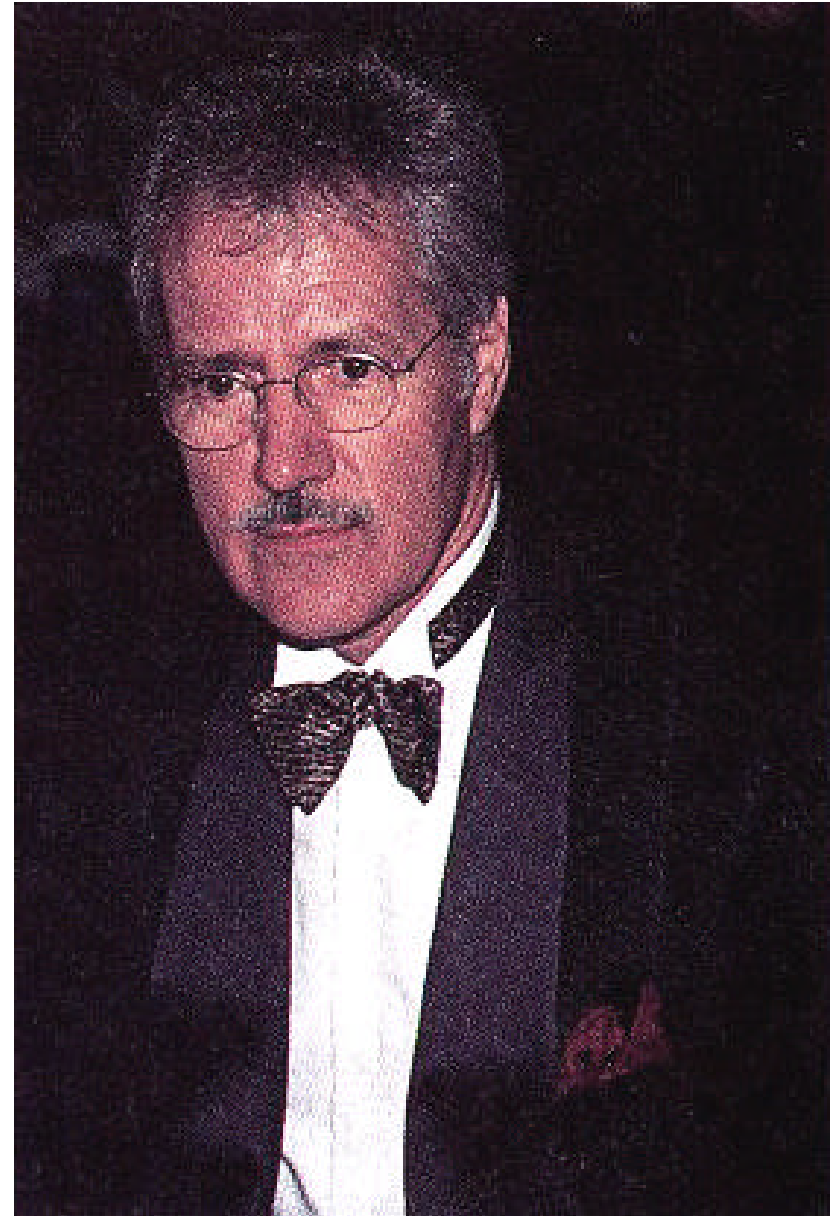
Despite the “obvious” advantage of the questioners, they were rated by spectators and contestants as being more knowledgeable.

#### FIGURE 4.5 Fundamental Attribution Error and the TV Quiz Show

Even though the simulated quiz show situation placed questioners in an obvious position of advantage over contestants, observers rated the questioners as more knowledgeable (right). Questioners did not overrate their general knowledge (left); but contestants rated themselves as inferior (middle) and observers rated them as inferior as well. These results illustrate the fundamental attribution error. (Ross, Amabile, and Steinmetz, 1977.)



The fundamental attribution error might explain why surveys often identify Alex Trebek, moderator of the Jeopardy game show, as one of the smartest people around.



# How do we explain the attribution error?

- 1.) A way to conserve mental effort
- 2.) Desire for control (motivational)

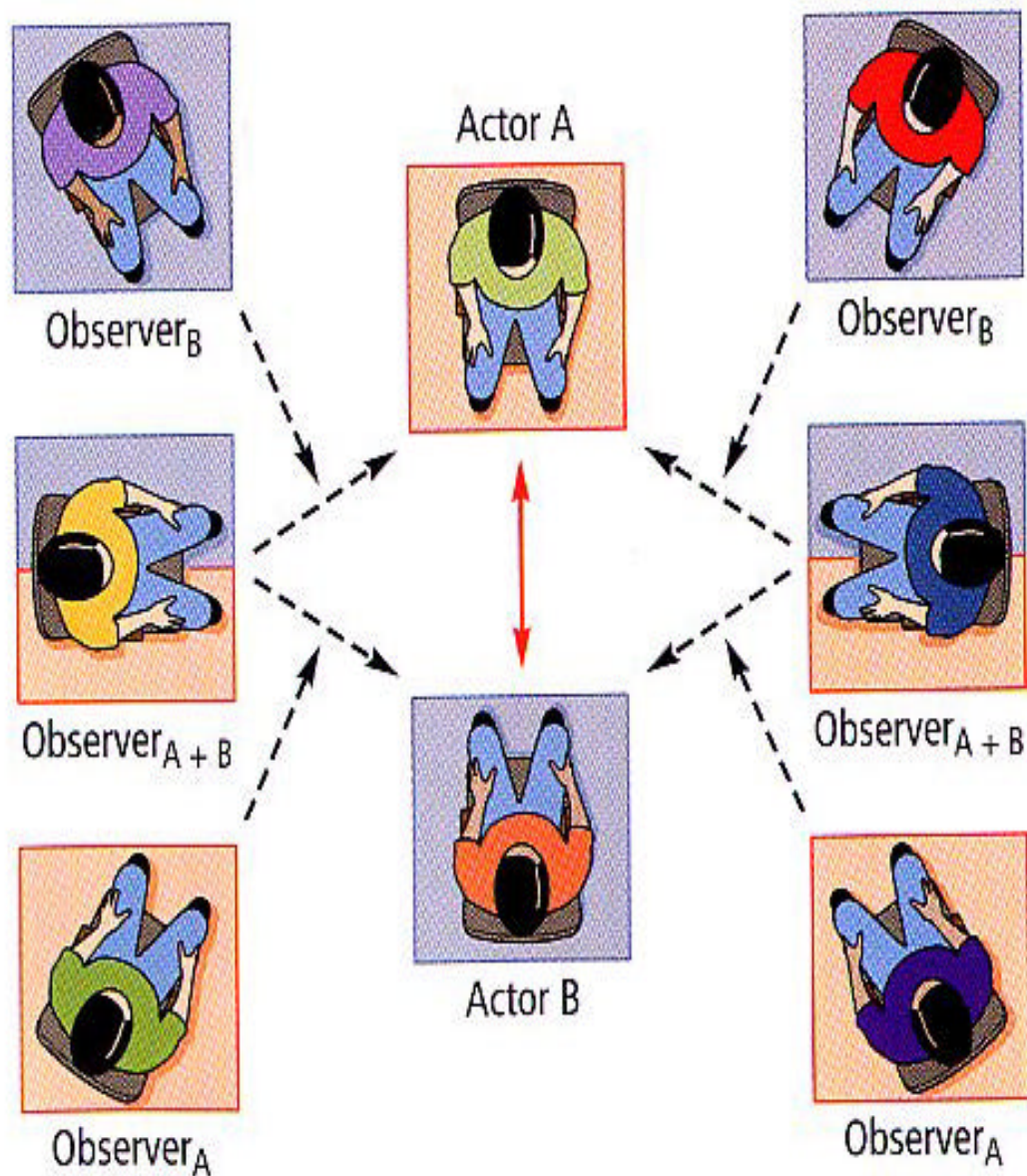
# 1.) Mental Effort and “Salience of Situation”

The tendency for other people to “engulf the field” and demand more attention than situational cues.

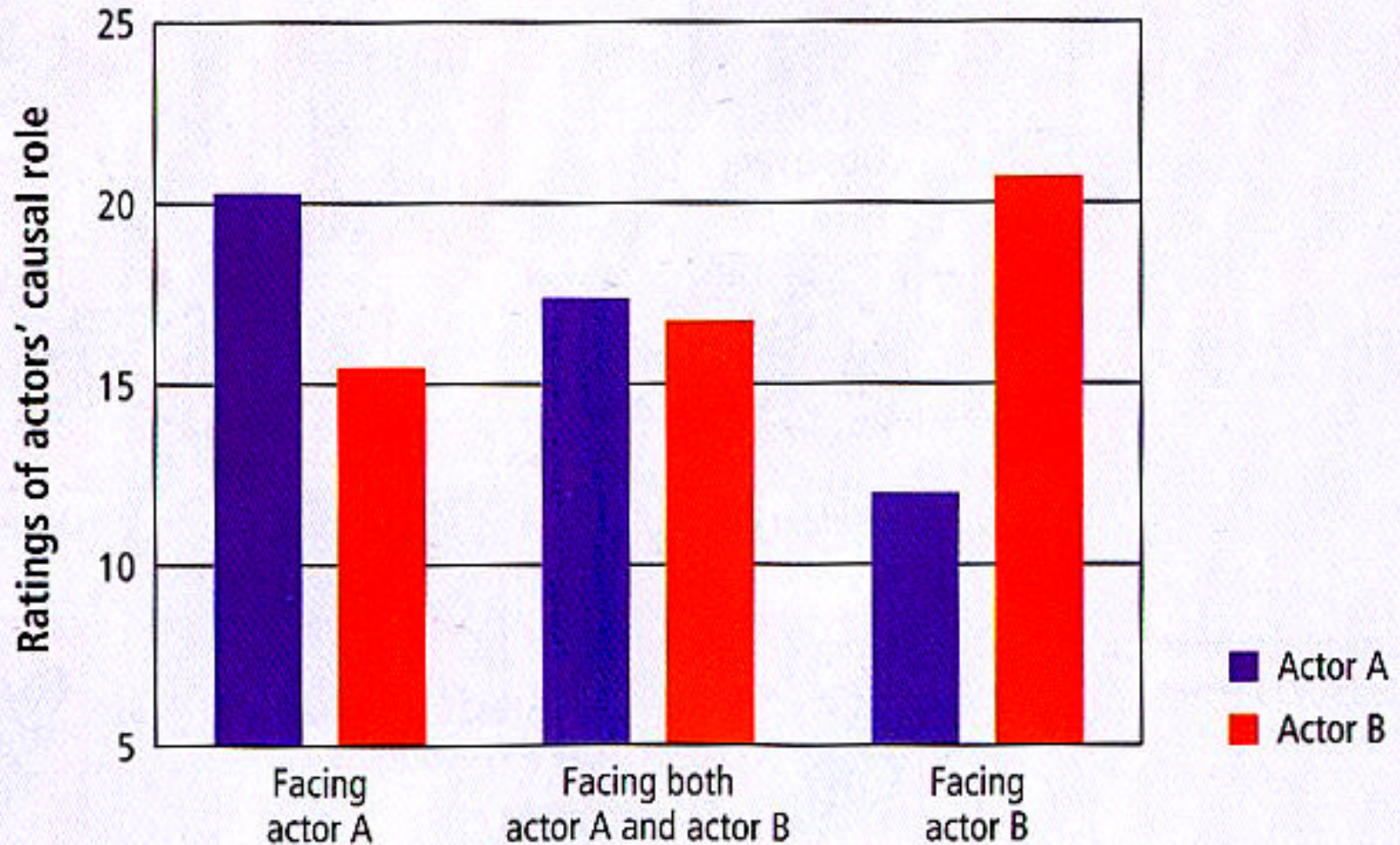
In sum, the individual “stands out” from the surrounding environmental background.

Experimenters manipulated how observers watched two others engage in a conversation.

Some watch only ONE actor, and others BOTH.



More salient actors were judged to have had a stronger causal role.



## 2.) Desire for Control

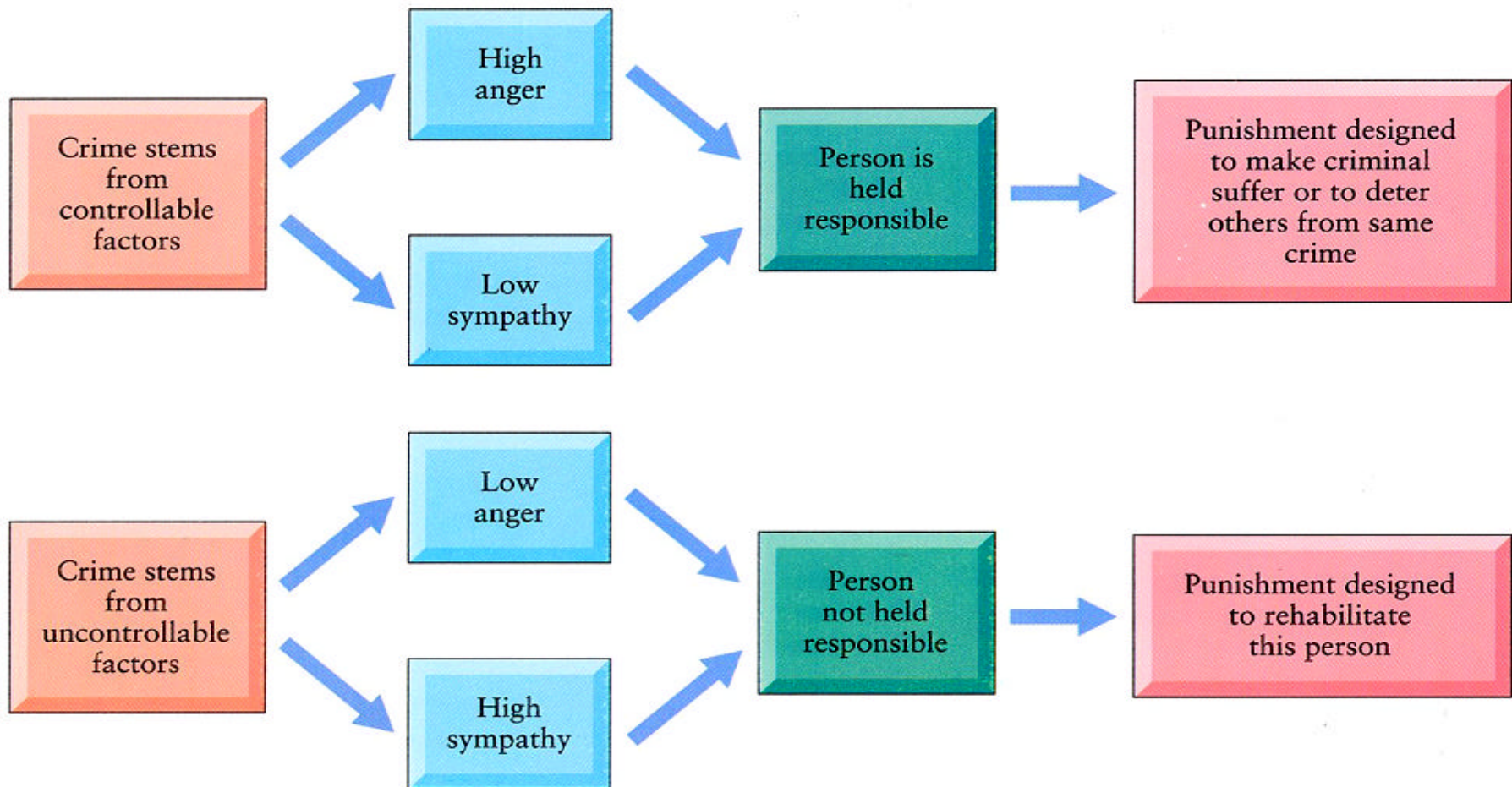
A second explanation for the attribution error is a strong *desire for control*. By exaggerating the role that dispositions play in others' behavior, we can enhance our belief in the ability to predict others' behavior in the future.

# Societal Outcomes of Attribution Biases

- Attributing more to peoples' dispositions rather than their situations has important moral and political implications.
- Example: Are poor people simply “lazy” and not trying hard enough? Did the rich get their money because of their hard work and skills?

# How do attribution processes influence the criminal justice system?

## Example of How Attribution Affects Individual's View of Punishment

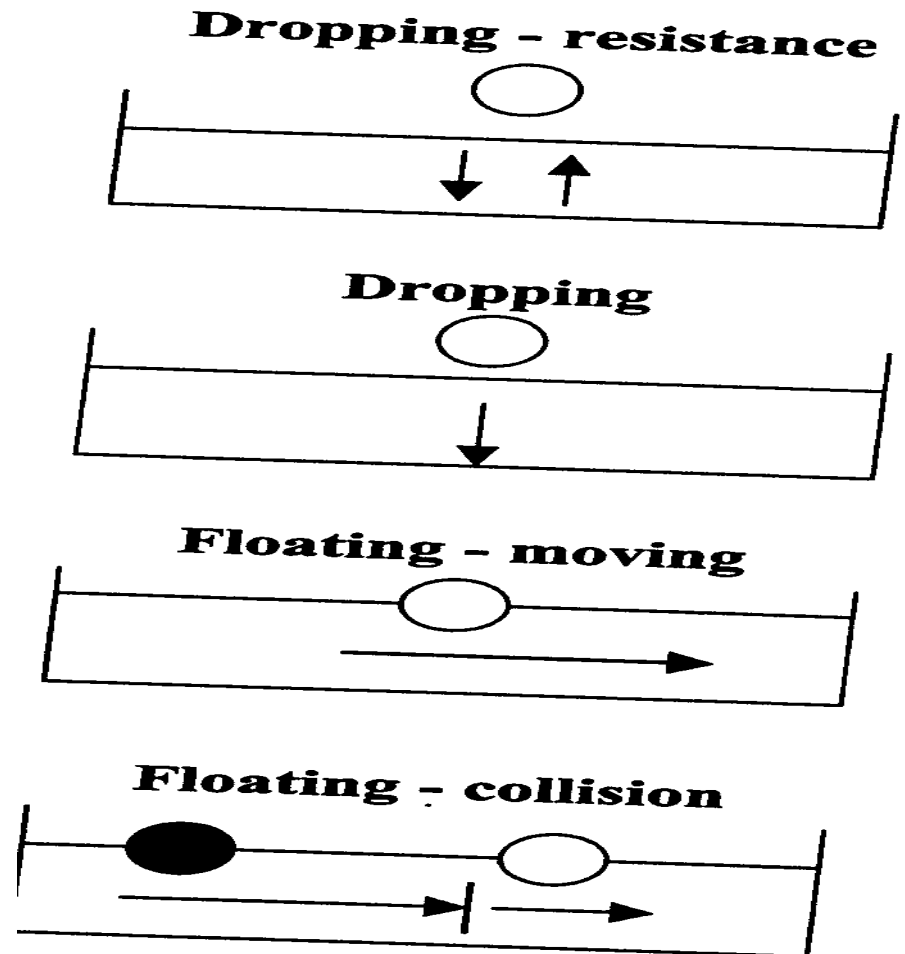


# Attribution and Culture

- As we have seen, East Asians pay more attention to “context” than Americans.
- Further, since all people are more likely to attribute causality to what captures our attention, we might expect further differences between East Asians and Americans with respect to attribution.

# “To what extent is the movement caused by internal factors?”

- American students were more likely than Chinese students to say that the movement was caused by internal (or dispositional) factors.



The “fundamental” attribution error is more common in Western cultures

