

Lecture Outline

Attributions Part 2

1) Mini-Theories of the Attribution Process

- Theory of Naive Psychology
- Correspondent Inference Theory
- Covariation Model
- Theory of Emotional Lability
- Self-Perception Theory

2) Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Attribution Theory

No unifying theory of attributions

Three central mini-theories

- Theory of Naive Psychology
- Correspondent Inference Theory
- Covariation Model

Attribution Theory

Two highly influential mini-theories

- Theory of Emotional Lability
- Self-Perception Theory

Theory of Naive Psychology

- Developed by Heider (1944)
- List of Observations
- Main Premise: People naturally see cause-effect relationships

Theory of Naive Psychology

Observation #1:

Time between events affects whether cause-effect relationship is seen

■ Proximal events = occur close in time

■ Distal events = occur far apart in time

Theory of Naive Psychology

Prediction:

Proximal events are more likely than distal events to be seen as a cause-effect relationship

Theory of Naive Psychology

Observation #2:

Similarity of events affects whether cause-effect relationship is seen

Prediction:

Similar events are more likely than dissimilar events to be seen as a cause-effect relationship

Theory of Naive Psychology

Observation #3:

People tend to see
single causes for
events

Theory of Naive Psychology

Observation #4:

People do more than
identify cause-effect
relationships

They also make
attributions of
responsibility

Theory of Naive Psychology

Attributions of responsibility:

How responsible one is for
having caused an event

Theory of Naive Psychology

Five levels of responsibility

■ Level 1:
Responsibility of association

Indirect Cause

Theory of Naive Psychology

Five levels of responsibility

■ Level 2:

Causal responsibility without
foreseeability

Accidental Cause
Outcome unforeseeable

Theory of Naive Psychology

Five levels of responsibility

- Level 3:
Causal responsibility with
foreseeability

Accidental Cause
Outcome foreseeable

Theory of Naive Psychology

Five levels of responsibility

- Level 4:
Intentional responsibility

Purposeful Cause

Theory of Naive Psychology

Five levels of responsibility

- Justifiable responsibility

Cause Justified

Theory of Naive Psychology

- **Attributions can be external or internal**

- **People tend to make:**
 - external attributions for own behavior;
 - internal for others' behavior

- **Actors: those doing a behavior**
- **Observers: those watching a behavior**

Correspondent Inference Theory

- Developed by Jones & Davis (1965)
- Formal theory (not just observations)
- Main Premise: People have a strong tendency to infer that people's dispositions correspond to their behavior

Dispositions = Underlying
personality

Correspondent Inference Theory

Factor:

Behavior: accidental vs.
intentional

Prediction:

Intentional behaviors
lead to dispositional
inferences more than
accidental behaviors

Correspondent Inference Theory

Factor:

Choice: situational
constraints

Prediction:

Unconstrained
behaviors lead to
dispositional
inferences more than
constrained behaviors

Castro Study: Jones & Harris (1967)

Choice prediction not supported

- Participants read another person's essay about Castro
- Participants told essay content had been assigned
- Essay content either supported or opposed Castro

Castro Study: Jones & Harris (1967)

■ Prediction:

True attitude of people judged to be the same regardless of their essay's content

■ Results:

When essay pro-Castro, participants evaluated person as holding pro-Castro attitude

When essay anti-Castro, participants evaluated person as holding anti-Castro attitude

Correspondent Inference Theory

Factor:

Behavior: Socially
desirable or
undesirable

Prediction:

Socially undesirable
behaviors lead to
dispositional inferences
more than socially
desirable behaviors

Correspondent Inference Theory

Factor:

Principle of non-
common effects

Prediction:

The less a chosen
behavior has in
common with other
possible
behaviors, the more it
leads to dispositional
inferences

Correspondent Inference Theory

Factor:

Motivational factors:
Hedonic relevance and
personalism

Hedonic relevance: Does actor's behavior have consequences for observer?

Personalism = Did actor intend to harm/help the observer?

Correspondent Inference Theory

Prediction:

Behaviors lead to more dispositional inferences when they are high in hedonic relevance and personalism

Covariation Model

- Developed by Kelly (1967)
 - Main Premise: People must believe that two events covary to infer a cause-effect relationship
-

Entity: object toward which actor directs a behavior

Covariation Model

Three factors determine attributions

- Distinctiveness: Does actor treat other entities that way?
- Consistency: Does actor treat the entity that way in other situations and times?
- Consensus: Do others also treat the entity that way?

Eric (actor) got depressed after talking with Diane (entity). Is this due to Eric or to Diane?

■ Distinctiveness: Does Eric get depressed when he talks with people other than Diane? (Yes)

■ Consistency: Does Eric get depressed every time he talks with Diane? (Yes)

■ Consensus: Do other people also get depressed when they talk to Diane? (No)

Eric's depression has something to do with him

People underuse consensus information

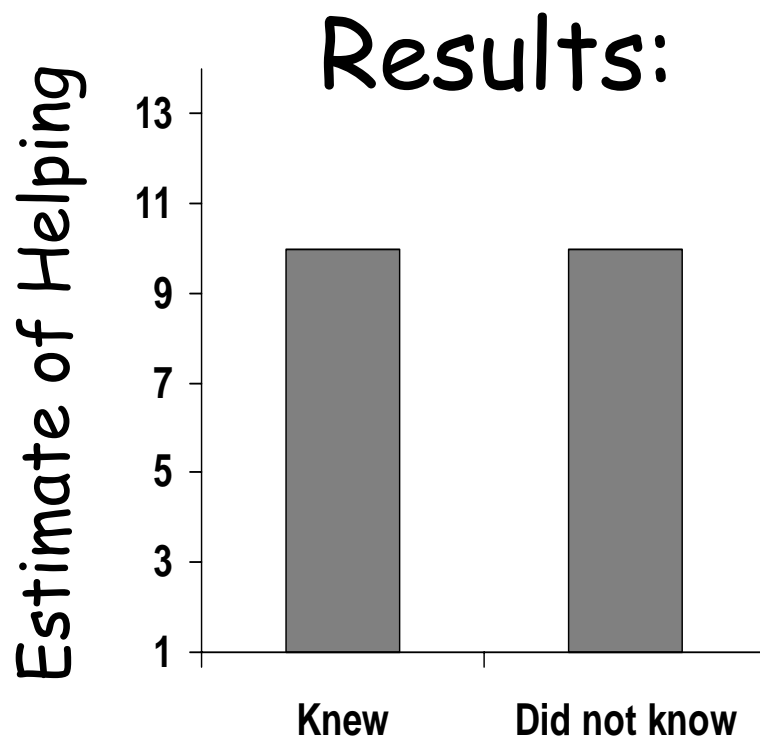
Seizure Victim Study: Nisbett & Borgida (1975)

- Participants read about earlier study in which partners talked on an intercom
- Told that one partner was a confederate who pretended to have a seizure
- 1/2 participants were told nothing else, whereas 1/2 told almost none of the partners helped the seizure victim
- Participants then estimated how likely it was that three particular partners had helped the seizure victim.

Seizure Victim Study: Nisbett & Borgida (1975)

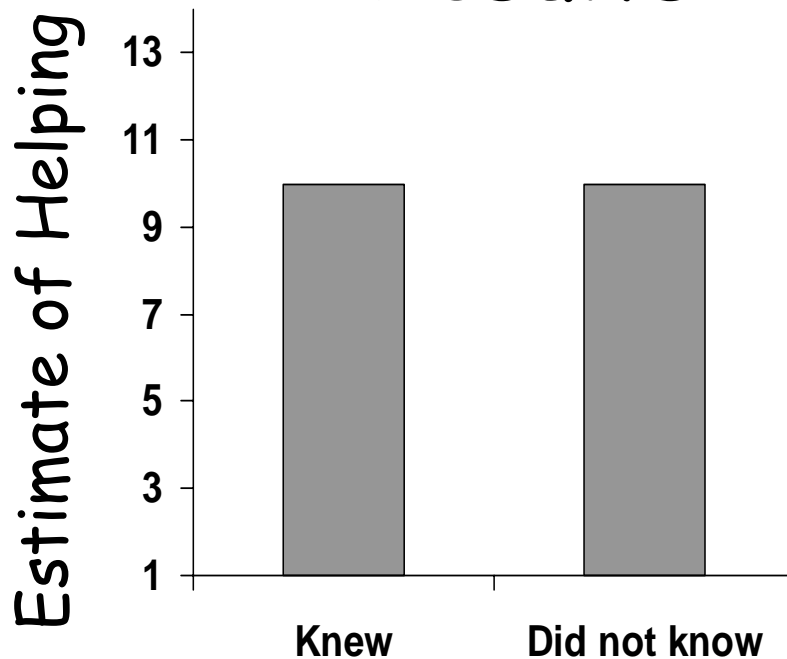
Prediction:

Lower estimates of helping
from participants who
knew that few partners
had helped the seizure
victims



Seizure Victim Study: Nisbett & Borgida (1975)

Results:



Conclusion: Participants did not use consensus information to make their estimates. This does not support the prediction.

Theory of Emotional Lability

- Developed by Schachter (1959)
- Theory explains how people make emotional attributions for physiological arousal
- Main Premise: The same physiological arousal can be attributed to different emotions

Theory of Emotional Lability

Emotion = general arousal + cognition

- General arousal = physiological state

- Cognition = thoughts that label the arousal as a particular emotion

Theory of Emotional Lability

Prediction:

When physiological arousal experienced before cognition, people use environmental cues to make emotional attributions

Bridge Study: Dutton & Aron (1974)

Participants: Men (18-35)

Site: Capilano Canyon

Two Experimental Manipulations

- Experimenter Gender (F vs. M)
- Physiological Arousal (low vs. high)

Bridge Study: Dutton & Aron (1974)

Procedures:

- Men approached by experimenter
- Asked to invent short story from TAT picture
- Encouraged to call experimenter for results

Dependent Variables

- Sexual content of short story
- Whether participant called or not

Bridge Study: Dutton & Aron (1974)

- Male Experimenter:

No differences in sexual content or # calls across low and high bridge

- Female Experimenter:

Sexual content and # calls greater among men on high bridge than low bridge

Interpretation : Bridge Study

Men on high bridge:

- Experienced arousal and used environment cues to label it
- Attractive female experimenter acted as a cue that led them to attribute their arousal to lust for her

Self-Perception Theory

- Developed by Bem (1967)
- Main Premise: People infer their attitudes from their behavior
- People do this when:
 - Behavior is freely chosen
 - Attitudes are ambiguous/weak
- Bem vs. Festinger

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

- Developed by Festinger (1957)
- Main Premise:
 - Attitude-behavior inconsistency leads to dissonance, an unpleasant emotional state
 - People try to reduce dissonance

Strategies to Reduce Dissonance

■ Change attitude

(Exercise does not = good health)

■ Add new attitude

(Heart attack better than cancer)

■ Alter importance of attitude

(Work is more important than exercise)

Support for Cognitive Dissonance Theory

- Series of studies:
- Participants wrote counter-attitudinal essay
- Participants consistently changed attitude in line with essay's content

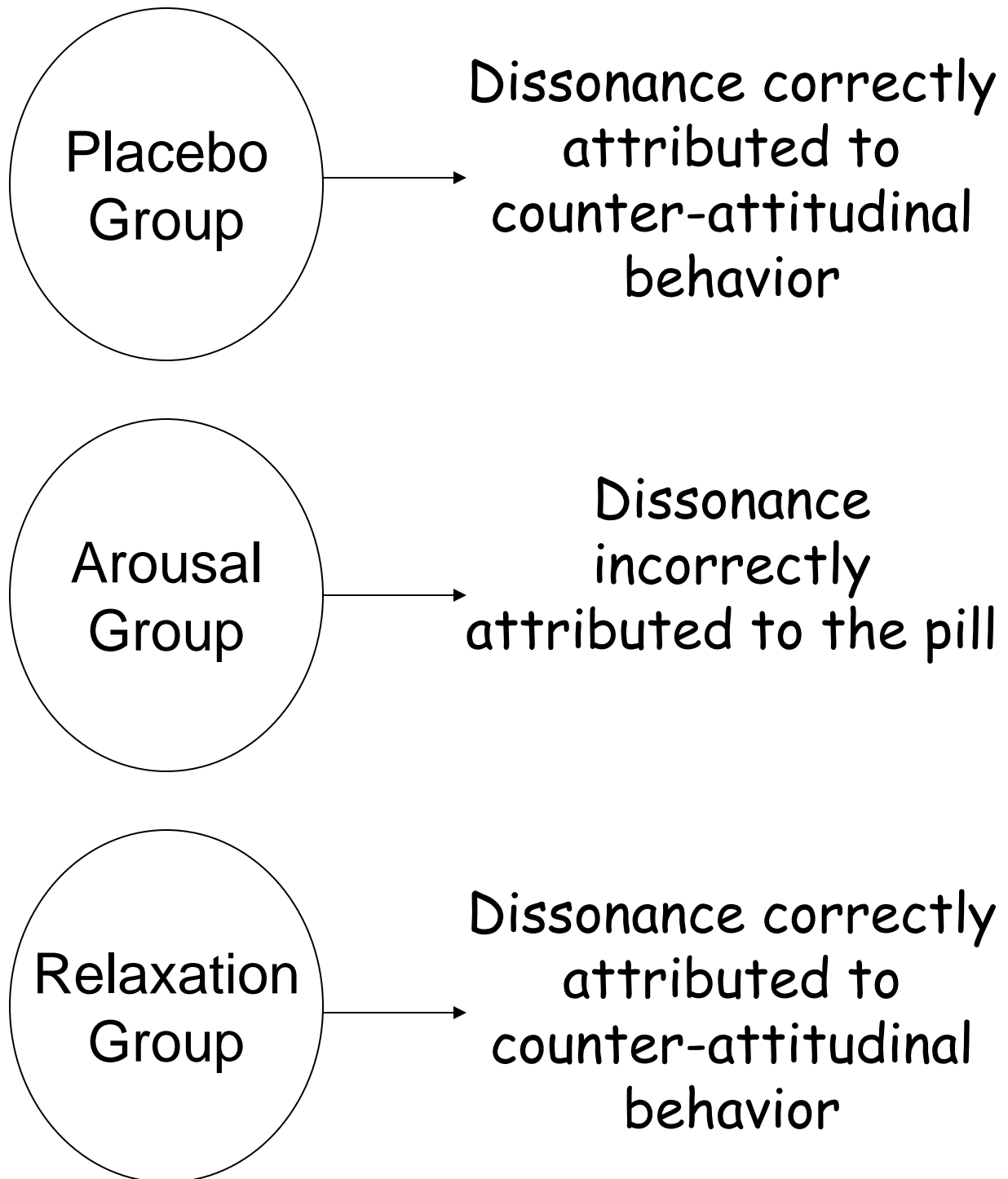
Cognitive Dissonance Theory

- Interpretation of results:
 - Counter-attitudinal essay led to dissonance
 - Dissonance was reduced via attitude change
- Re-interpretation of results:
 - People changed their attitude because they inferred it from their behavior

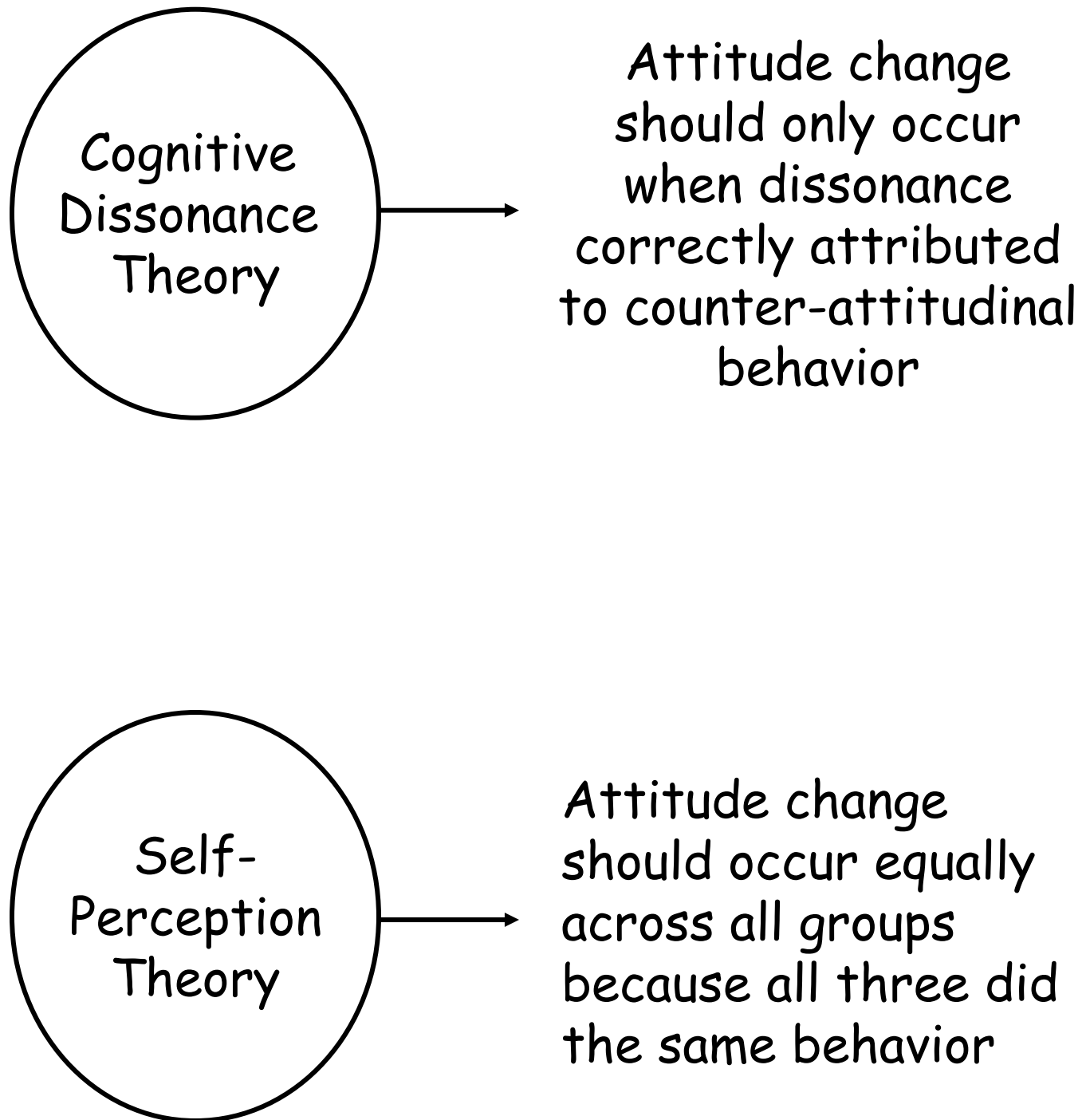
Pill Study: Zanna & Cooper (1974)

1. Participants engaged in counter-attitudinal behavior
2. Digested a pill
3. Three groups of participants:
 - Placebo group: told pill was placebo
 - Arousal group: told pill was stimulant
 - Relaxation group: told pill was tranquilizer

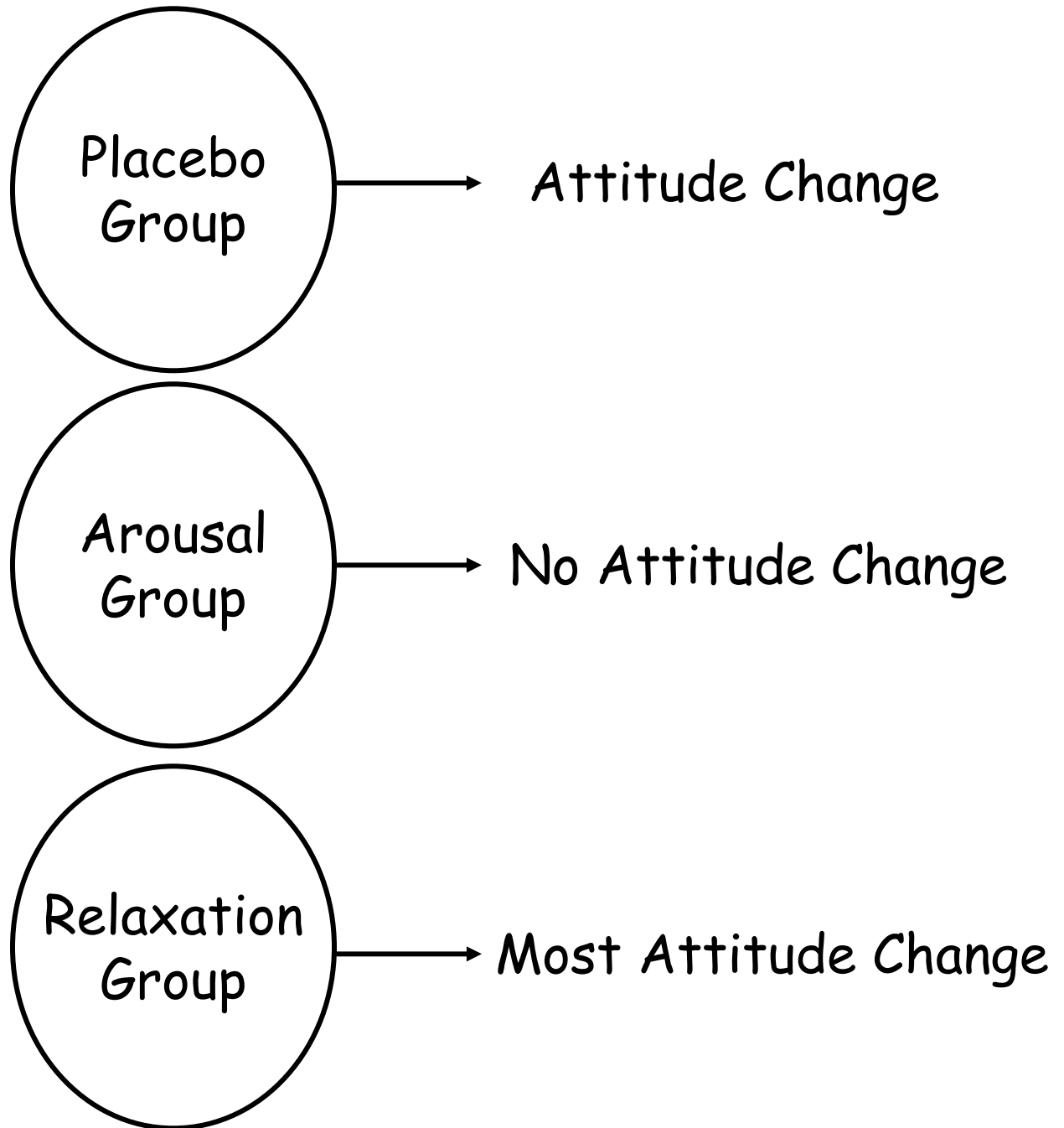
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Pill Study: Zanna & Cooper (1974)



Pill Study: Zanna & Cooper (1974)



Pattern supports Festinger's
Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Why did relaxation group
experience the most
attitude change?

Because participants in this
condition experienced the
most dissonance.

See next slide...

- Participants in the relaxation group expected to feel relaxed, but felt discomfort.

- Experienced discomfort as being especially strong because it occurred despite the tranquilizer.

- Attributed their high discomfort to their counter-attitudinal behavior.

- Changed their attitude more than other groups to reduce the high discomfort they felt