

Lecture 7: Dynamics of Conflict

Past I: Social Perception

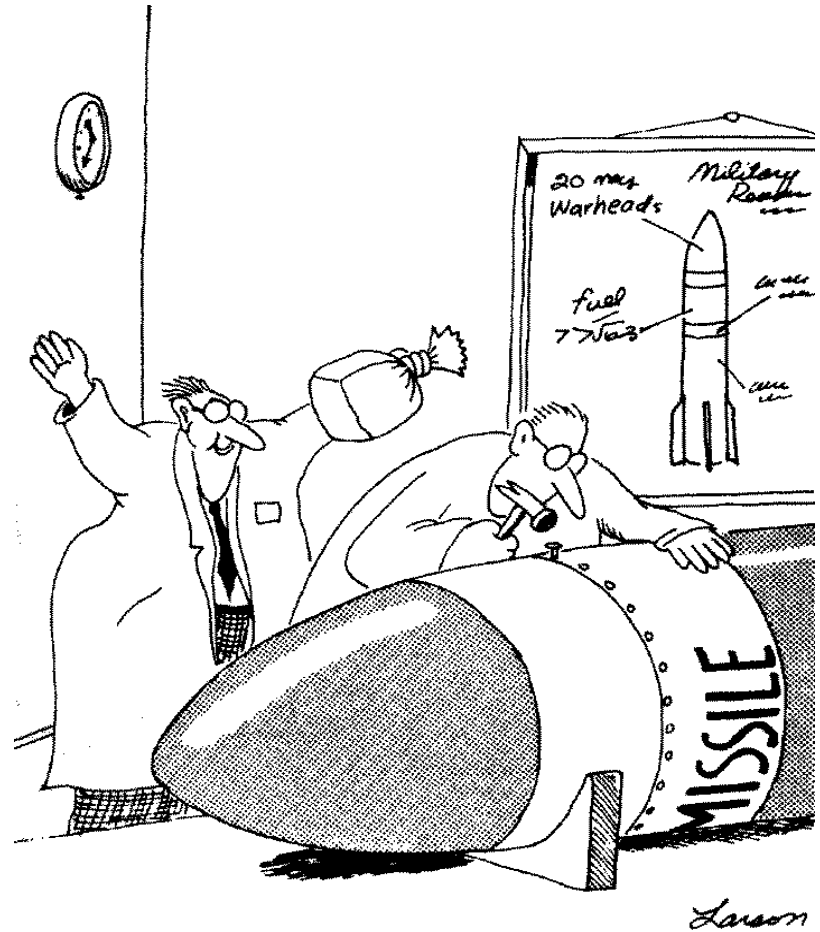
Part II: Conflict Escalation

Part III: Psychological Changes



Conflicts are Dynamic

- Interaction between conflicting parties often leads to changes, for better or worse, or sometimes preserving the status quo.
- Regardless of direction, conflicts are almost always **dynamic**, and have a time trajectory.
- We will address models of escalation and de-escalation.



Escalation

- In any conflict, parties attempt to influence each other.
- Conflict Escalation: an increase in intensity.

Examples: tactics turns from light to heavy; number of issues increases; issues transform from specifics to general orientations; parties conceptualize the importance of winning and/or hunting the other party; number of participants in conflict grows.

De-escalation

- 1.) One party wins.
- 2.) One or both parties choose to withdrawal, and focus their resources elsewhere
- 3.) Parties reach a stalemate in which both parties realize proceeding with the conflict is less desirable than ending it.



Reasons for a stalemate

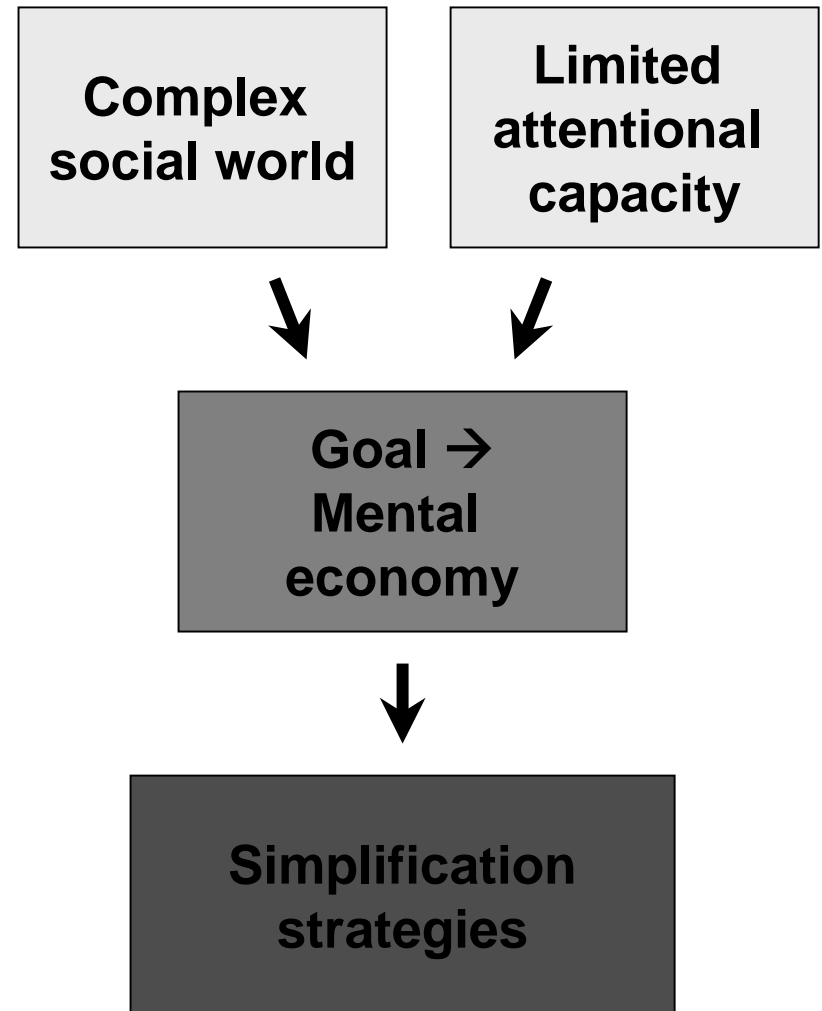
- 1) Contentious tactics are no longer effective
- 2.) The parties have exhausted their resources to fight
- 3.) Parties have lost outside support.
- 4.) The costs of continuing the conflict are seen as too high by both parties.

Part I: Social Perception

- Most theories of conflict resolution pay attention to how conflicting parties are perceiving the conflict or dispute, and how the process of resolution is unfolding.
- Thus, it is important to review some general principles from social psychology related to how individuals process information about the social world.

Conserving Mental Effort

- Can you focus on one conversation in a crowded room? Why don't you write every word I say when you take notes?
- Cognitive resources are limited
- What can we do to still respond to social situations without being overwhelmed?



One way that we free up limited resources is to make some cognitive processes automatic.

They then can run without awareness and without taking up resources that might be needed for other important tasks.

Schema

- 1.) Schemas are mental representations of people, objects of things. They allow individuals to organize similar kinds of information, aiding storage and retrieval.
- 2.) When we encounter information that can be interpreted in a number of different ways, schema can reduce ambiguity.
- 3.) Stereotypes are schemas about groups of people

How are Schema Constructed?

Example:

- List everything you think about famous humanitarians such as Gandhi?
- What's on your list?

examples

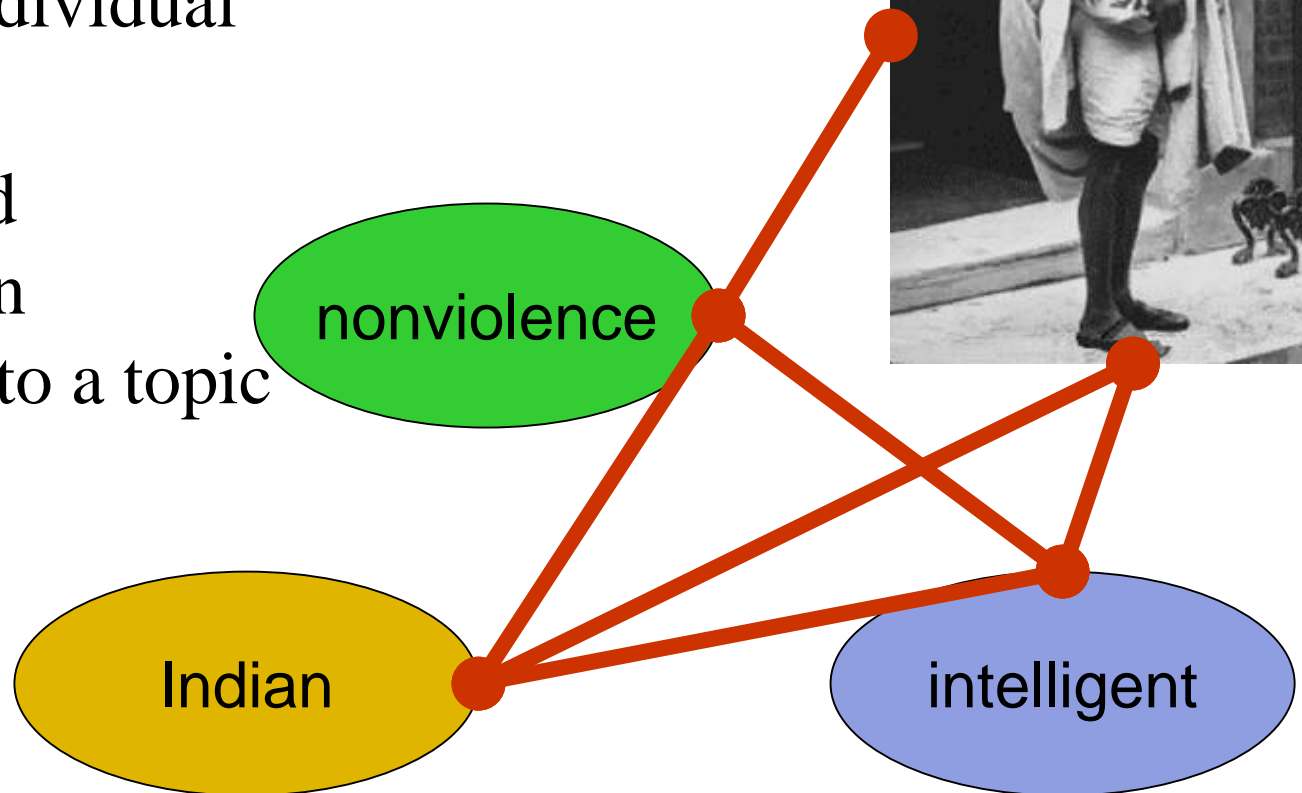
characteristics

actions

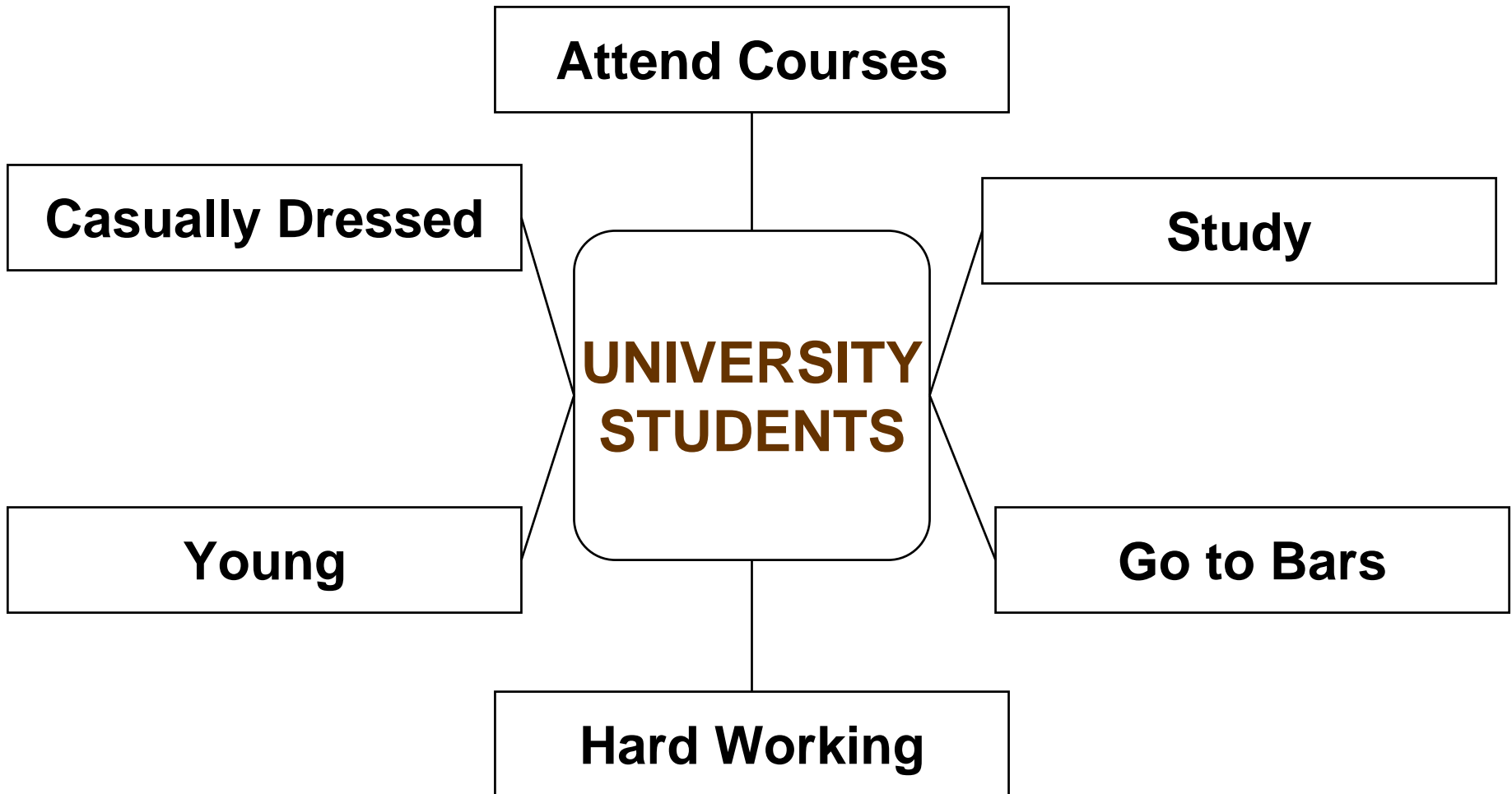


Schema Construction

- *Exemplar* → knowledge of specific episode, event or individual
- *Schema* → generalized information connected to a topic



Possible Schema of University Students



Numerous types of schemas are used:

- Person schemas (e.g., introvert, extrovert)
- Role schemas (e.g., professors)
- Event scripts (e.g., ordering at restaurants)
- Self-Schemas (e.g., who am I?)

How Do Schema Influence Cognitive Processing?

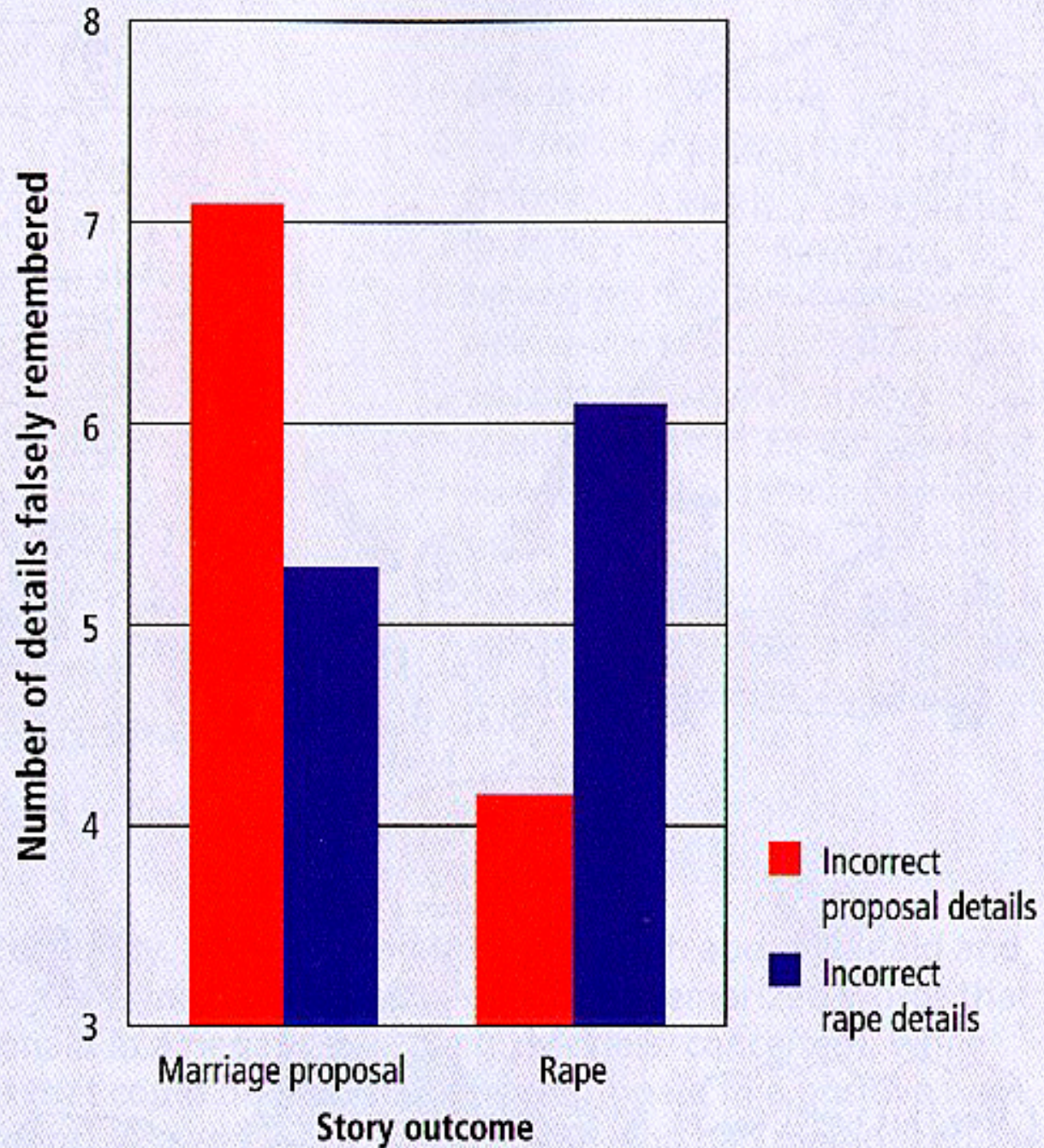
Carli (1999) had participants read a story about a woman named Barbara and her relationship with a man named Jack. After dating for a while, Barbara and Jack went to a ski lodge for a weekend.

In one condition, the story ended with Jack proposing to Barbara. In a second condition, the story ended with Jack raping Barbara.

Two weeks later, the participants were given a memory test. They read a list of “facts” (really information that was not in the original story) and had to decide if they had appeared in the original story.

Some of the details were consistent with the original story, but had not actually appeared in the story (e.g., Jack gave Barbara a dozen roses; Jack liked to drink).

Memory was biased toward schema-consistent information . . .



Perseverance

Once formed, a schema is difficult to change.

Schema serve as useful tools in helping us make decisions. If we had to change our schema all the time, they would become less effective in simplifying our lives.

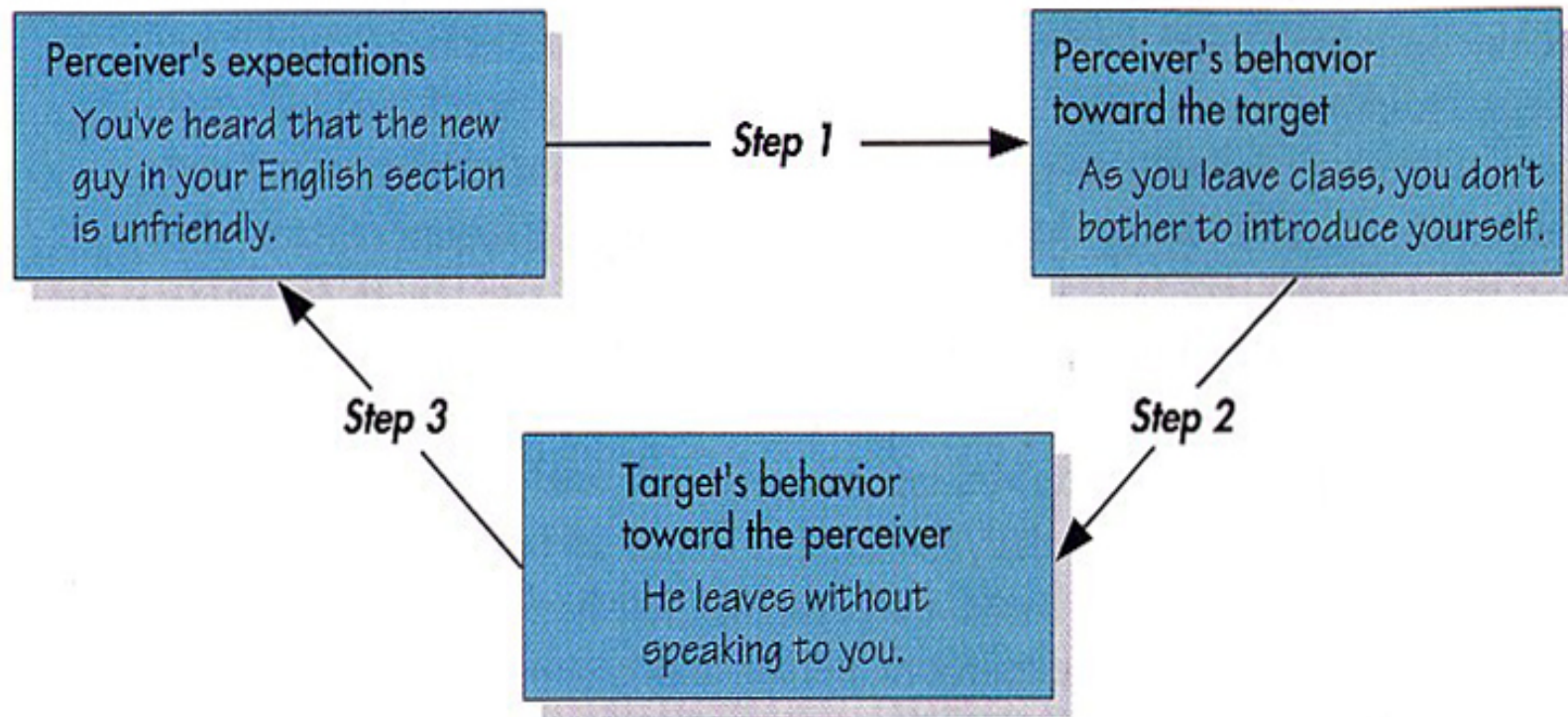
The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

One of the most powerful effects of a schema is in directing behavior in ways that confirm the expectations embedded in the schema.

Such a process is highly relevant to conflict. If we believe conflict and problems are inevitable, such expectations magnify the likelihood actual conflict (and heavy tactics) will occur.

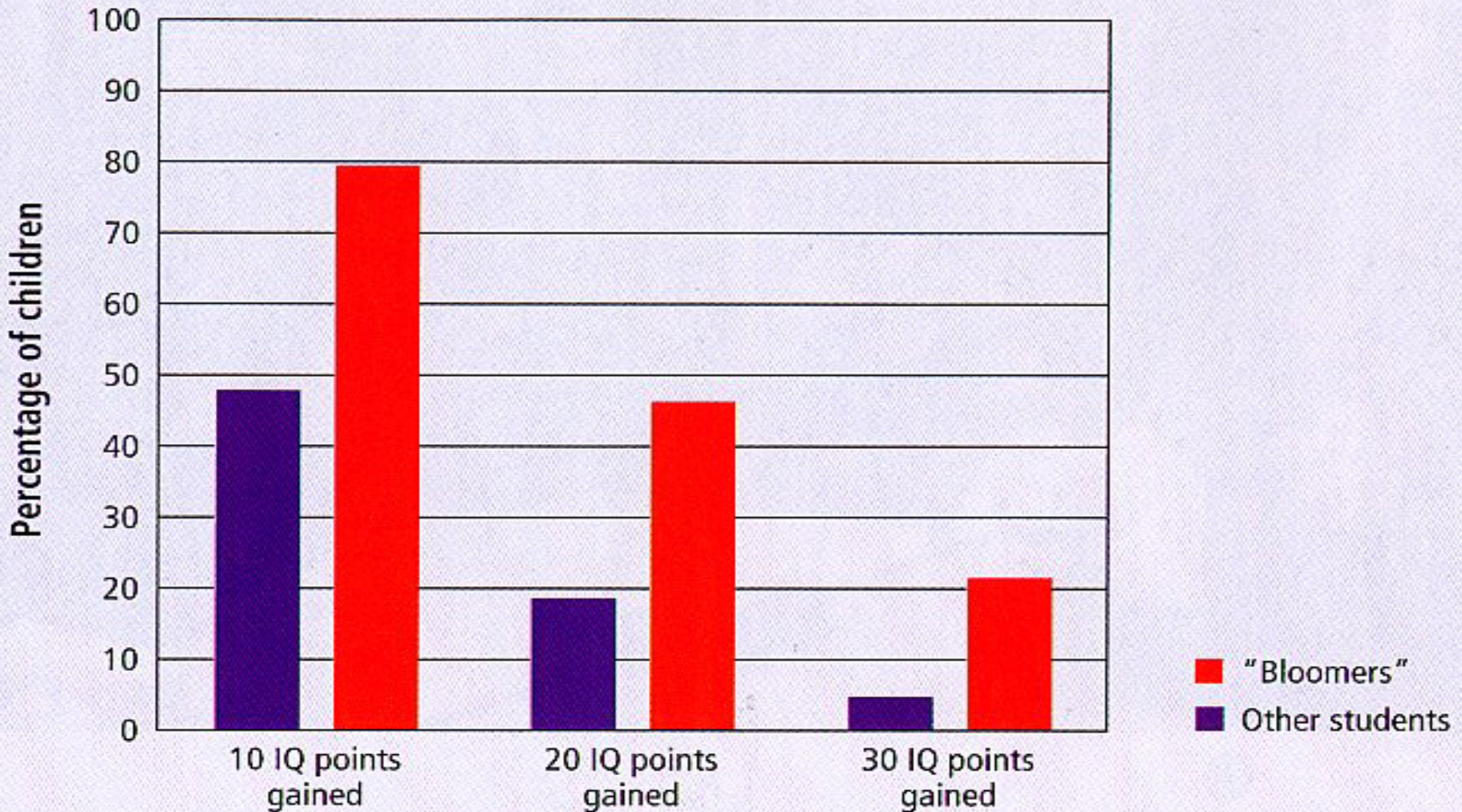
FIGURE 4.10 The Self-fulfilling Prophecy as a Three-Step Process

How do people transform expectations into reality? (1) A perceiver has expectations of a target person, (2) The perceiver then behaves in a manner consistent with those expectations, (3) The target unwittingly adjusts his or her behavior according to the perceiver's actions.

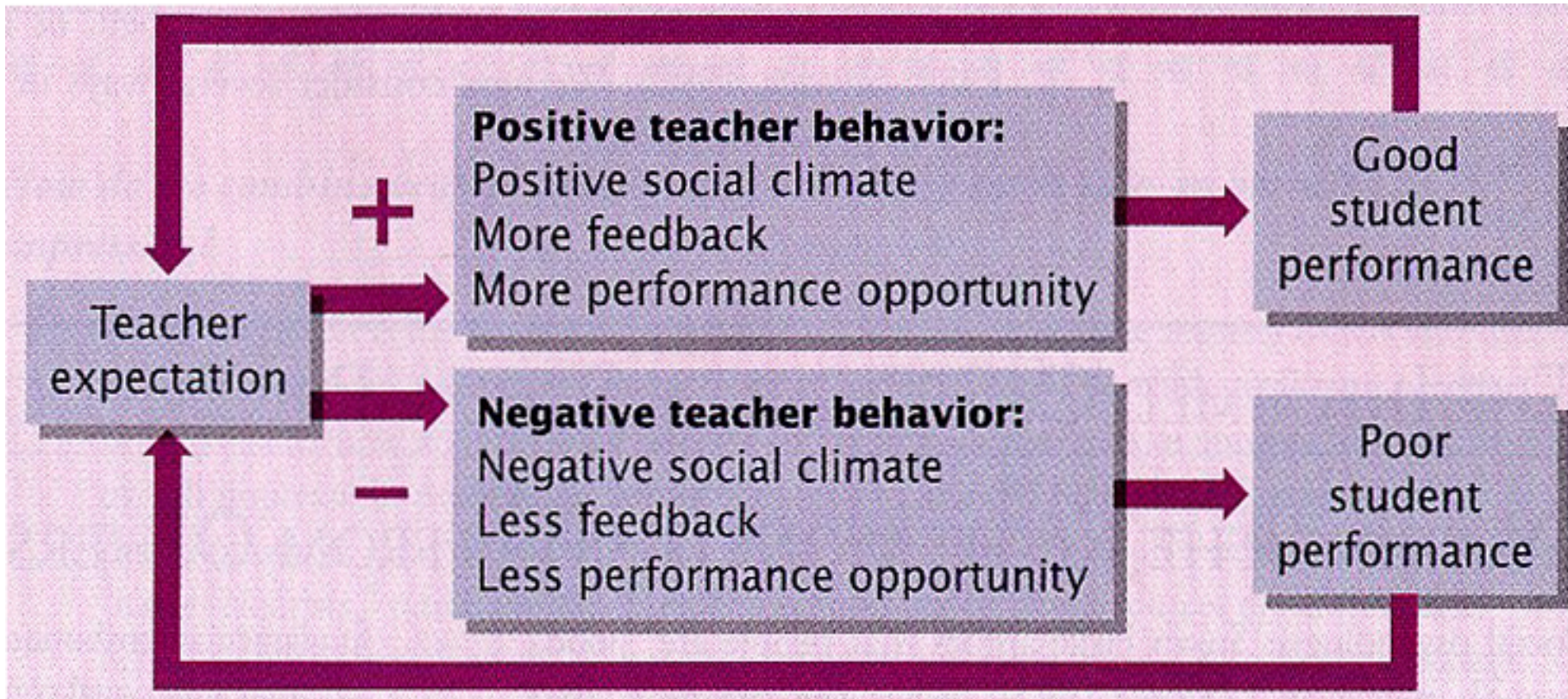


Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) administered an IQ test to elementary school children and then told teachers that some of the children had scored very well and were likely to “bloom” academically during the year. These “bloomers” were actually chosen randomly. They were no smarter than the other students at the beginning of the year. At the end of the year, the children were given the same IQ test.

“Bloomers” outperformed other students at all levels of actual talent.



What happened?



These behavioral differences usually happen without conscious awareness and are especially likely when we are distracted.

Summary: Limits of Information and Conflict

- Humans use shortcuts when interpreting their social world.
- How do these processes (e.g., self-fulfilling prophecies) influence conflict and the dynamics of conflict?
- In general, we will see that interpretations of the behavior of others is very important to the development of conflict.

Part II: Models of Conflict

- Most theories of conflict escalation can be classified within three categories: Aggressor-defender, Conflict Spiral, and Structural Change.
- Aggressor-defender has been overemphasized, and the Structural Change underestimated.

Model 1: Aggressor Defender

- Simple model from the perspective of one party only.
- One party (the aggressor) tries to create change that puts it into conflict with the other party (the defender). As the aggressor increases the contentiousness of tactics, the Defender responds in kind.
- The Aggressor controls the dynamic, and the Defender merely “reacts”.



Model 2: Conflict Spiral

- Recognize that causes flow in both directions.
- Each party's actions influence the other party's responses, but these responses themselves are actions provoked by yet another round of response
- A “chicken and egg” problem.

Conflict Spiral

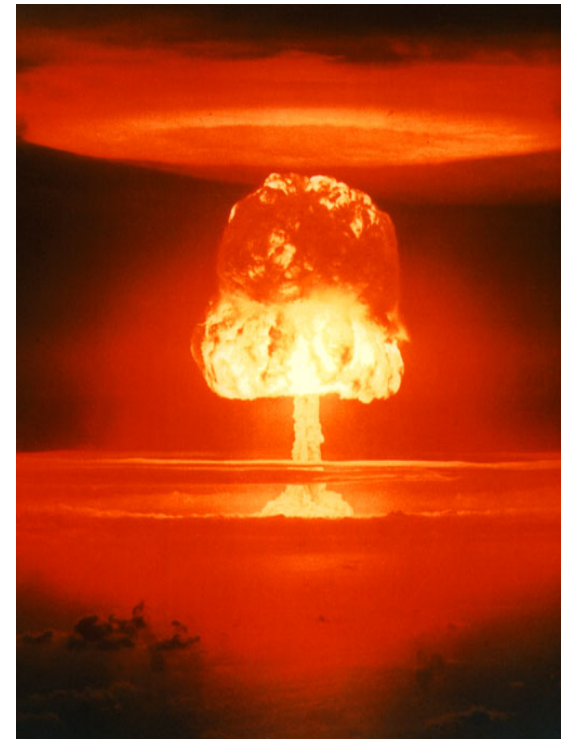
- The main idea is that “heavy tactics” used by one party, will often lead the other party to also use heavy tactics.
- What starts as a small debate, might first escalate into a shouting match, and then a fist fight as each party responds to the other’s hostile actions.

Two broad Classes: Retaliatory and Defensive (Deterrence)

- Retaliatory: each party punishes the other for actions that it finds aversive.
- For example, one person yells at another person who cut them off on the road, and after experiencing such abuse, the other person yells back.

Deterrence

- “Give him an inch, and he will take a mile”
- With assumptions of rationality (reacting to punishment), the theory states that a party must “have resolve”, and not yield on even small issues.



Deterrence Requirements

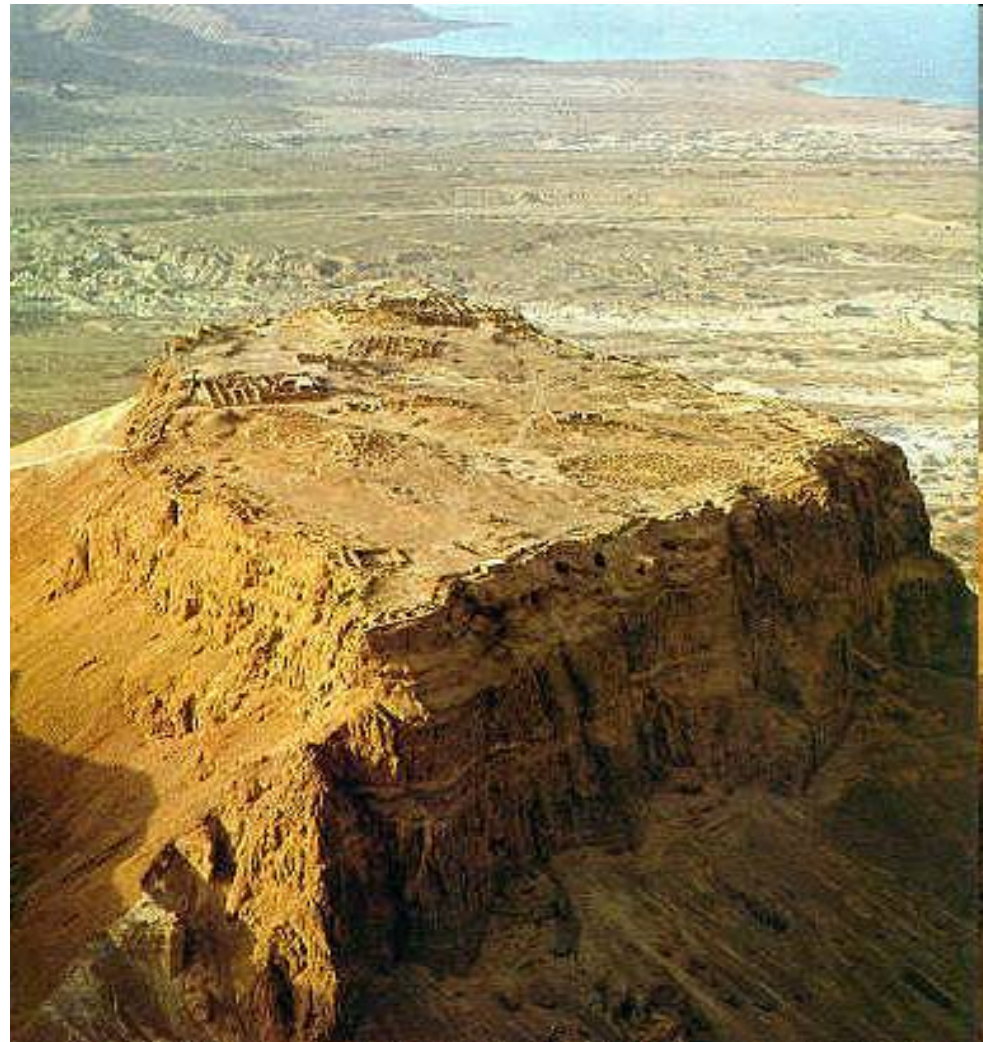
- i. Clarity:** Threat must be understood
Failures: Iraqi invasion of Kuwait
- ii. Credibility:** Opponent must believe threat will be carried out if line is crossed
Failures: Nuclear threats over Berlin Wall, Vietnam, Falklands
- iii. Cost:** Threat must be great enough to outweigh benefits of crossing the line
Failures: Sanctions on China, Chemical weapons in Iran-Iraq war
- iv. Restraint:** Opponent must believe threat will NOT be carried out if line is NOT crossed
Failures: WMD Inspections before current Iraq conflict, Hitler declares war on America
- v. Rationality:** Opponent must weigh costs and benefits

Cognitive Processing and Rationality

- The data discussed earlier concerning cognitive processing and schema illustrate that the rationality assumed by deterrence doctrines may often be incomplete.
- People are not computers, and their cognitive and emotional processes can produce different outcomes than predicted by simple conflict models.

Example: Masada

- Jewish revolt against Rome
- Last 1000 holdouts on fortress of Masada



Example: Masada

- Jewish revolt against Rome
- Last 1000 holdouts on fortress of Masada
- Rome imports 15,000 laborers from around empire, spends a year building ramp
- Why?

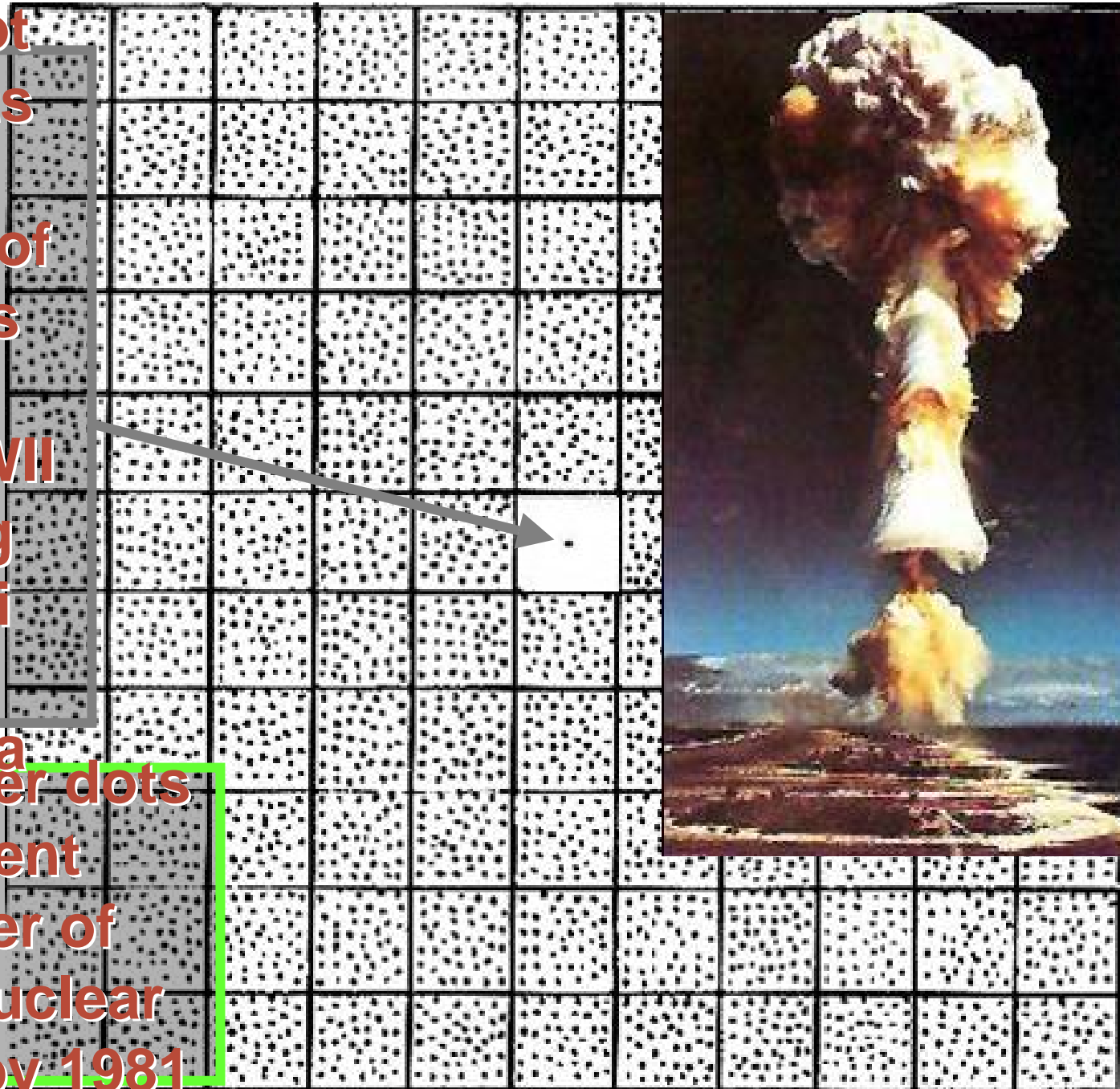


Nuclear Deterrence

- "Thus far the chief purpose of our military establishment has been to win wars. From now on its chief purpose must be to avert them." – Bernard Brodie, 1946
- Massive Retaliation: Depended on atomic superiority
- Mutually-Assured Destruction: "Tripwires"
- Flexible Response: Credibility at every level

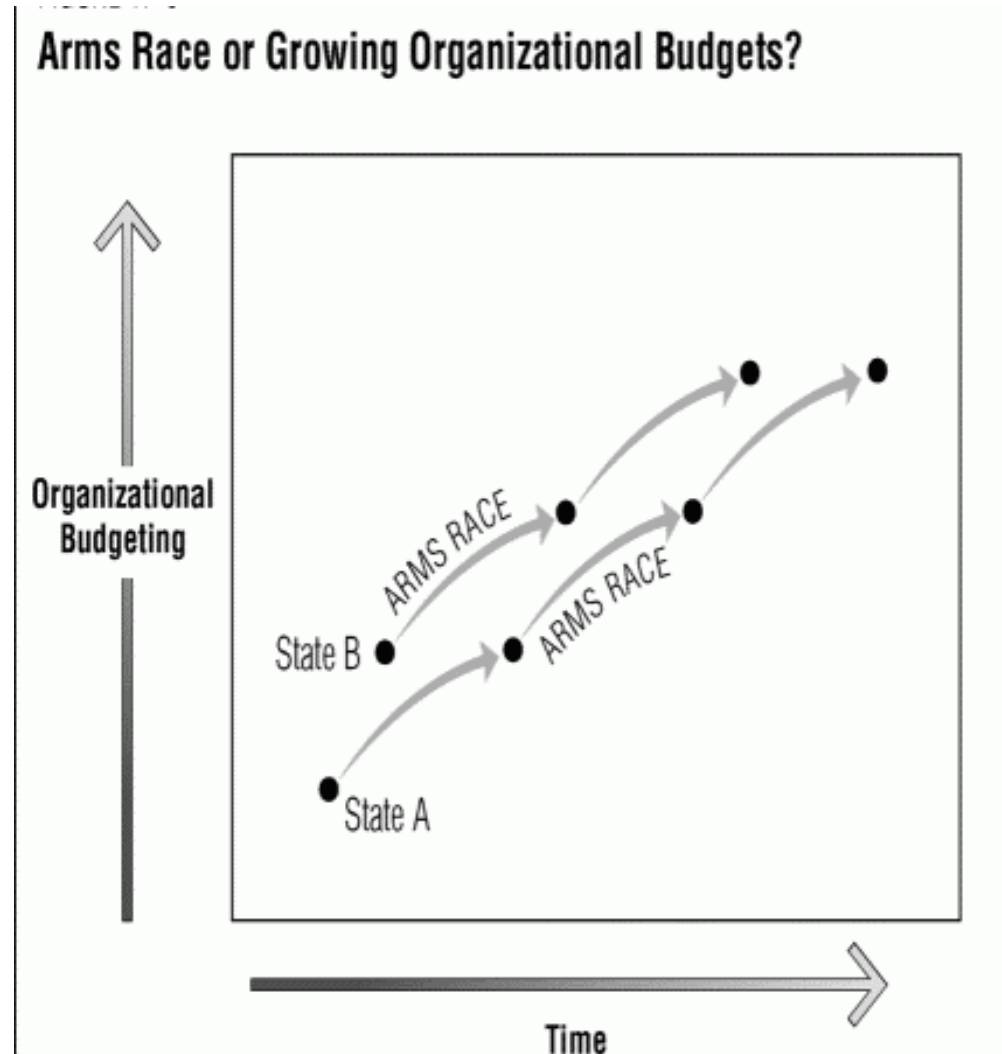
**Center dot
represents
total
firepower of
all bombs
dropped
during WWII
including
Nagasaki
and**

**Hiroshima
All the other dots
represent
firepower of
world's nuclear
weapons by 1981**



Arms Races

- i. Rivalry + Arms Race = Risk of War?
- ii. Most arms races difficult to demonstrate:



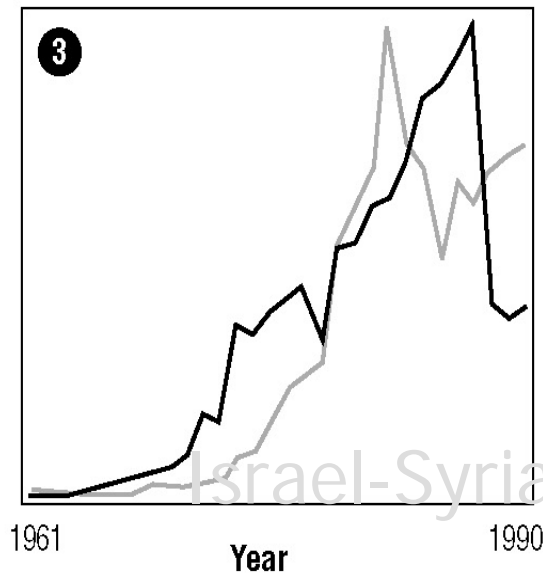
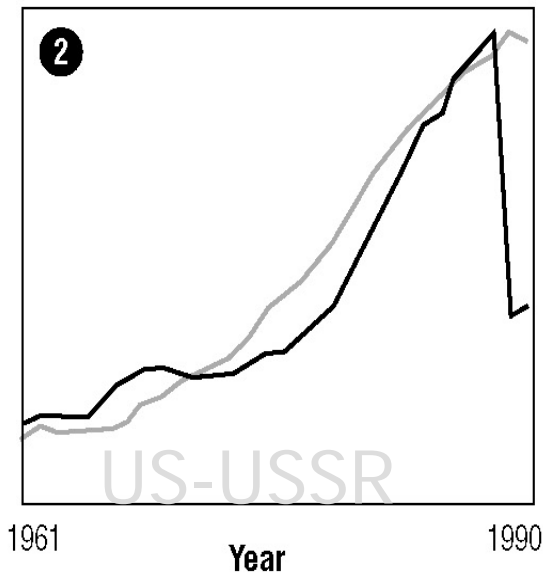
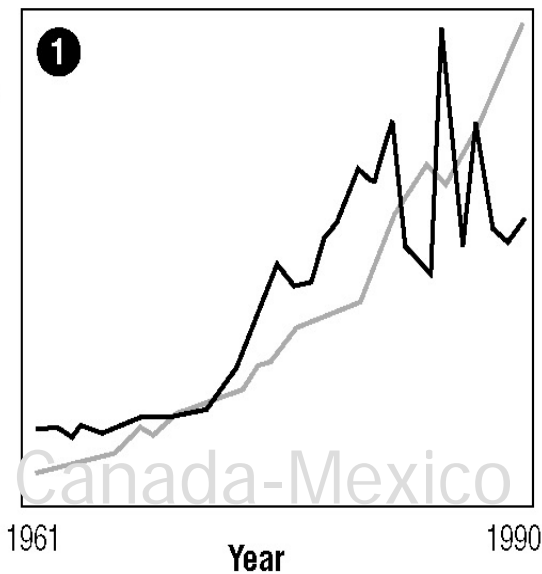
Can You Pick Out the 3 Arms Races?

Military Expenditures

High



Low

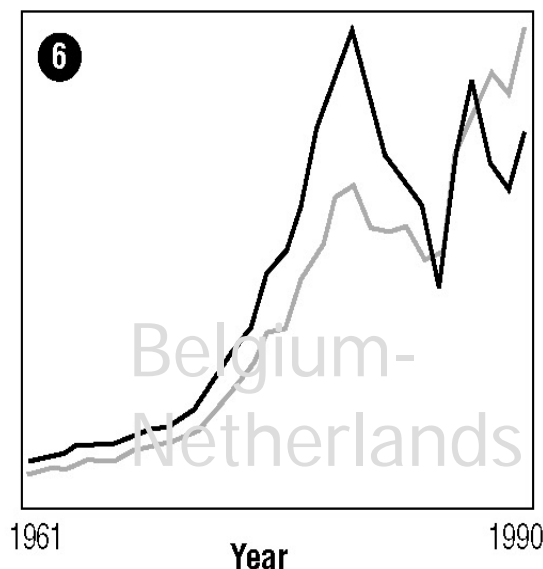
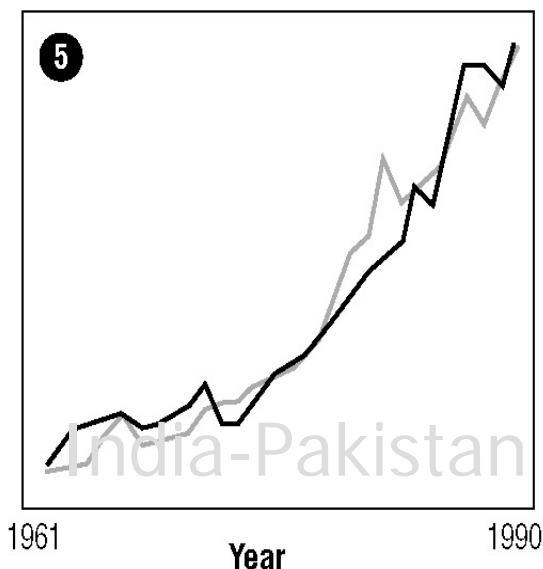
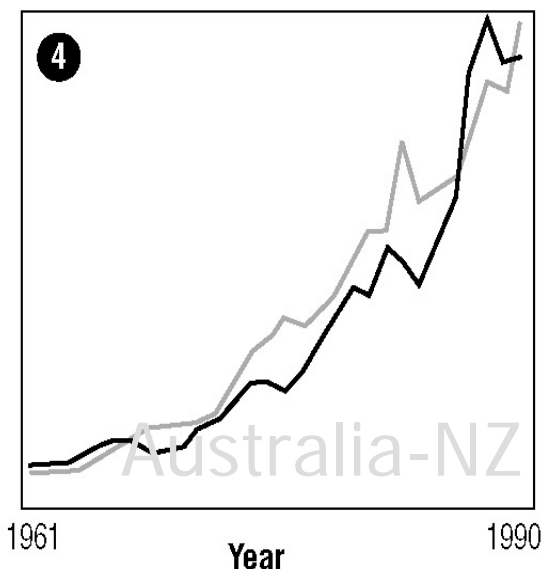


Military Expenditures

High



Low



Conflict Spiral

Conflict situations are complex; each party can see their own intentions but must **INFER** the intentions of the other.

Sometimes there are mistakes in interpretation. (Example, Robert McNamara and the “Fog of War”.)

Conflict Spiral

- Because people have difficulty interpreting a complex social world, sometimes parties will perceive their own actions as non-aggressive, while believing the other party's actions are aggressive.

Examples of Spiral Conflict

- “We are peaceful, but they are aggressive!”
- World War I
- China and U.S. during Korean War
- Cold War

Model 3: Structural Change

- The tactics used in ongoing conflicts can lead to “residues” in the form of changes in the parties or communities involved.
- As each party begins to use more and more aggression to resolve the dispute, individuals and groups within the parties become more and more emotionally charged.

Structural Change

- Ongoing conflicts can create patterns of behavior that lead to major changes in the psychology of individuals (e.g., fear, anger, prejudice).
- These forces can then in turn re-shape societal institutions. For example, fear of terrorism in the U.S. has created a Department of Homeland Security, and has led to other changes in U.S. policy.

Part III: Psychological Changes

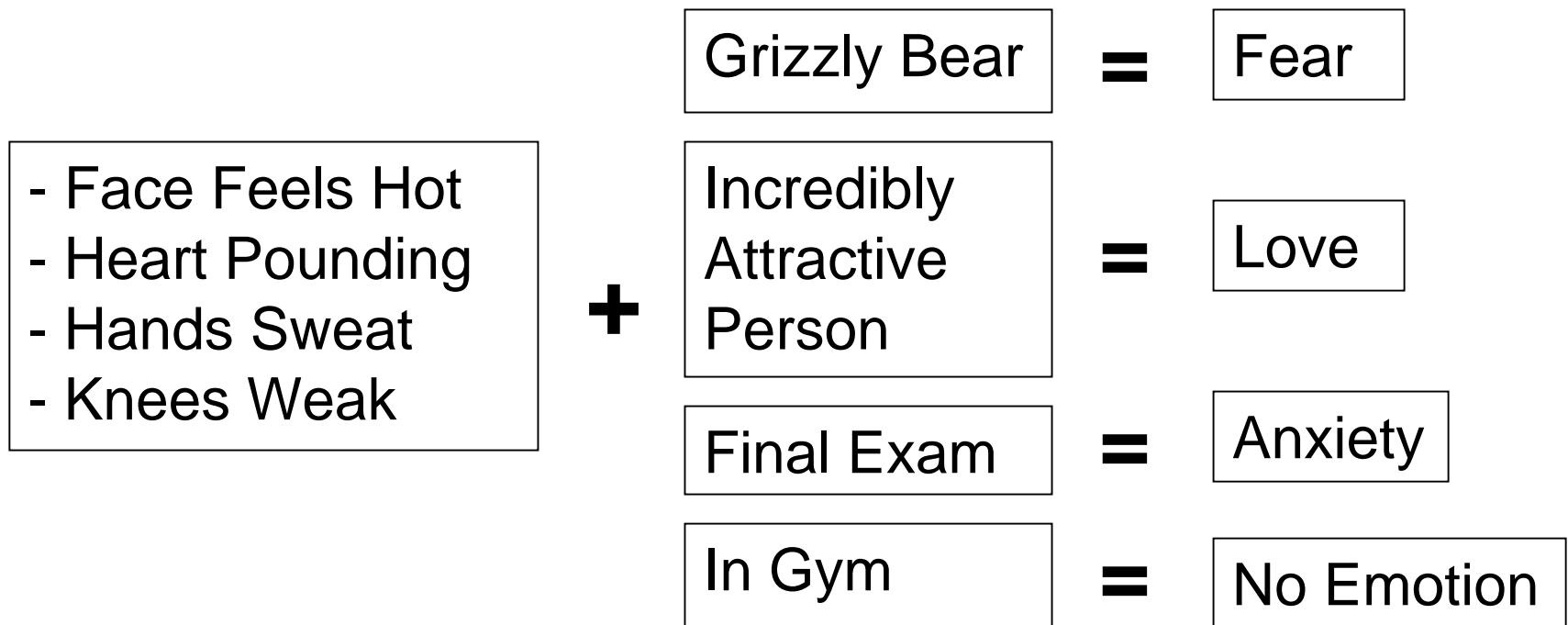
- The heavy tactics of conflict escalation can result in substantial psychological changes among individuals.
- Following the READER article, we will consider:
 - 1.) Desire to Punish (The Role of Anger)
 - 2.) Negative Attitudes and Perception (Read about this in the READER)
 - 3.) Deindividuation

The Role of Anger

- Anger is the cognitive labeling of sources of arousal or feeling.
- First, individuals experience emotional arousal, and then they label it.
- **Main Idea: The most heavy and contentious conflict resolution is likely to occur when individuals are aroused.**

Two-Factor Theory of Emotion

- Core Idea: Arousal + External Cues = Label



Arousal may amplify the current emotional response . . .

Intensity of Physiological Arousal

Low

High

Negative

Aggression increases

Aggression greatly increases

Type of Emotion

Neutral

No effect

Aggression increases

Positive

Aggression decreases

Aggression increases

or

Aggression decreases

FIGURE 11.7 The Arousal-Affect Model

According to this model, aggression is influenced by both the intensity of physiological arousal and the type of emotion produced by a stimulus.

Deindividuation

- Loss of self-awareness and evaluation apprehension; occurs in group situations that foster responsiveness to group norms, good or bad.
- **Main Idea: Heavy tactics and emotional responses during conflict can lead to deindividuation. This in turn can lead to more intense and severe forms of conflict.**



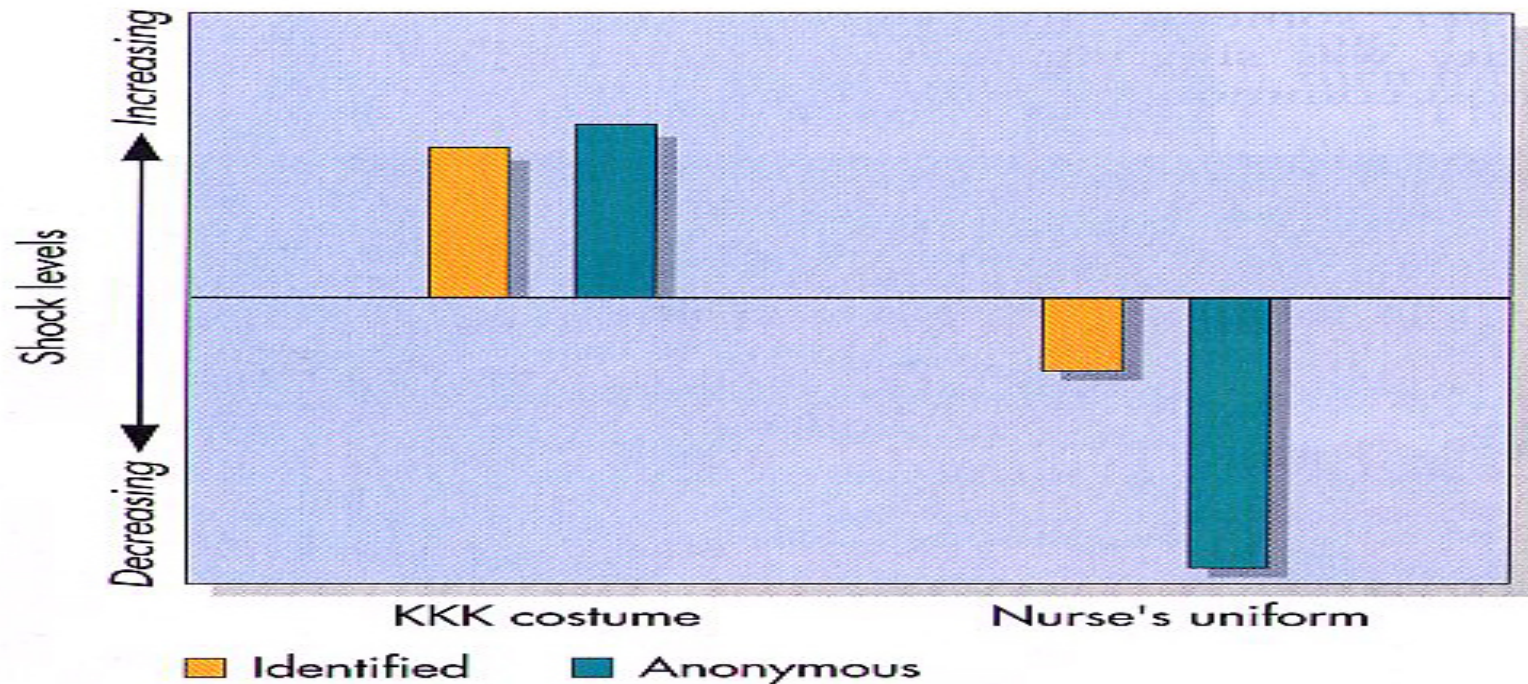
Research indicates that when individuals are not easily identified, they are more likely to act in deviant and destructive ways. (e.g., giving “shocks” to others, punishing prisoners)



If cues suggest a positive norm, deindividuation may produce positive behavior . . .

FIGURE 8.4 Anonymous Goodness

Regardless of whether they were individually identified or anonymous, female participants wearing KKK robes increased the intensity of shocks they administered to an experimental confederate. Among those wearing nurses' uniforms, however, anonymous participants *decreased* shock intensity much more than did individually identified participants. (Data from Johnson & Downing, 1979.)



Percent transgressing

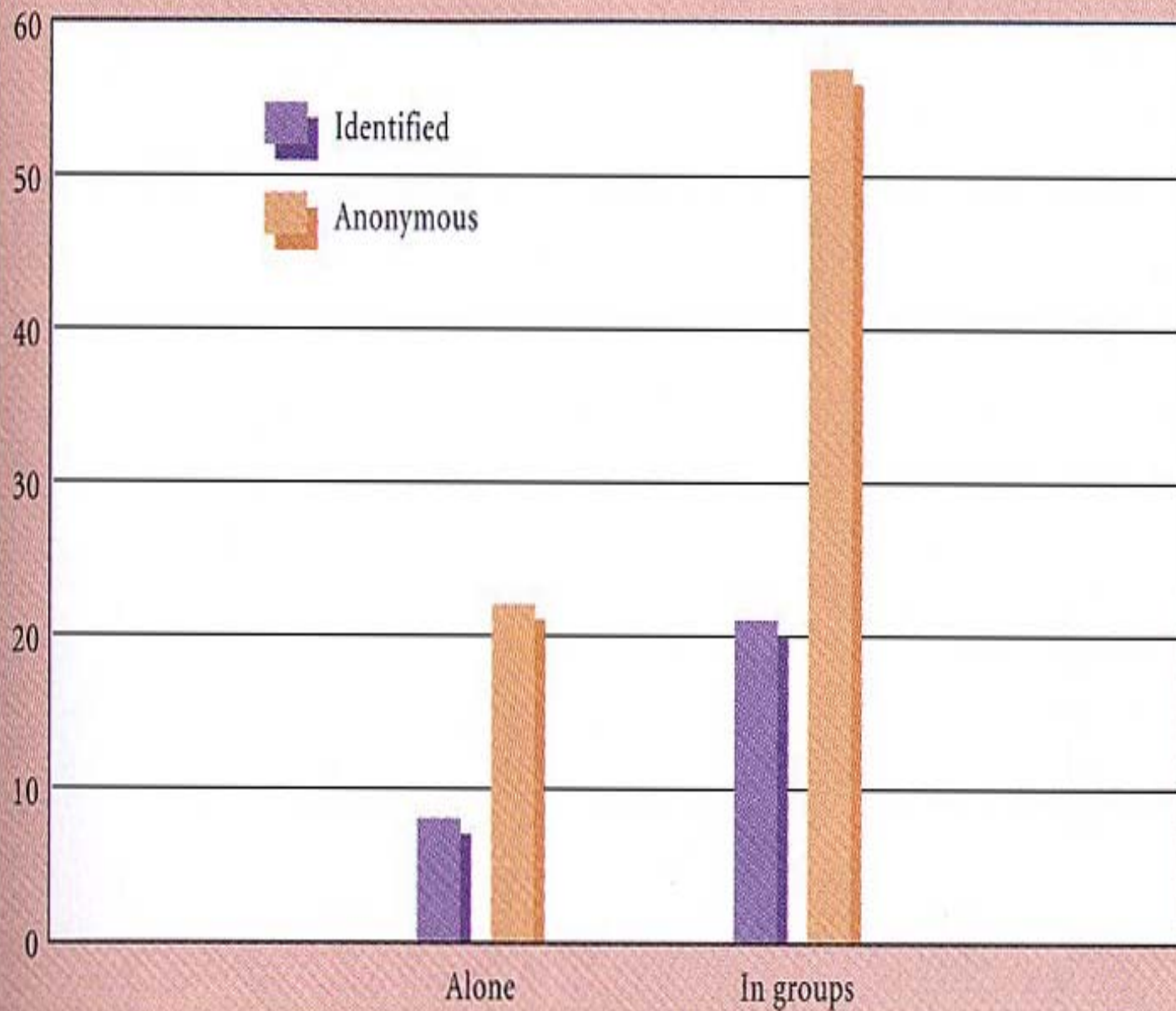


figure 8-6

Children were more likely to transgress by taking extra Halloween candy when in a group, when anonymous, and, especially, when deindividuated by the combination of group immersion and anonymity.