

Social Cognition

Social Psychology: Global Perspectives

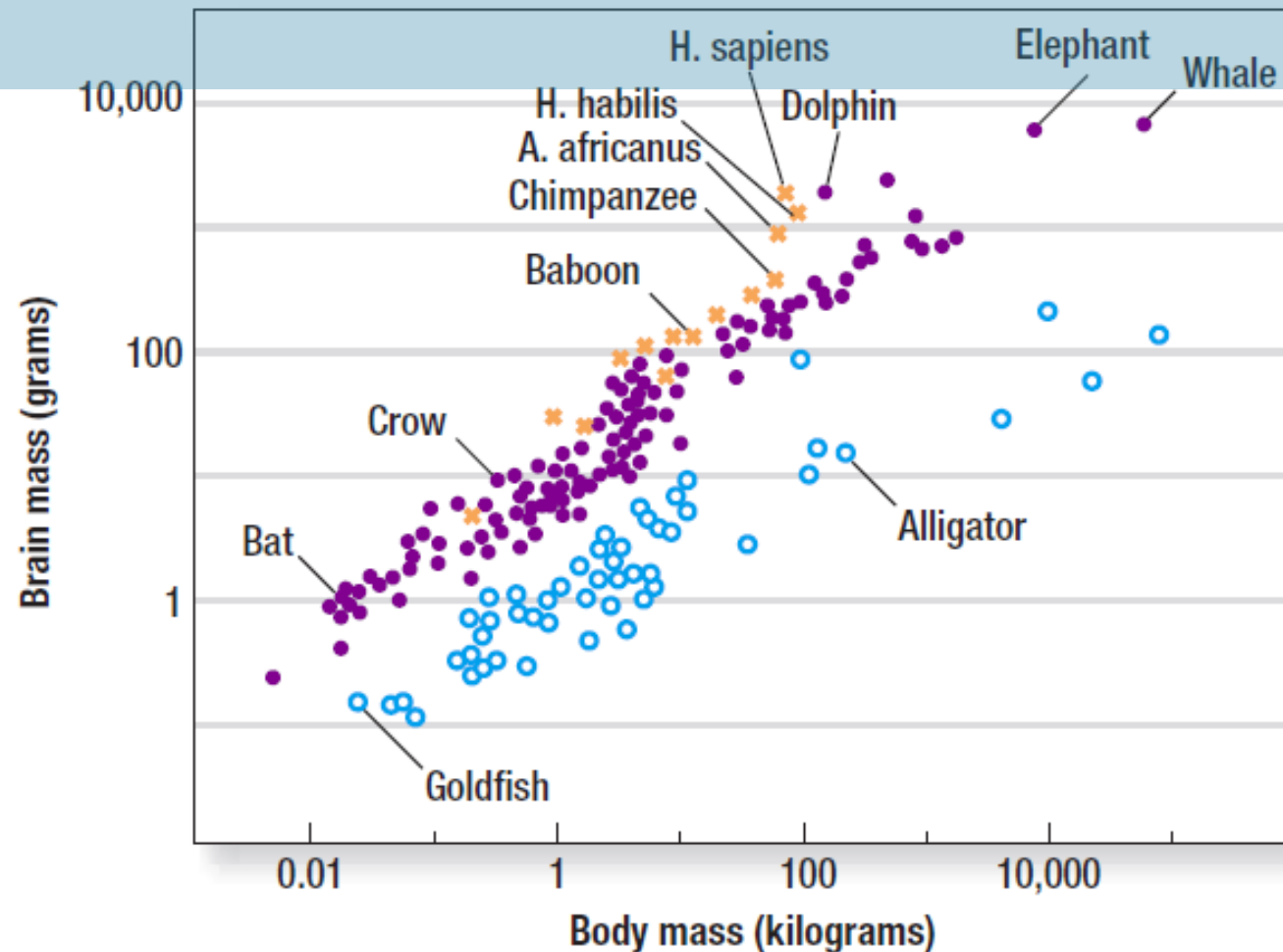
Introduction

- Vaccine-autism connection
 - “Most damaging medical hoax of the last 100 years”
 - Misinformation is “sticky”
- Rejecting information requires cognitive effort
 - Accepting messages is easier

What is Social Cognition?

- Social psychology: study of how people think and feel
 - Began in the 1970s
 - Attitudes and motivations were the first to be studied
- Social cognition: thinking by people about people and social relationships
 - What is unique about thinking about people as opposed to thinking about something else, like frogs or computers?

Brain Mass versus Body Mass



From "Cosmic Evolution - Epoch 7 - Cultural Evolution," Fig. 7.13 located at http://www.tufts.edu/as/wright_center/cosmic_evolution. Copyright © 2005 by Eric J. Chaisson, Wright Center for Science Education. Reprinted by permission.

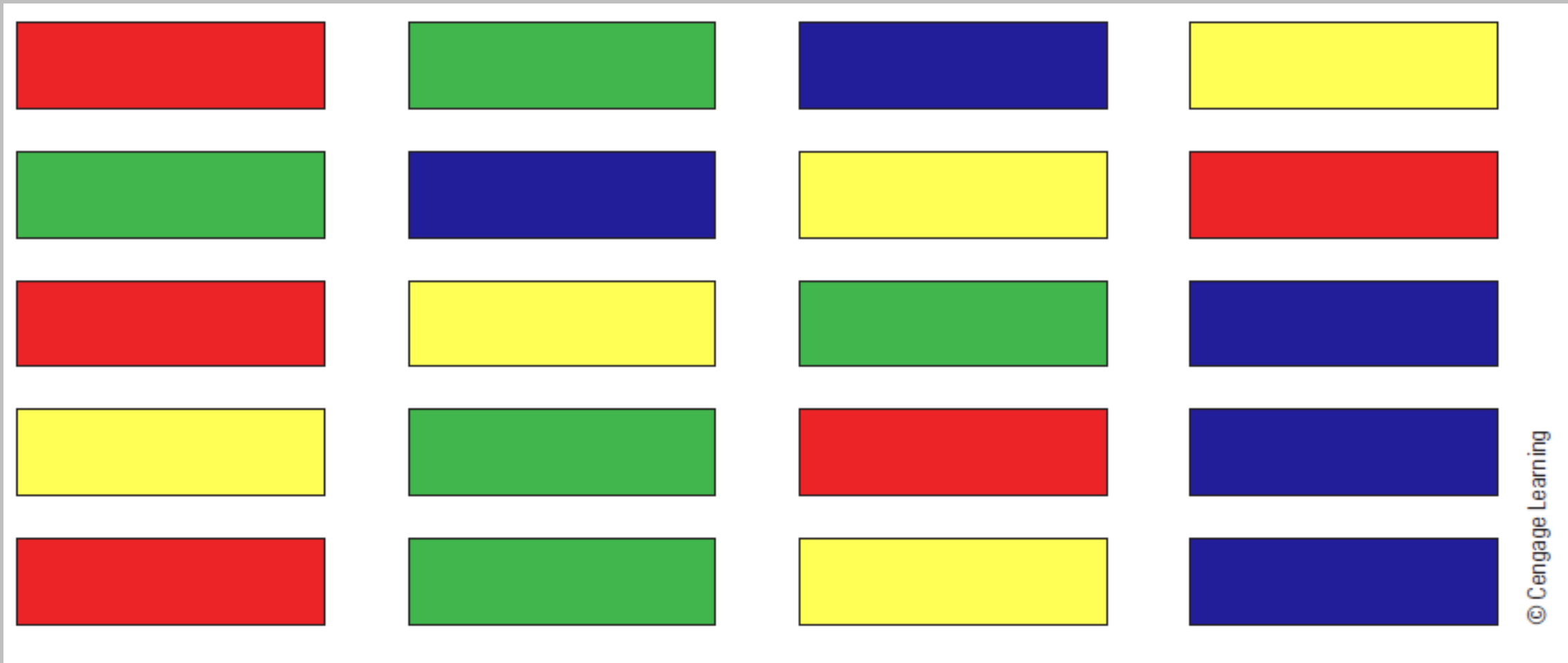
What is Social Cognition? (cont'd.)

- Why people think, and why they don't
 - Human brain: size of a grapefruit
 - Research shows people are lazy about thinking
 - Cognitive miser: reluctance to do extra thinking
 - People do think at great length about things that are interesting to them
 - Deliberate thinking requires more effort than automatic thinking

Automatic and Deliberate Thinking

- Stroop effect: people have difficulty overriding the automatic tendency to read the word rather than name the ink color
 - Illustrates automatic versus deliberate thought
- How do we know if a thought is automatic?
 - Requires no awareness, not guided by intention, not subject to deliberate control, requires no effort, and is highly efficient

Stroop Test 1



Stroop Test 2

BLUE

GREEN

BLACK

RED

RED

BLACK

GREEN

BLUE

RED

BLUE

BLACK

GREEN

BLUE

RED

GREEN

BLACK

BLACK

BLUE

GREEN

RED

Name the colour of each word as quickly as you can, ignoring what the word says.

Stroop Test 3

RED	BLUE	GREEN	BLACK
BLACK	BLUE	RED	GREEN
BLUE	BLACK	GREEN	RED
GREEN	BLUE	BLACK	RED
BLUE	BLACK	RED	GREEN

Name the colour of each word as quickly as you can, ignoring what the word says.

Automatic and Deliberate Thinking (cont'd.)

- Knowledge structures
 - Schemas: represent information about a concept, its attributes, and relationships
 - Scripts: define situations and guide behavior
- Priming: activating an idea in someone's mind so related ideas are more accessible
 - Wakening associations
- Framing: whether messages stress potential gains or losses

Thought Suppression and Ironic Processes

- Process of thought suppression
 - Lookout for reminders of unwanted thought
 - Redirect attention away from unpleasant thought
- Distraction and rumination (or contemplation) are more effective than suppression
 - Mental control is a form of self-regulation

Trade Offs

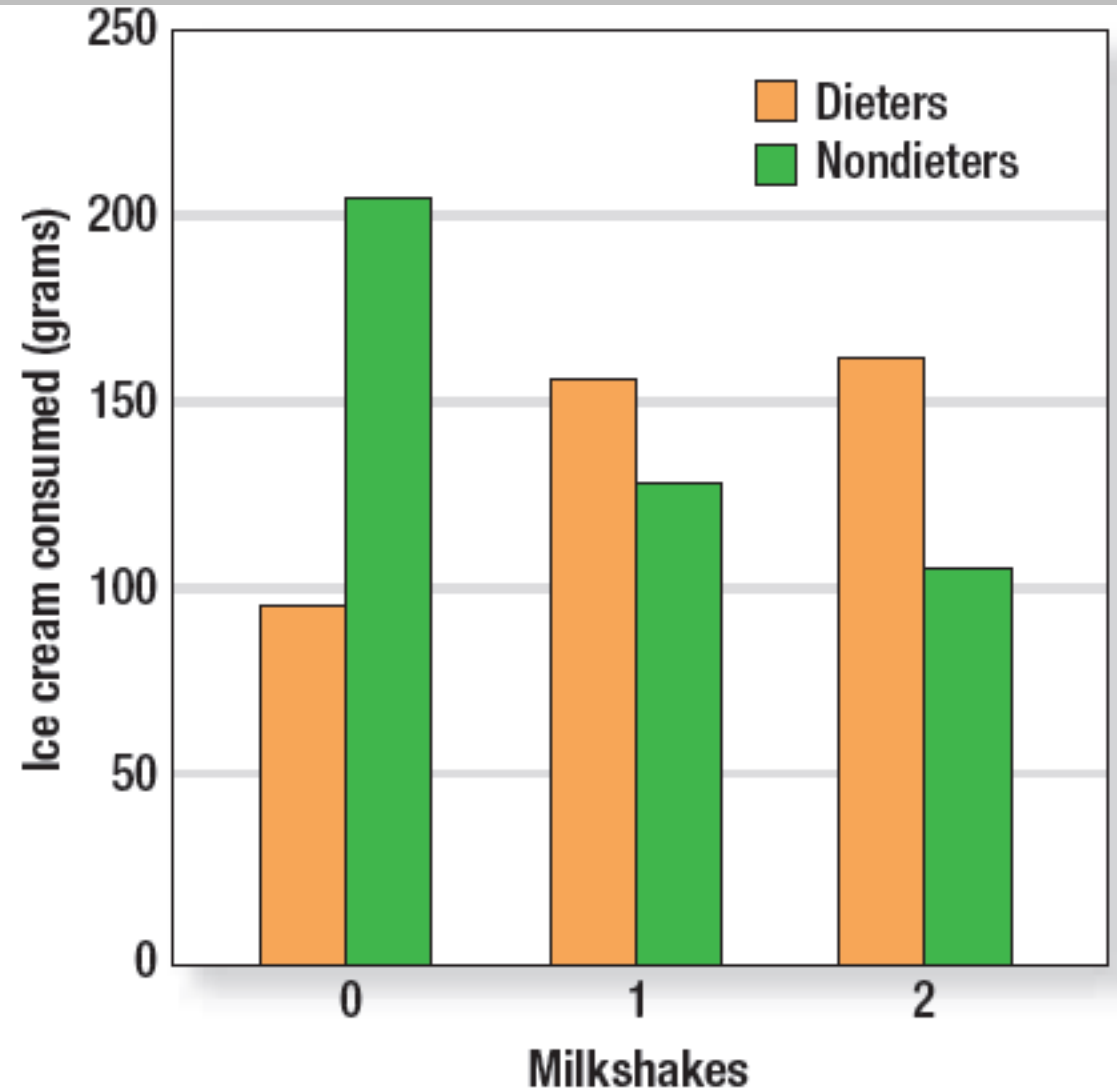
- Conscious and unconscious thought
- Both processes have important and valuable functions
 - Unconscious thought: helps sort through information and come to good decisions
 - Conscious thought: vital to logical reasoning

Food for Thought

- Dieting requires self-regulation
 - Dieters and nondieters will eat different amounts of food based on eating patterns
 - Milkshakes and ice cream test (see next slide)
- Counterregulation: “what the heck” effect
 - Driven by cognition, not bodily needs
 - Type of food, not calorie content, affects whether dieters suffer from counter-regulation

Dieters versus Non-dieters

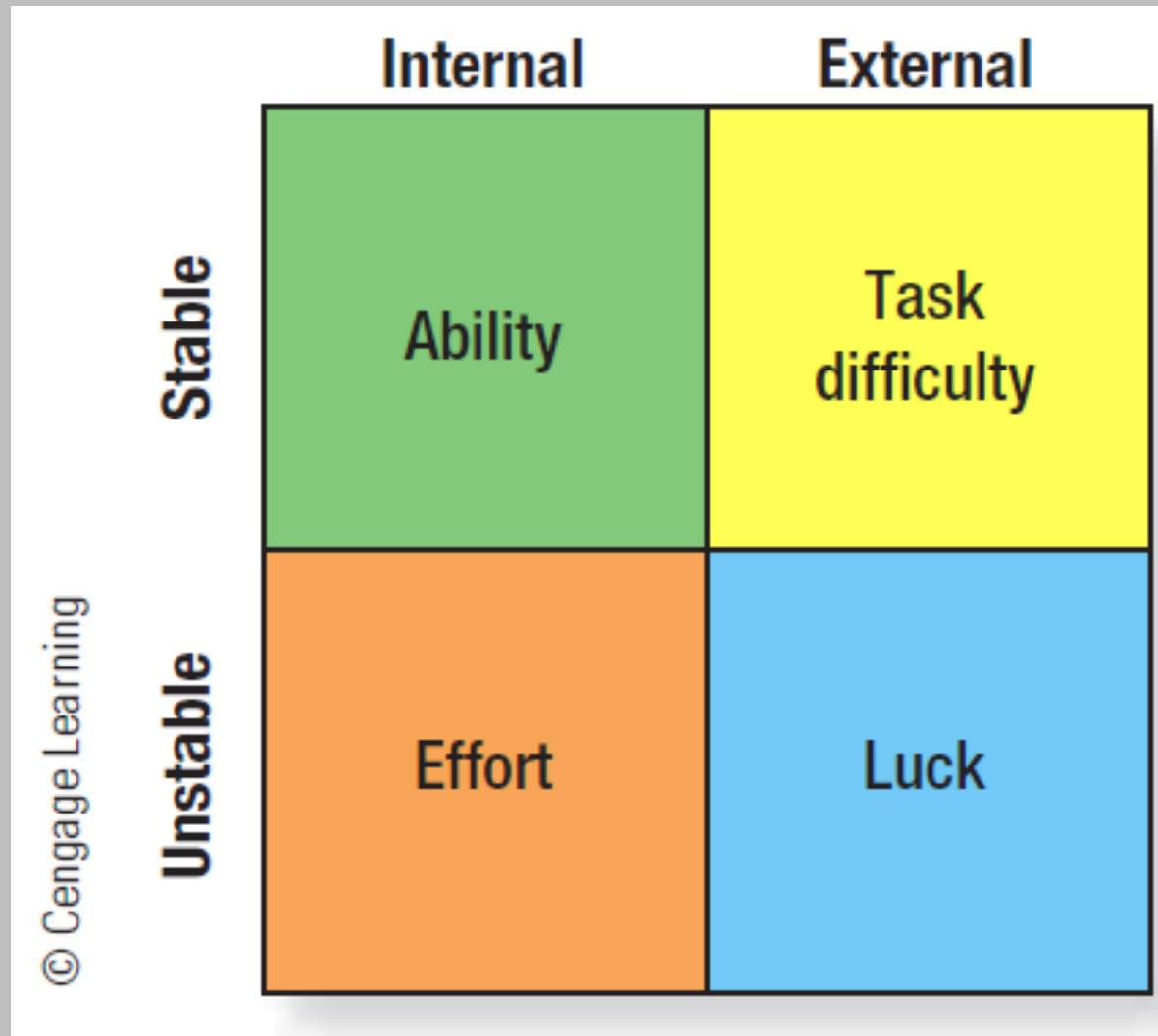
Non-dieters who had had a milkshake ate less ice cream; dieters who had a milkshake ate *more* ice cream (Herman & Mack, 1975).



Attributions and Explanations: Why Did That Happen?

- Attributions: inferences people make about events in their lives
 - Help determine behaviour
- “It’s not my fault”
- Two-dimensional attribution theory
 - Possible attributions types: internal–external and stable–unstable

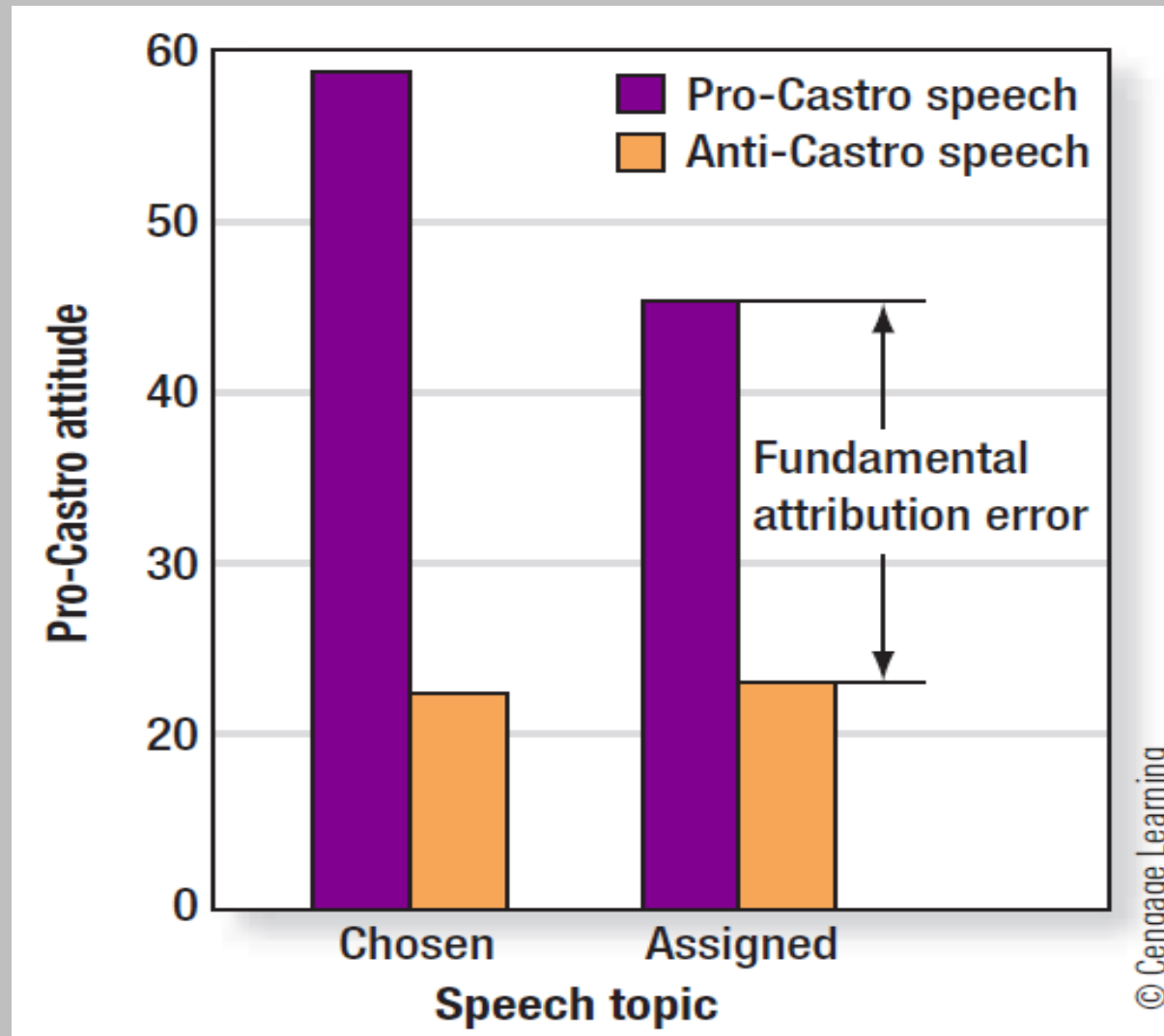
Two-Dimensional Attribution Theory



Attributions and Explanations: Why Did That Happen? (cont'd.)

- “You know I’m right”
 - Actor/bias: tendency for actors to make external attributions and observers to make internal attributions
- Fundamental attribution error (correspondence bias)
 - Tendency for observers to attribute other people’s behaviour to internal or dispositional causes and to downplay situational causes

Fundamental Attribution Error



Jones and Harris (1967)

Attributions and Explanations: Why Did That Happen? (cont'd.)

- Challenging attribution theory
 - Malle: observers did not consistently make more dispositional attributions than actors
- Explaining actions: a different approach
 - Malle examined people's explanations; concluded people distinguish between intentional and unintentional action
 - Intentional behaviour: explained by reasons
 - Unintentional behaviour: explained by causes

Heuristics: Mental Shortcuts

TABLE 5.1

The Most Common Mental Shortcuts (or Heuristics) That People Use

Heuristic	Definition	Example
Representativeness	The tendency to judge the frequency or likelihood of an event by the extent to which it “resembles” the typical case	In a series of 10 coin tosses, most people judge the series HHTTHTHTTH to be more likely than the series HHHHHHHHHH (where H is heads and T is tails), even though both are equally likely.
Availability	The tendency to judge the frequency or likelihood of an event by the ease with which relevant instances come to mind	People overestimate the frequency of dramatic deaths (e.g., dying in an airplane crash) and underestimate the frequency of less dramatic deaths (e.g., dying from lung cancer).
Simulation	The tendency to judge the frequency or likelihood of an event by the ease with which you can imagine (or mentally simulate) an event	In the Olympics, bronze medalists appear to be happier than silver medalists because it is easier for a silver medalist to imagine being a gold medalist.
Anchoring and adjustment	The tendency to judge the frequency or likelihood of an event by using a starting point (called an anchor) and then making adjustments up and down from this starting point	If one party in a negotiation starts by suggesting a price or condition, then the other party is likely to base its counteroffer on this anchor.

The Availability Heuristic

ESP beliefs. People remember salient events, but forget non-salient events.

		Dream recalled	
		Yes	No
“Key” event happened	Yes	Available	Unavailable
	No	Unavailable	Unavailable

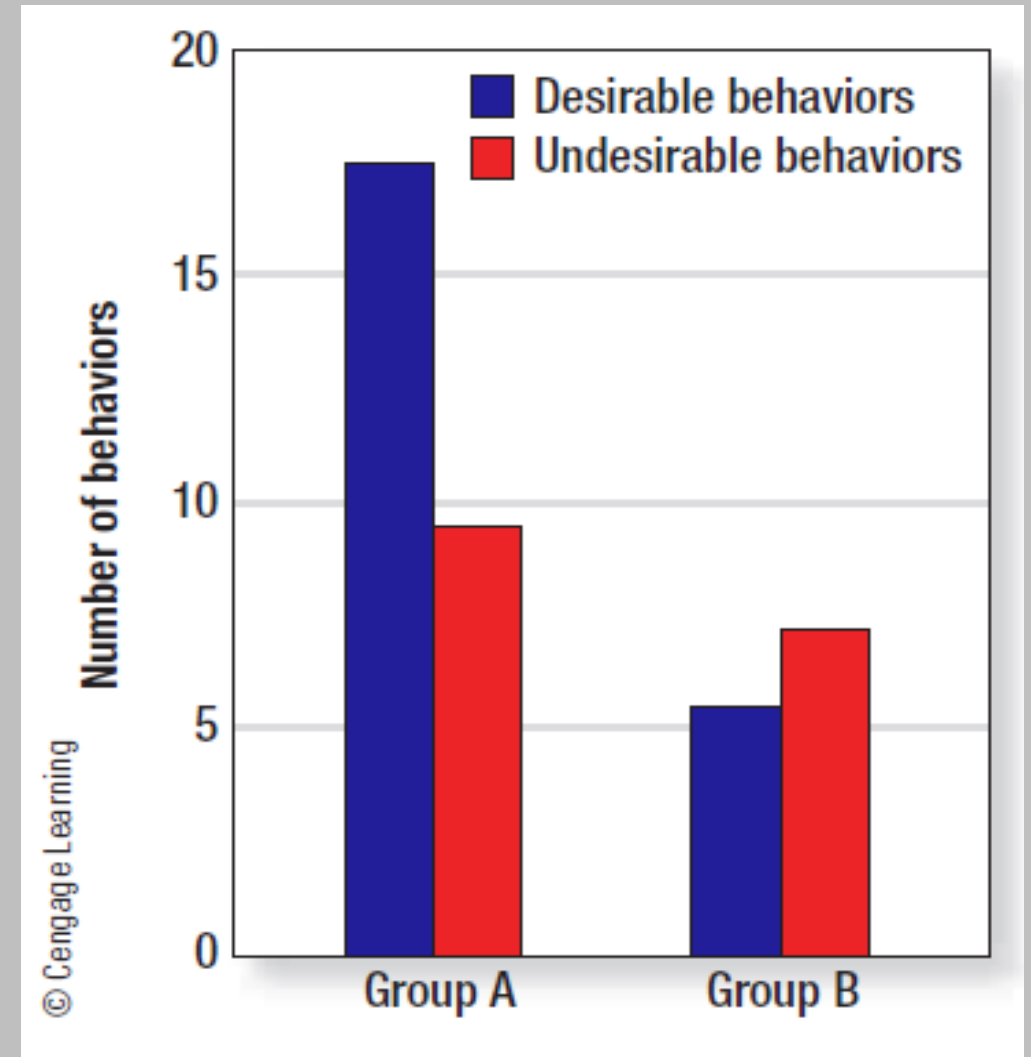
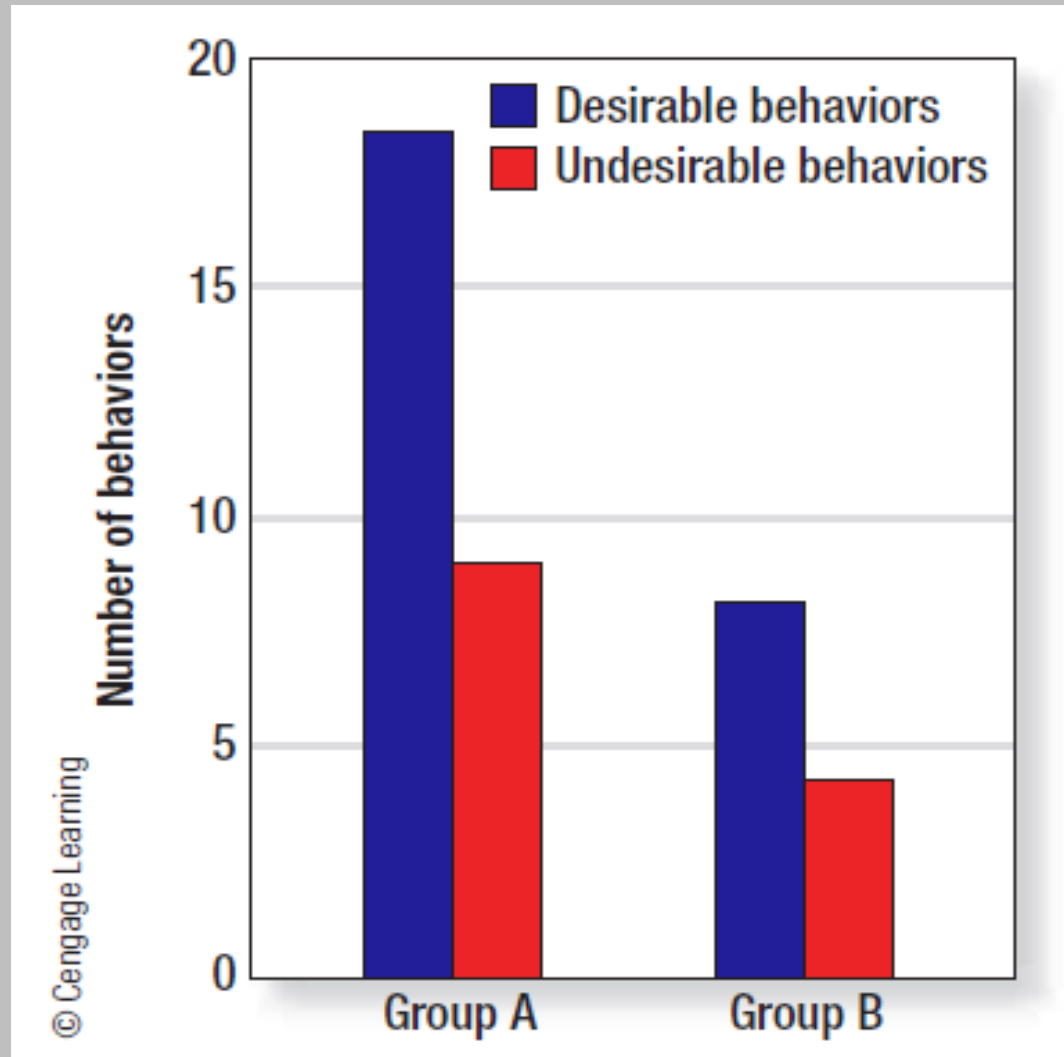
Flawed or Clever Thinking?

- Standard view
 - People think in order to find the truth
 - Thinking suffers from mistakes and shortcomings (e.g., laziness and motivated biases)
- Alternate view
 - People think to argue with others and convince them of their side, rather than figure out the truth alone
 - Shortcuts and heuristics actually work well

(So-Called) Errors and Biases

- Two types of information
 - Statistical information and case history
- Confirmation bias: tendency to search for information that confirms one's beliefs
 - Ignore information that disconfirms it
- Illusory correlation: tendency to overestimate link between variables that are related only slightly or not at all

Actual and Illusory Correlation Studies



(So-Called) Errors and Biases (cont'd.)

- Base rate fallacy: ignore or underuse base rate information
 - Be influenced by distinctive features of the case being judges
- Gambler's fallacy and the hot hand
 - Hot hand: luck will continue
 - Gambler's fallacy: chance event is affected by previous events and will "even out"

(So-Called) Errors and Biases (cont'd.)

- False consensus effect
 - Overestimate the number of people who share one's opinions, attitudes, values, and beliefs
- False uniqueness effect
 - Underestimate the number of people who share one's prized characteristics or abilities

(So-Called) Errors and Biases (cont'd.)

- Perseverance of theories
 - Theory perseverance: once a conclusion is drawn, it is only changed by overwhelming evidence
- Statistical regression
 - Tendency for extreme scores or behavior to be followed by others closer to average

(So-Called) Errors and Biases (cont'd.)

- Illusion of control
 - A false belief that one can influence events
- Counterfactual thinking
 - Imagining alternatives to past or present events or circumstances
 - First instinct fallacy
 - Upward and downward counterfactuals

Common Cognitive Errors

Error or Bias	Definition	Example
Confirmation bias	The tendency to notice information that confirms one's beliefs and to ignore information that disconfirms one's beliefs	Looking for evidence that your horoscope is true if you believe in astrology, and ignoring evidence that is inconsistent with your horoscope
Illusory correlation	The tendency to overestimate the link between variables that are related only slightly or not at all	Believing that mentally ill individuals are violent and dangerous
Base rate fallacy	The tendency to ignore or underuse base rate information and instead to be influenced by the distinctive features of the case being judged	Thinking that it is equally likely to have 60% of births be male in a small or a large hospital
Gambler's fallacy	The tendency to believe that a particular chance event is affected by previous events, and that chance events will "even out" in the short run	Believing that one is more likely to get a <i>heads</i> on a coin toss after the sequence TTTTTTTT than after the sequence THHTTHTHT
Hot hand	The tendency for gamblers who get lucky to think they have a "hot" hand and their luck will continue	Believing that one is more likely to get a <i>tails</i> on a coin toss after the sequence TTTTTTTT than after the sequence THHTTHTHT
False consensus effect	The tendency for people to overestimate the number of other people who share their opinions, attitudes, values, and beliefs	Believing that most people have the same religious beliefs as you do

Common Cognitive Errors (cont'd.)

Error or Bias	Definition	Example
False uniqueness effect	The tendency for people to underestimate the number of other people who share their most prized characteristics and abilities	If a person exercises regularly, underestimating the number of other people who also exercise regularly
Theory perseverance	The tendency to stick with a conclusion unless there is overwhelming evidence to change it	Continuing to dislike someone because you heard she was mean to your friend, even though you later find out she was not mean to your friend
Statistical regression	The statistical tendency for extreme scores or extreme behavior to return toward the average	The " <i>Sports Illustrated</i> jinx," in which athletic performance usually declines after appearing on the cover of <i>Sports Illustrated</i>
Illusion of control	The belief that one can control totally chance situations	For gamblers, throwing dice softly for low numbers and hard for high numbers
Counterfactual thinking	Imagining alternatives to past or present factual events or circumstances	After getting in a car wreck, thinking "what if" I had gone home using a different route

Are Most People Really Just Stupid?

- People make many cognitive errors
 - Not random; quite predictable
- More important decisions
 - Deliberate system is used and less errors occur
- Reducing cognitive errors
 - Debiasing: deliberate processing
 - Meta-cognition: reflection

Summary

- Social cognition examines how people think about other people and about relationships
 - Much thinking is done by the automatic mind, as opposed to deliberately thinking through things
 - What were traditionally thought of as errors in thinking may have advantages for human life