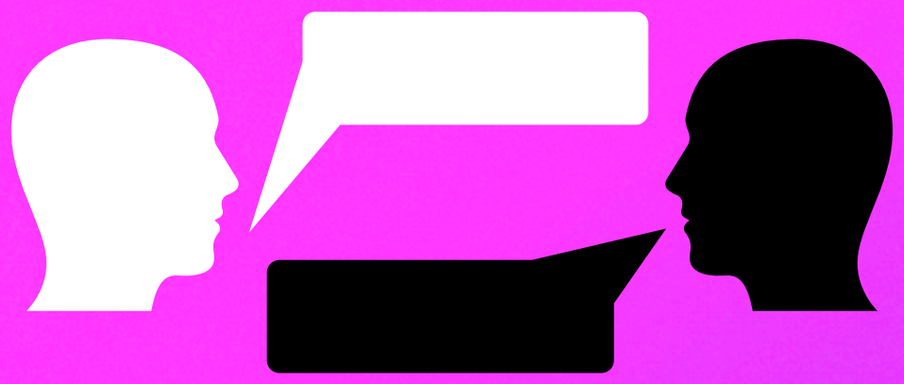

BERLIN WORKSHOP ON SPEECH AND HARM

SOCIAL NORMS AND CONVERSATIONAL INJUSTICE

27 JULY 2023

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HTTPS://WSTARR.ORG

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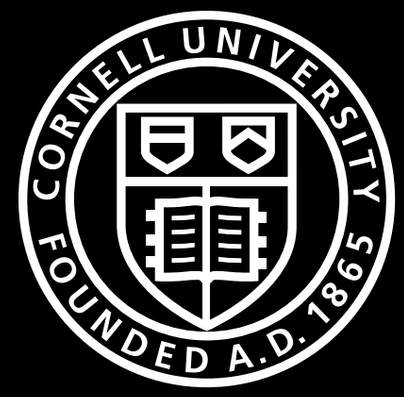
BERLIN WORKSHOP ON SPEECH AND HARM

WOGAP BERLIN



Technische Universität Berlin

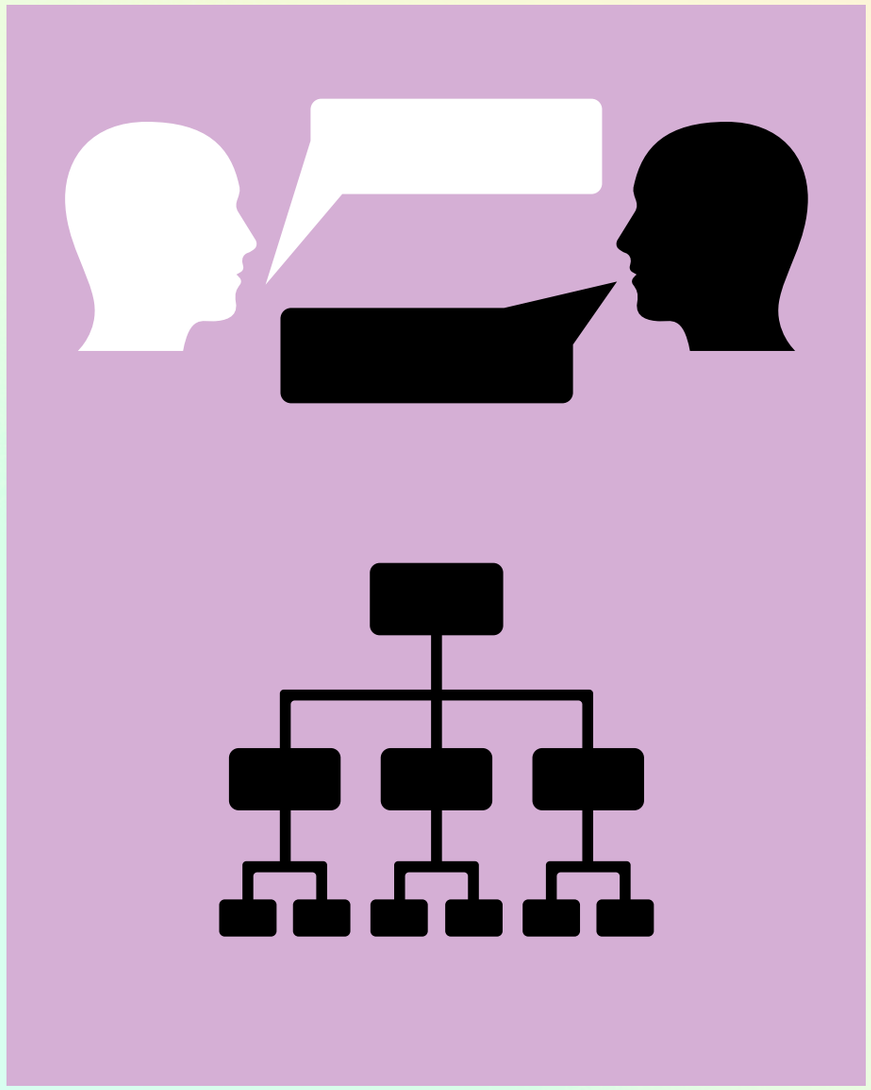
OUTLINE

1 **SOCIAL NORMS & COMMUNICATION**
Motivating ‘Norms of Communication’

2 **CASE STUDIES**
Conversational Injustice

3 **NORM-BASED ANALYSIS**
And Practical Implications

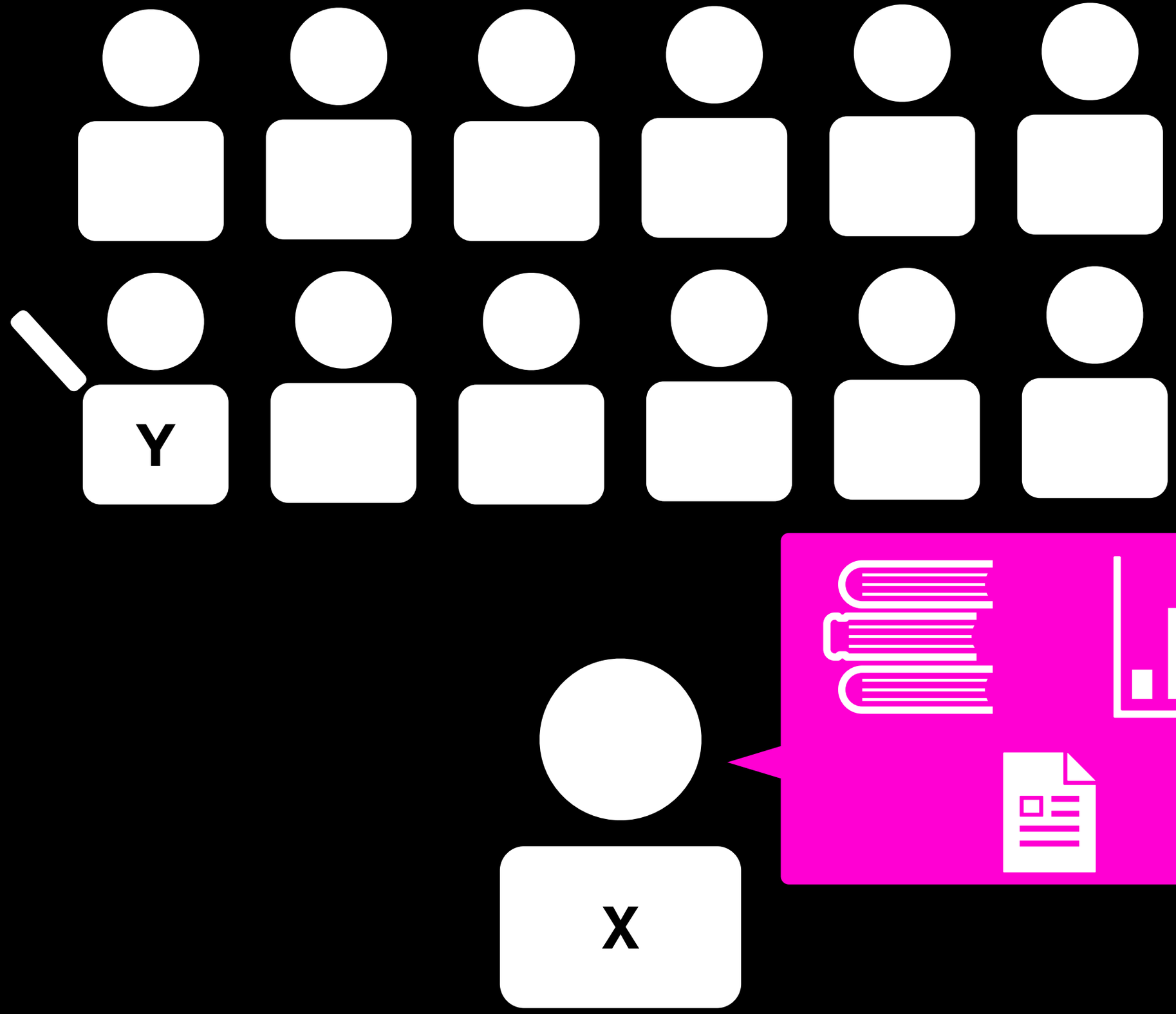
4 **INTEGRATION**
With Previous Analyses

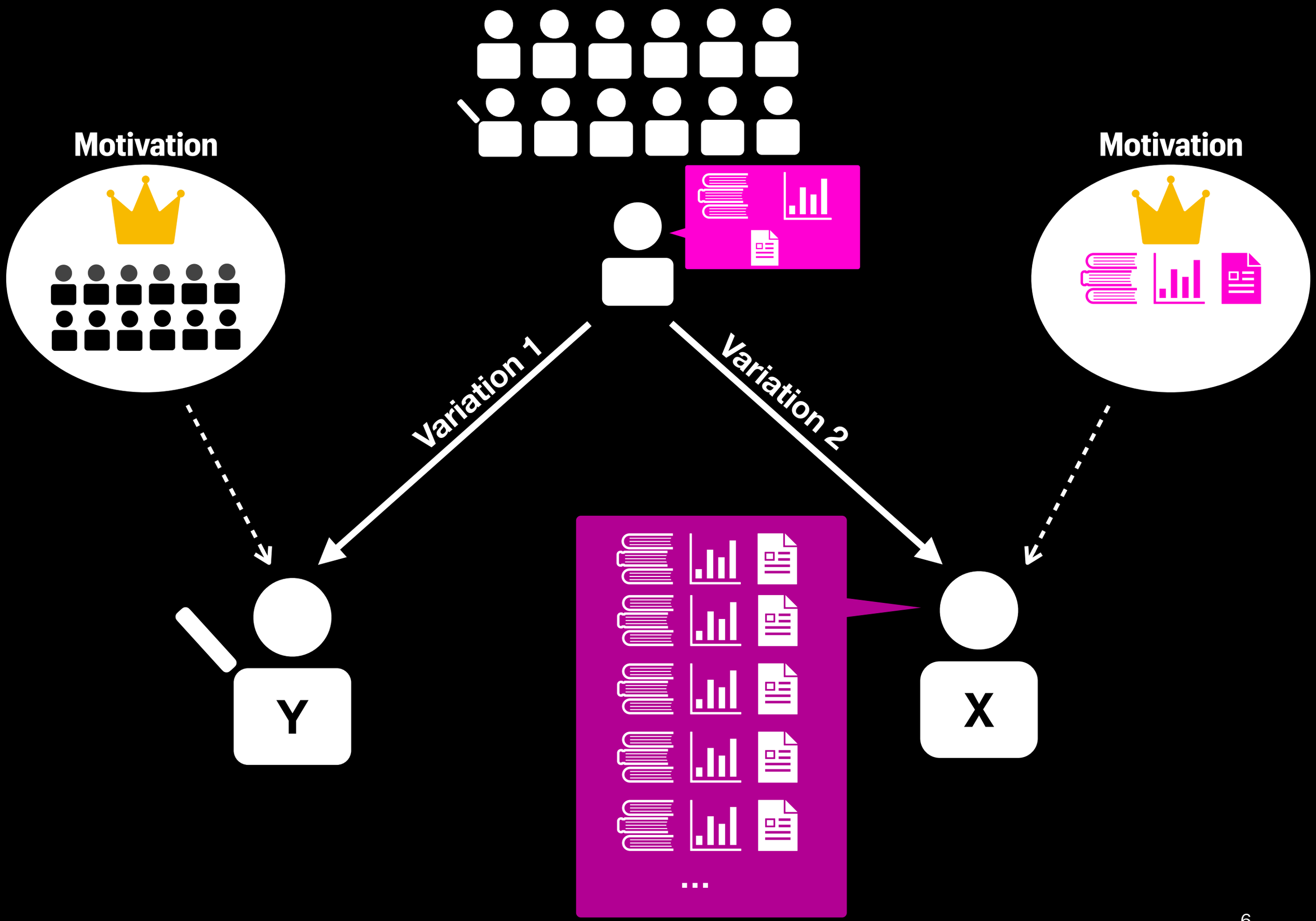


1 SOCIAL NORMS & COMMUNICATION

Motivating 'Norms of Communication'

Reuters


Y
X


Motivation
Motivation
Variation 1
Variation 2
Y
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...

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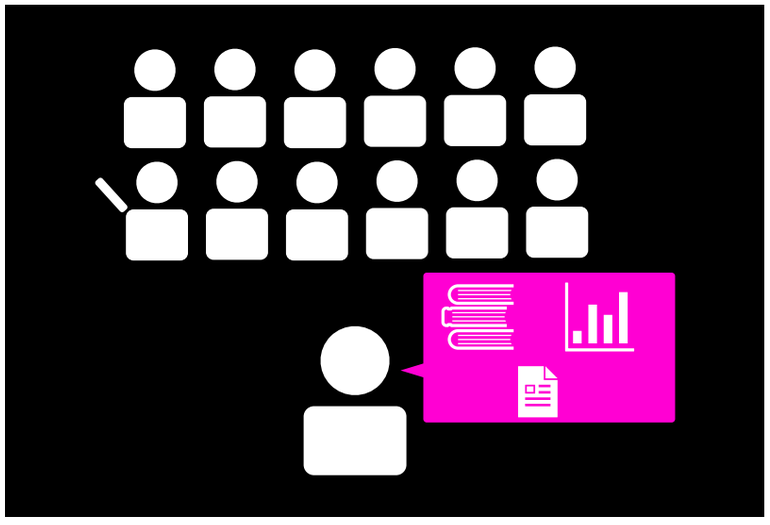
COMMUNICATION



- ‘Classroom Communication Script’
  - X lectures, Y raises hand, X calls on Y, Y asks, X answers
- What produces this ‘normal pattern’?
  - What is the social function of this script?
    - Hypothesis: manages competing interests of X, Y & others
- Motivation:
  - ‘Normal Variation’ vs Deviation
  - Deviations like Variants 1 & 2 involve speaker pursuing their interests at others' expense
  - They upset a prescribed equilibrium of interests
- Prescribed?
  - Are sanctions of X in Variant 1, or Y in Variant 2 justified?
  - Like: Y not calling on X, or students complaining about Y in evaluations?

1

QUEUING

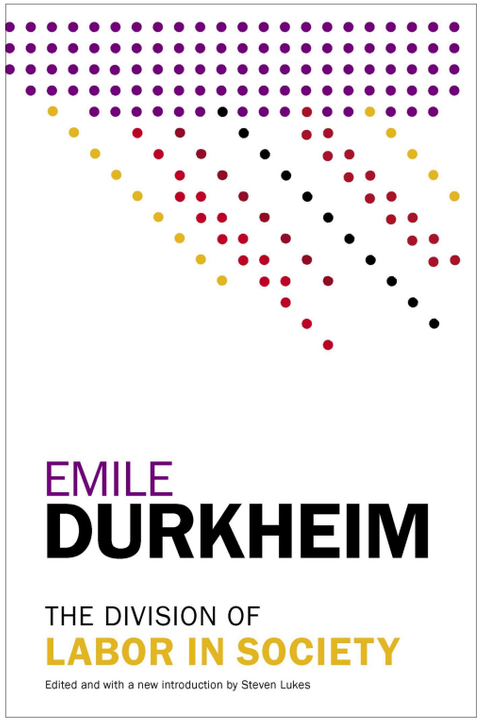
Reuters

- ‘Queuing Script’
  - Stand behind others, wait, advance
- What produces this ‘normal pattern’?
  - What is the social function of this script?
    - Hypothesis: manages competing interests of X, Y & others
- Motivation:
  - Variation vs. Violation
  - Violations arise when agent pursues their interests at others' expense
  - Violations upset a prescribed ‘equilibrium of interests’
- Prescribed?
  - Are sanctions of line cutters appropriate?
  - Like: ‘hi! the line starts back there’ or ‘hey buddy, get in line’.

QUEUING AND SOCIAL NORMS

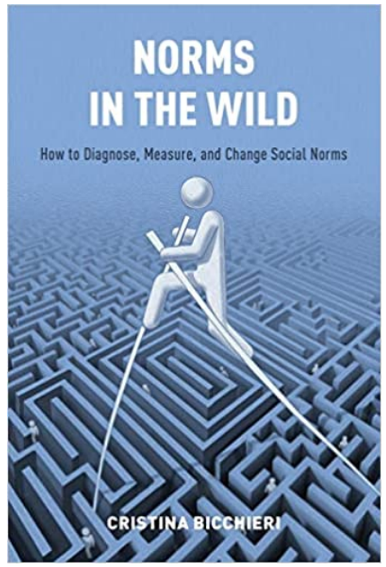
- Queuing is a social norm
- Common functionalist picture of social norms:
  - Social norms are rules for managing conflicting interests to promote 'social goods'
    - E.g. Durkheim (1892), Ullman-Margalit (1977), Coleman (1990), Hector & Opp (2001)
- How is this consistent with the oppressive reality of some social norms?
  - E.g. child marriage, gender violence/hierarchy

Reuters



ANALYZING SOCIAL NORMS

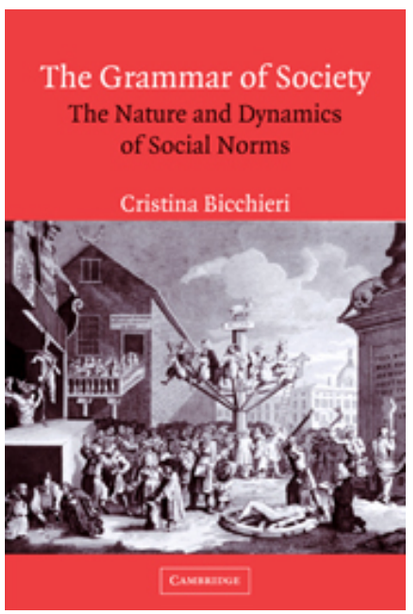
- Social norms are an evolved social tech for managing competing interests in society.
- Self-fulfilling expectations about what people *like us* do in situations *like this*.



Bicchieri 2017

SOCIAL NORMS (BICCHIERI 2006, 2017)

- Social Norms consist in preferences to do A when one believes:
  1. *Empirical*: most of 'us' do A in this situation.
  2. *Normative*: most of 'us' believe we ought to do A in this situation.



Bicchieri 2006

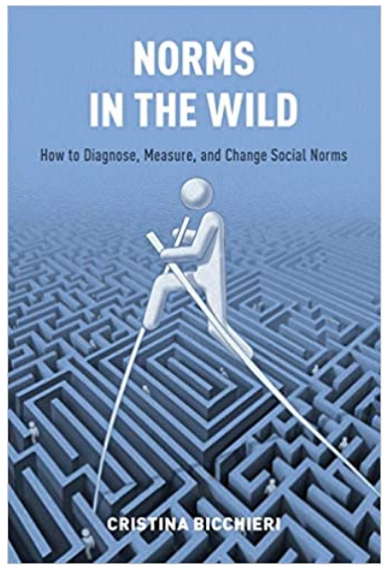
QUEUING NORM

- Consists in preferences to queue when one believes:
  1. *Empirical*: most of 'us' do queue in this situation.
  2. *Normative*: most of 'us' believe we ought to do queue in this situation.

FURTHER DETAILS

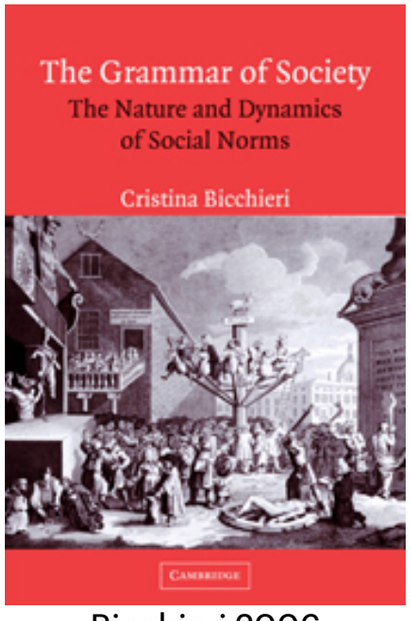
SOCIAL NORMS (BICCHIERI 2006, 2017)

- Social Norms consist in preferences to do A when one believes:
  1. Empirical: most of ‘us’ do A in this situation.
  2. Normative: most of ‘us' believe we ought to do A in this situation.

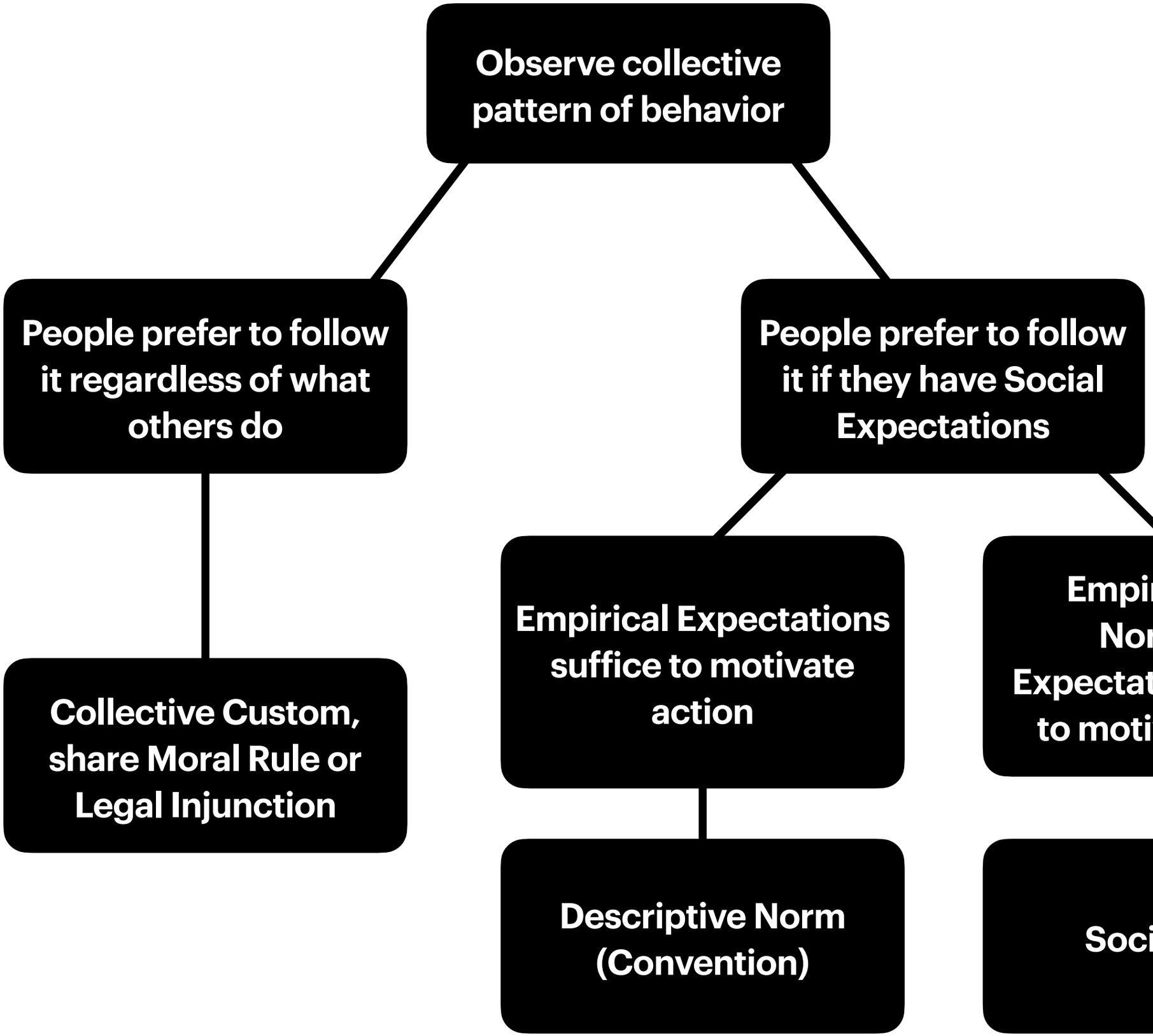


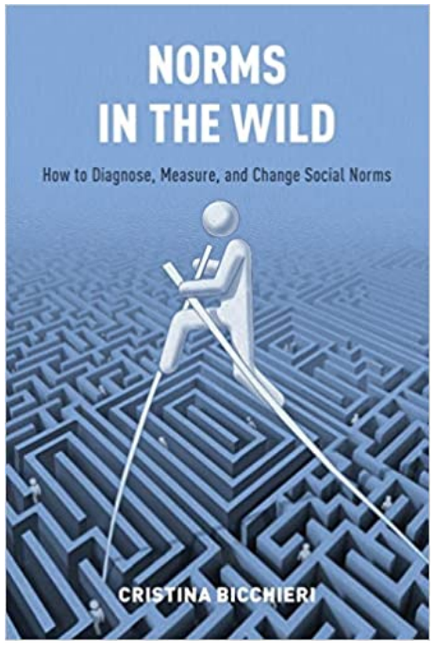
Bicchieri 2017

- Action-guiding ‘ought’: social sanctions (+/-) are justified.
- Preference: not ‘like’ or ‘desire’; but ‘revealed choice behavior’.
- Effect: discourage self-interested behavior, promote ‘collective goods’.
- Remaining question: where do these preferences come from?



Bicchieri 2006





Bicchieri 2017: 41

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HOW, EXACTLY, DO SOCIAL NORMS SHAPE COMMUNICATION?

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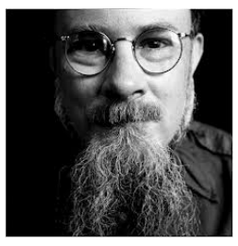
HOW DOES COMMUNICATION WORK?

- One answer comes from the ‘Standard Model’ (Grice, Lewis, Stalnaker):
  - Getting people to believe things by saying something, and meaning it.
- Tools used in this model:
  - Signalling Conventions (Lewis 1969)
  - Communicative intentions / speaker meaning (Grice 1957)
  - Common ground / conversational score (Stalnaker 1978, Lewis 1979)
  - Game-theoretic model of practical interactive rationality
- As Stalnaker (2014: 42) makes explicit, these tools assume communication is possible only when speaker and hearer have a common interest in belief being transmitted.
  - See also Godfrey-Smith & Martinez (2013)



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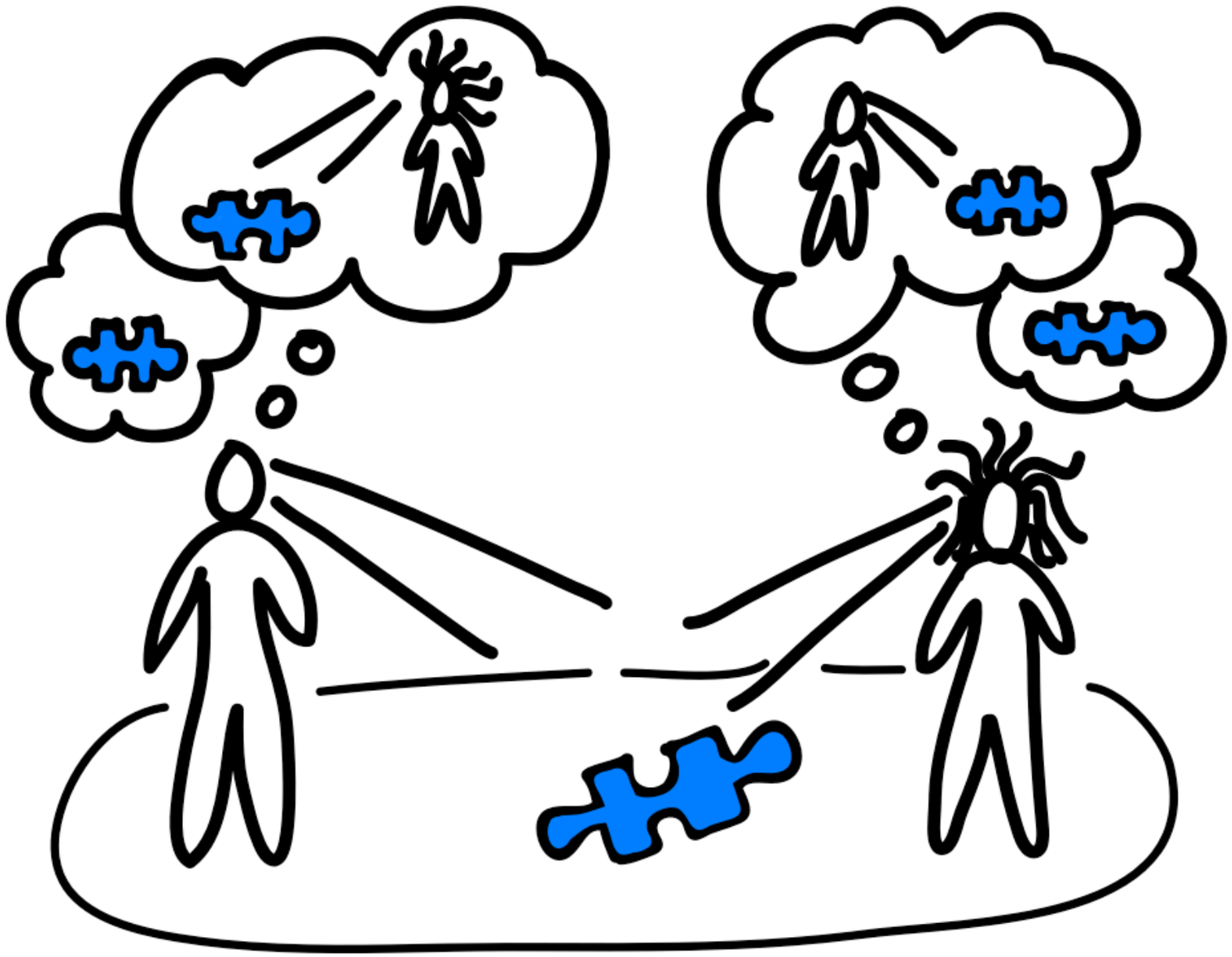
COMMON GROUND



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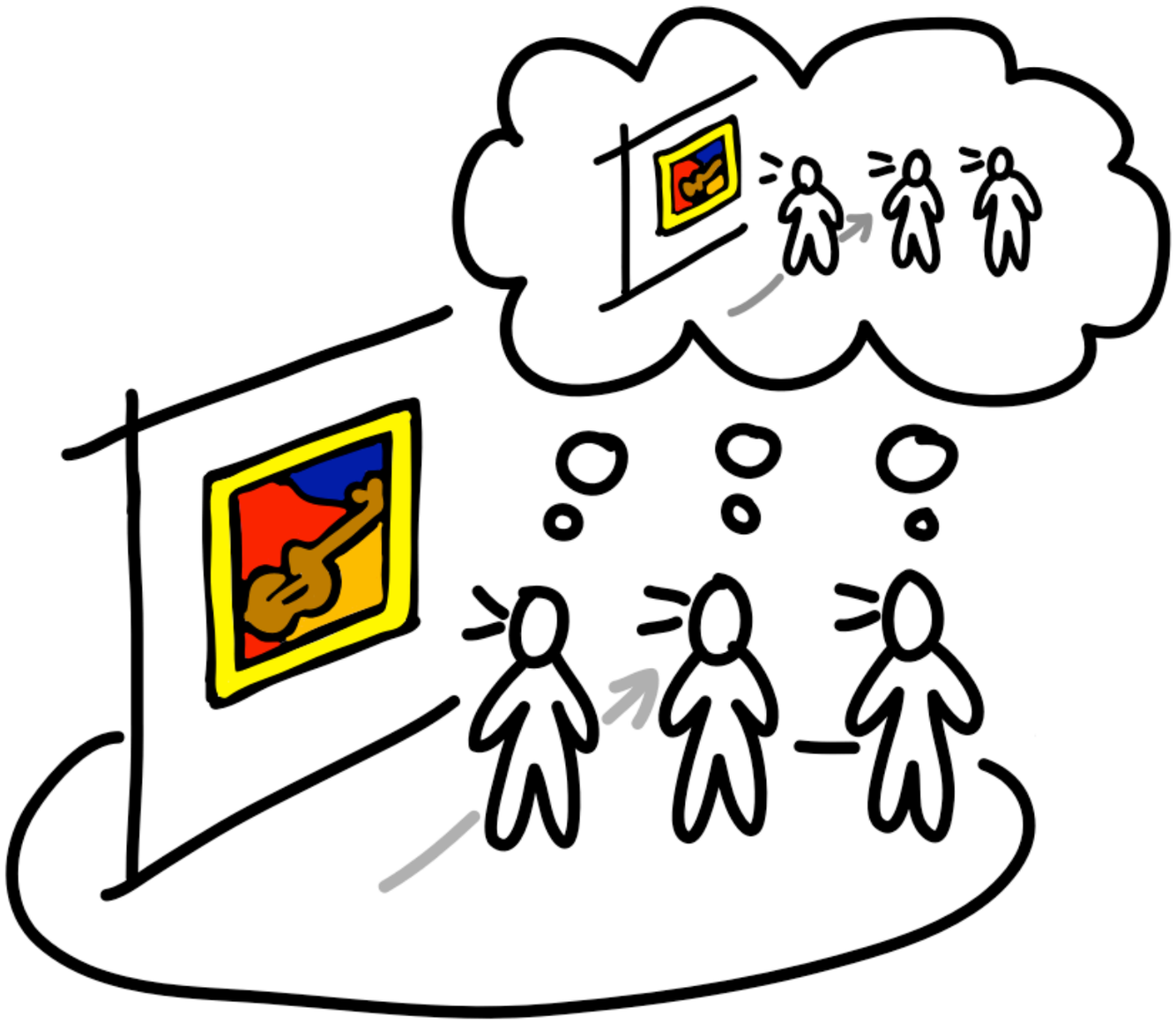
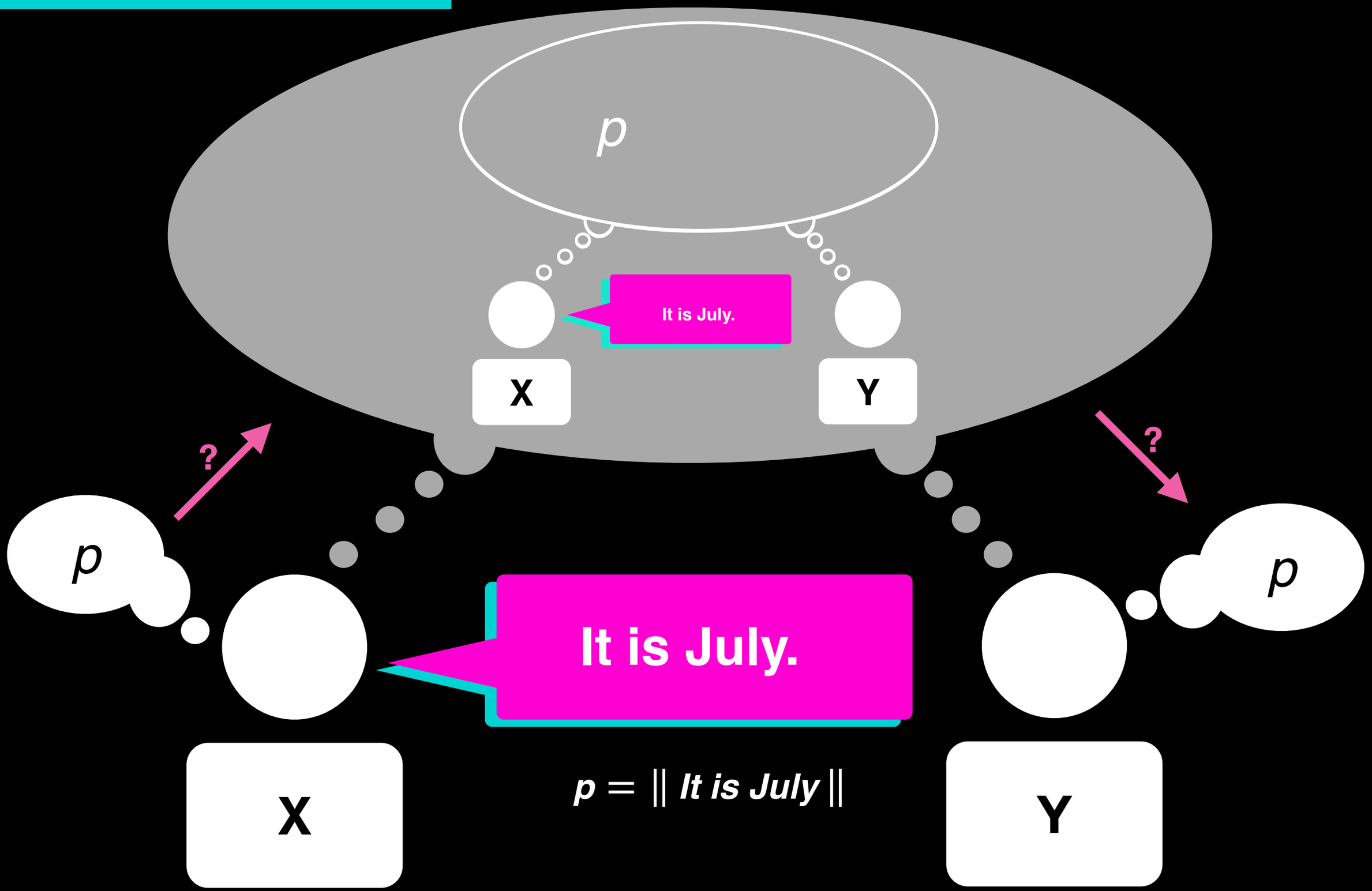
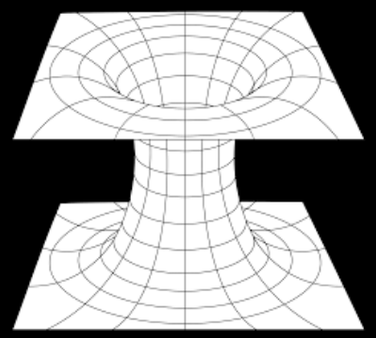
COMMON GROUND



Standard Model



Social Normative Model



CG

Norms of Communication

p

p

It is July.

X

Y

p

p

It is July.

X

Y

$p = \| \textit{It is July} \|$

Y

Common interests mediated by Social Norms

X

1

ARGUING FOR THE NORMATIVE MODEL

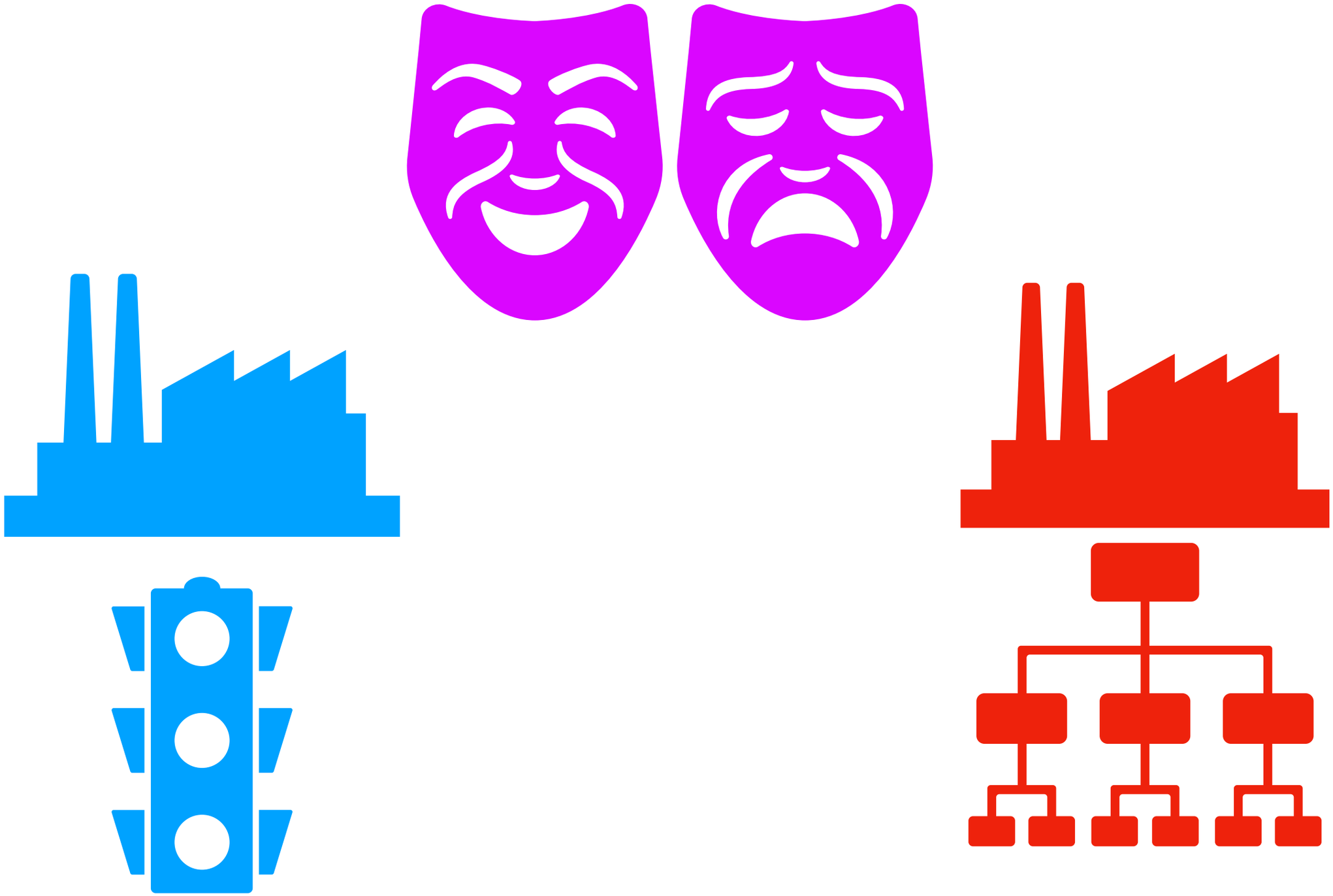
- Standard Model assumes common interests required for communication ‘just exist’.
- Social norms work by warping our divergent interests into ‘common ones’ (caveat to follow)
- Starr (MS. Chs.1–2) argues this plays a central role in communication.
  - This is the best explanation of why people communicate even when they don’t appear to have required common interests, as in social dilemmas (see Dawes 1980, Sally 1995, Balliet 2010, Bicchieri 2006)

NORMS OF COMMUNICATION (STARR MS.)

- Prescribed scripts of production and uptake (consumption)
- E.g. speaker to provide information in certain contexts, and hearer is to believe it — nothing special about assertion though.
- Actual norms are an empirical matter to be investigated using methods developed by Bicchieri et. al.

1

NORMS OF COMMUNICATION

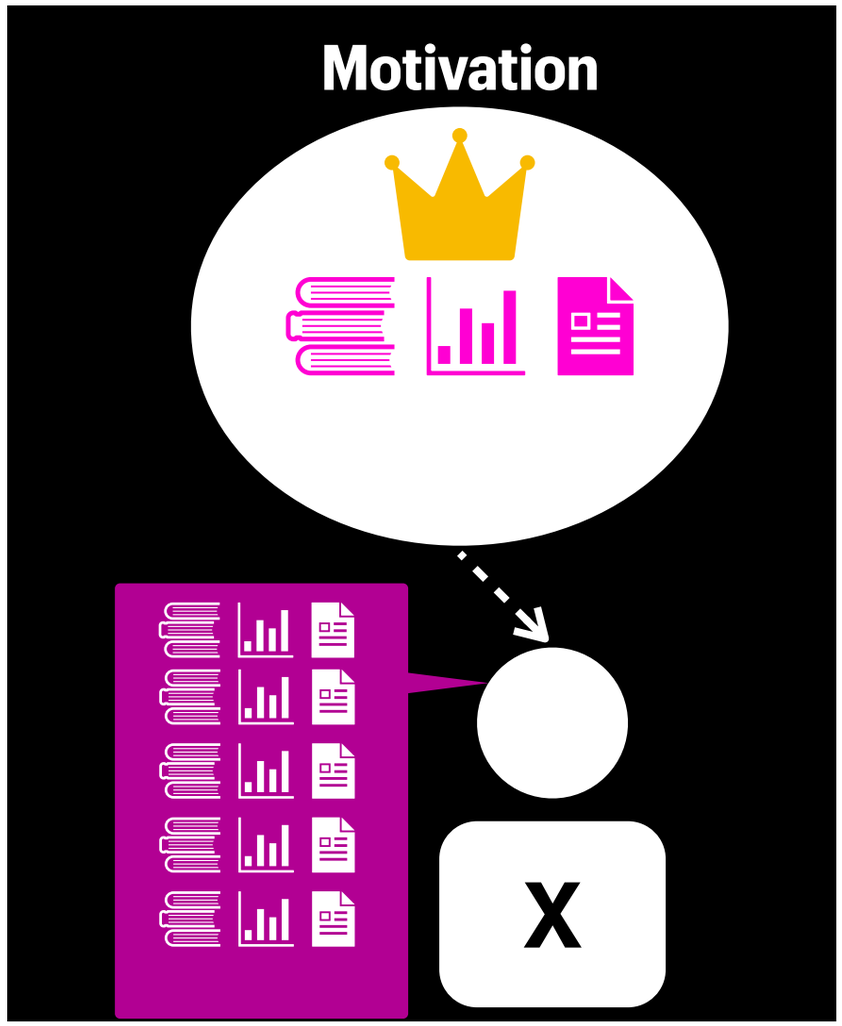


2 CASE STUDIES

Conversational Injustice

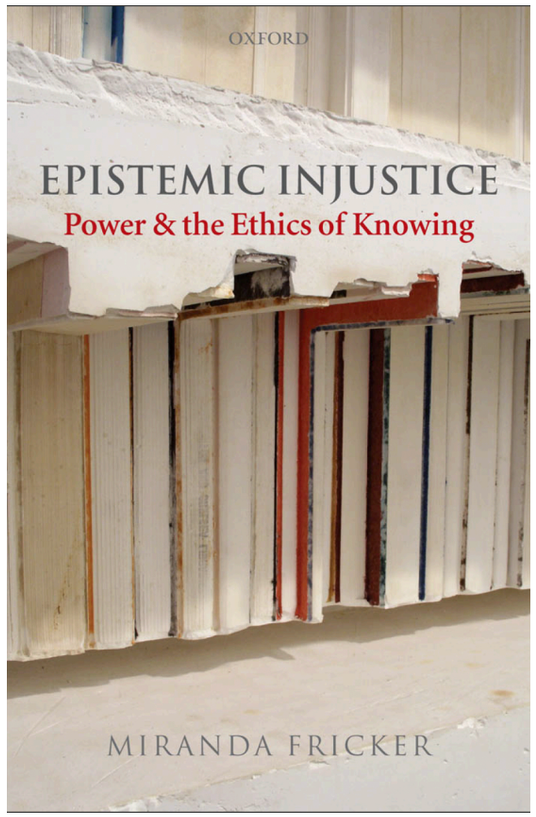
INSTRUCTOR SOAP BOX

- The instructor who uses the classroom to demonstrate and promote their reputation
- They may not even realize they are doing this!
- Suppose they were trained to speak in a work culture that valued those demonstrations, while being given little training in teaching/ instruction.
- Students have very little recourse to sanction these violations effectively



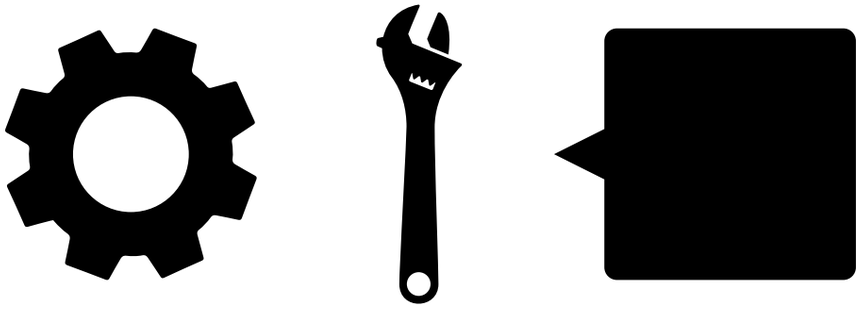
TESTIMONIAL INJUSTICE

- Fricker (2007) presents to central cases
  - E.g. Marge in *Talented Mr. Ripley*, Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- Empirically well-researched example (McCaffrey & Ferrell 1992, Hoffman & Tarzian 2001):
  - Womens' self-reports of pain are less likely to be acted on by medical professional than mens'
  - Correlates with caregiver biases such as *women are more likely to report pain, more likely to experience pain, less tolerant of 'minor pains'.*
- Fricker (2007) analyses this as arising from a credibility deficit.



DISCURSIVE INJUSTICE

- Kukla's (2014) Celia case:
  - Celia is floor manager at factory where 95% of the workers are male
  - Her job description gives her authority to give workers on the floor orders
  - Compliance is low, and her reputation is poor
  - Workers are not consciously acting on misogynistic beliefs
  - They just 'see' her orders are requests, despite her having conventional authority.



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COMMUNICATIVE WARPING

hannah moskowitz @hannahmosk · 17h

do men know how many times we rewrite tweets to make SURE it doesn't look like we're asking for advice

and how much advice we still get

54 261 1.6K

Attractive Lemon @Lemonanyway · 6h

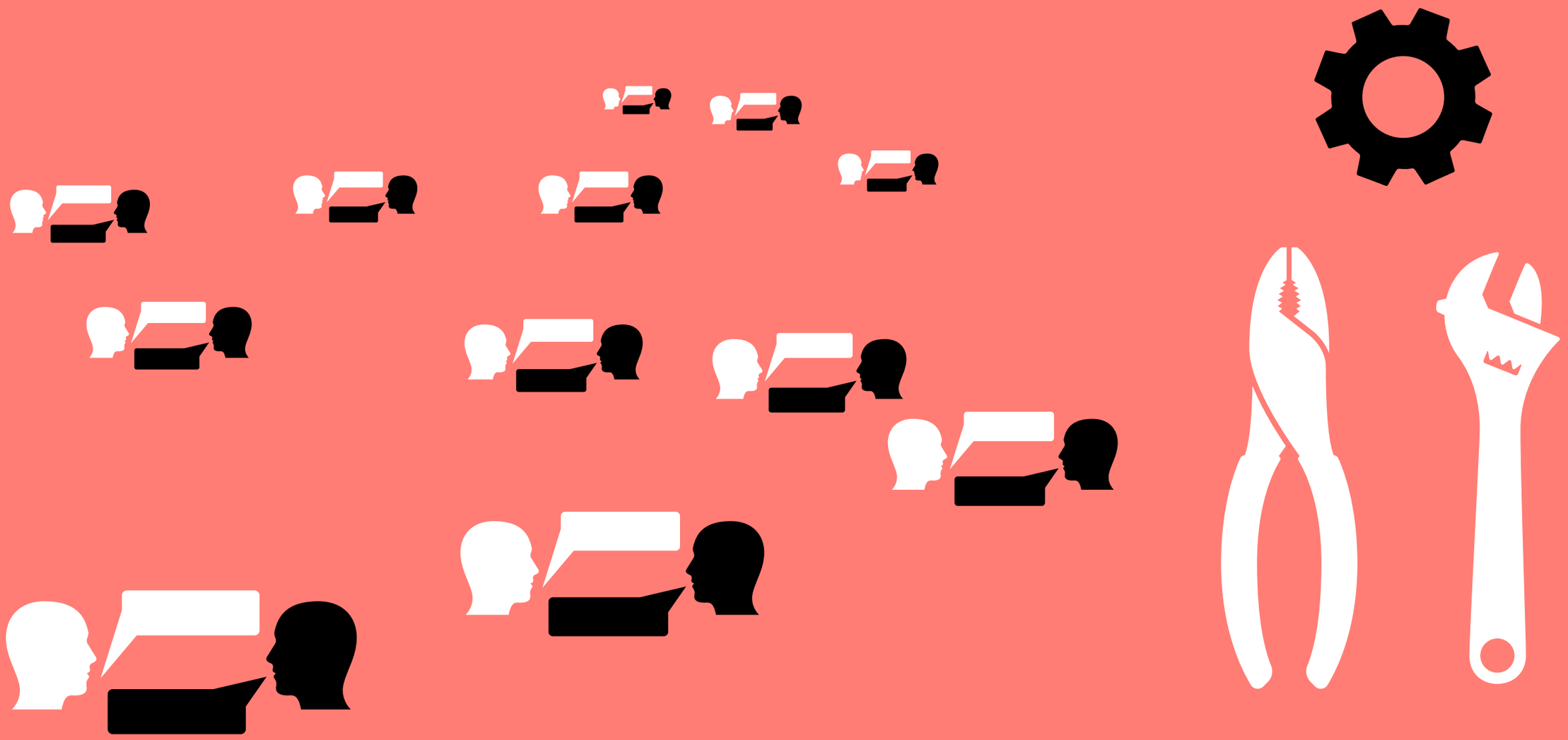
The best way to avoid this is to not present something as a problem. Because if you do then people will instinctively try to solve it.

4

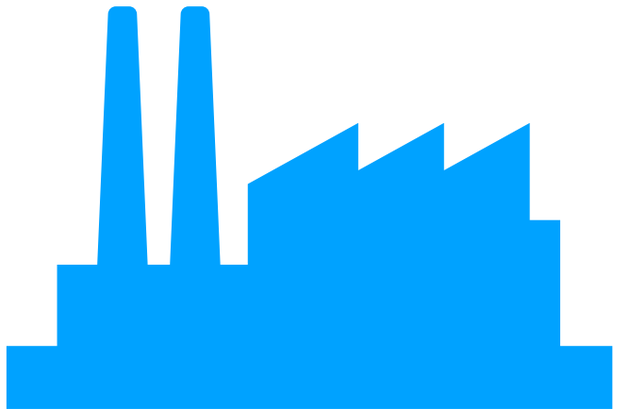
https://twitter.com/Lemonanyway/status/926155375270821888

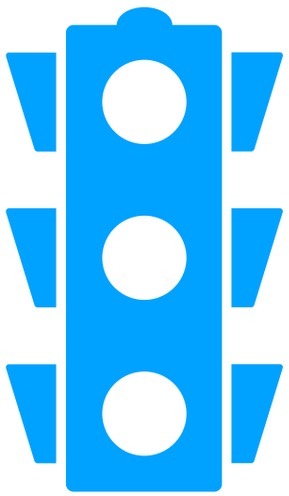
- **Manne's (2020: Ch.8) similar mansplaining cases:**
  - **Paul Bullen tweets correcting sex educator Laura Dodsworth on 'vulva' vs. 'vagina'.**
  - **Solnit's NYC literary old boy explaining her own work to her by accident**

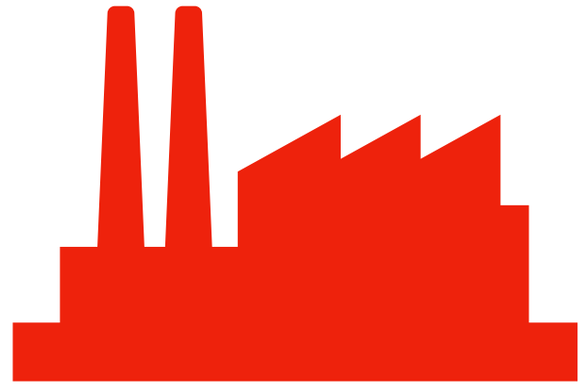
3 NORM-BASED ANALYSIS
And Practical Implications

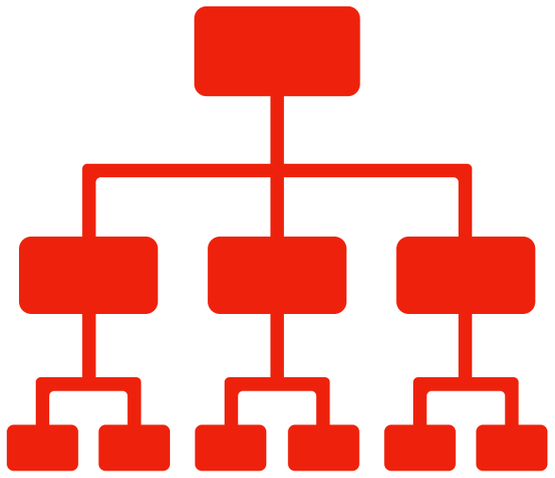


NORMS OF COMMUNICATION



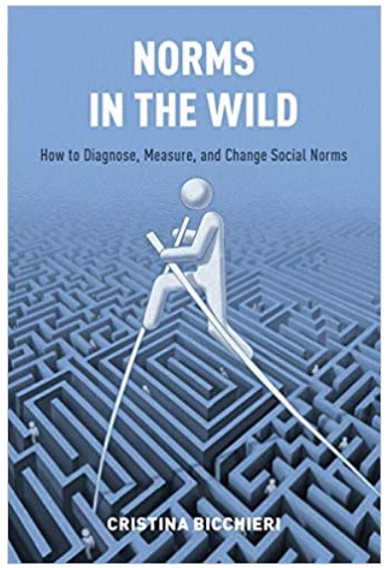






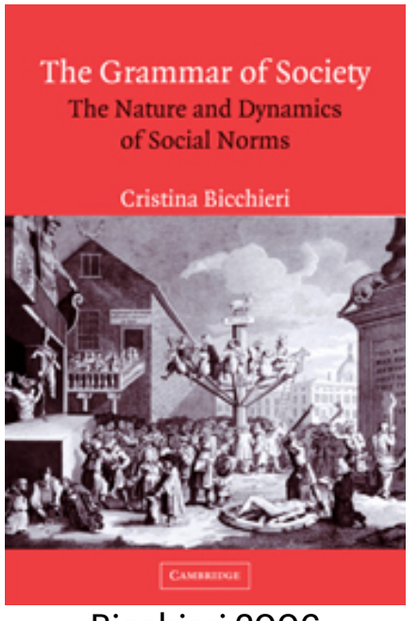
SOCIAL NORMS AND SANCTIONS

- Social norms can produce pro-social behavior even when other means fail.
  - E.g. reciprocation, reputation don't work to maintain queuing
- If social norms are empirical and normative expectations, how do people learn these preferences?



Bicchieri 2017

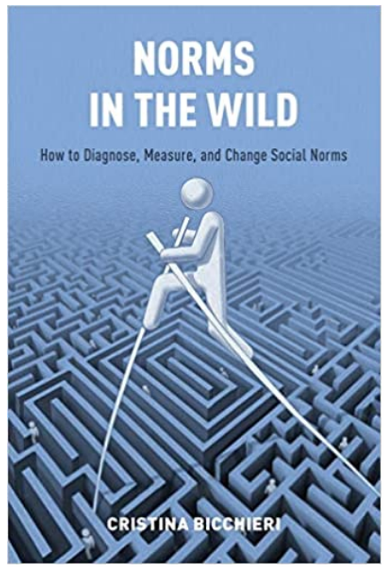
- Internalized sanctioning (Horne 2003, Bicchieri 2004: Ch.4)
  - Some: sanctioning by those in close-knit social groups.
  - Most: observed sanctioning leads to self-sanctioning
  - "The perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary." (Foucault 1979: 201)



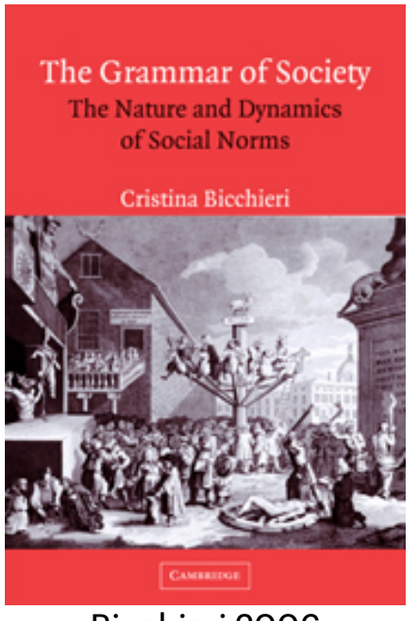
Bicchieri 2006

TWO KEY EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

- Psychologically, social norms are selectively triggered by (Bicchieri 2006: Ch.2) unconscious:
  - *Scripts*: stereotypical representations of social interactions (Schank & Abelson 1977, Eickers 2023a, b)
  - *Schemas*: stereotypical representations of roles (Goffman 1959, Bern 1983, Rentsch et. al. 2019)
- Lots of inter-individual variation in compliance and sanctioning behavior; known factors:
  - *Social & Self-image* (Gross & Vostroknutov 2022)
  - *Social Power* (van Kleef et. al. 2015, Winter & Zhang 2018)



Bicchieri 2017



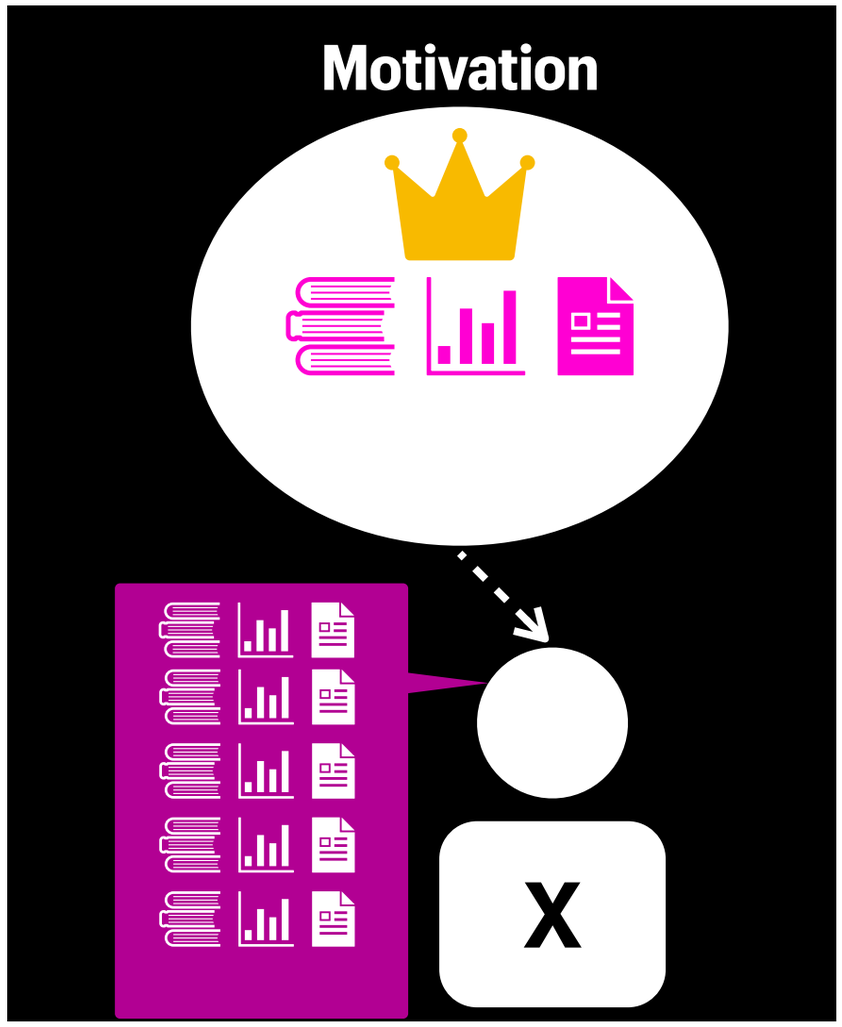
Bicchieri 2006

PREDICTION

- Social elites are perceived as more stereotypical, e.g. competent (Connor, Varney & Chen 2020)
- So anything they do tends to be seen as ‘closer’ to the stereotypical ideal
- Combined with reduced sanctioning of social elites, this gives them enhanced power over social norms
- It appears inevitable, then that they will shape them more to their interests than others’.
- In short, elite capture (Táíwò 2022) of social norms

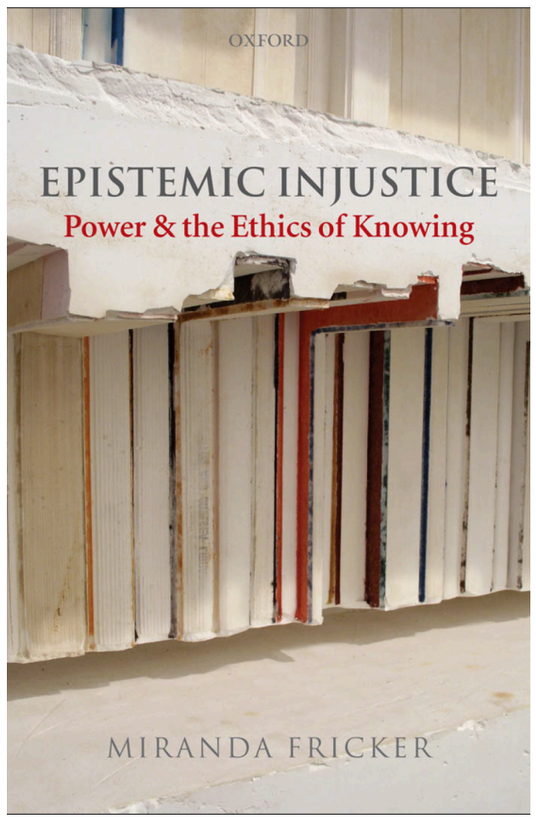
NORM-BASED ANALYSIS

- Instructor lacks appropriate scripts and norms – repurposes others
- But cannot be effectively steered onto appropriate norms/scripts
- For at least some instructors, this can be addressed by offering alternatives.



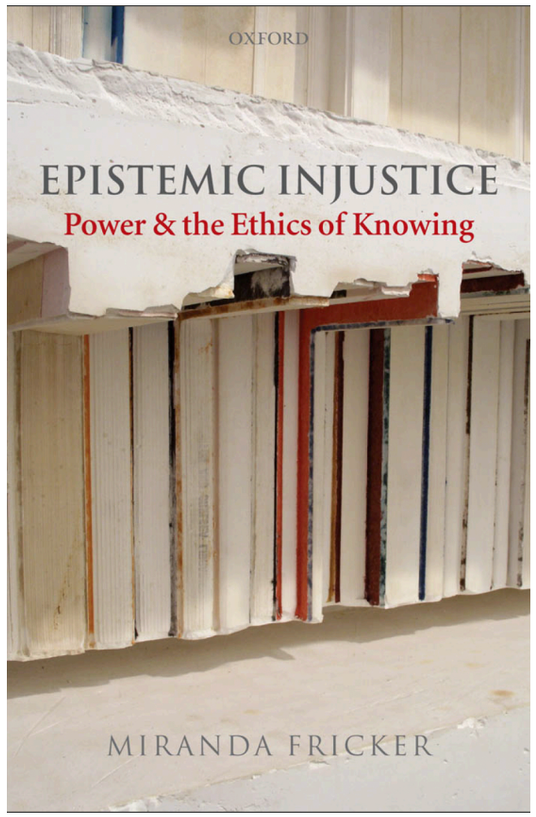
NORM-BASED ANALYSIS

- Medical providers' schemas and stereotypes influence not just what they believe about women's credibility
- It's about what women are capable of doing
- Much more general than credibility deficit (see Táíwò 2022)
  - It's about general inequalities in capacity for social action.
  - Scripts/norms/stereotypes that portray women as overly sensitive, fragile, etc.



NORM-BASED ANALYSIS

- Woman not seeking advice, Attractive Lemon gives it anyway.
- Consumption and production norms are triggered by scripts and schemas.
  - ‘Woman’ + ‘Has a problem’ -> ‘woman needs help’
  - ‘Woman needs advice’ + ‘male authority’ -> ‘man advises woman’
- Similarly for Celia



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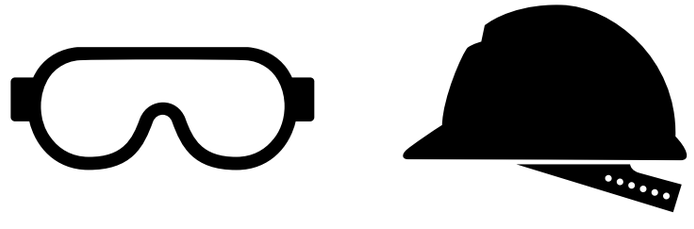
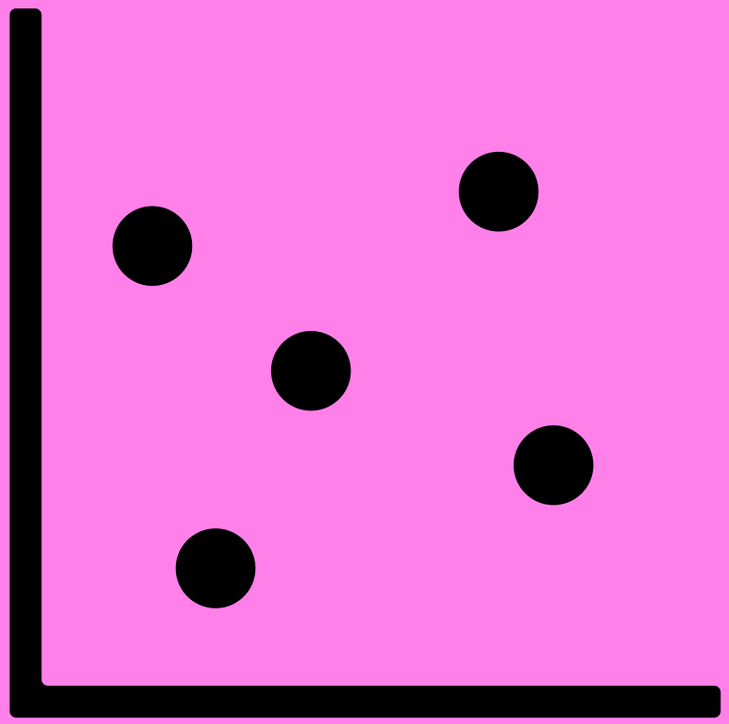
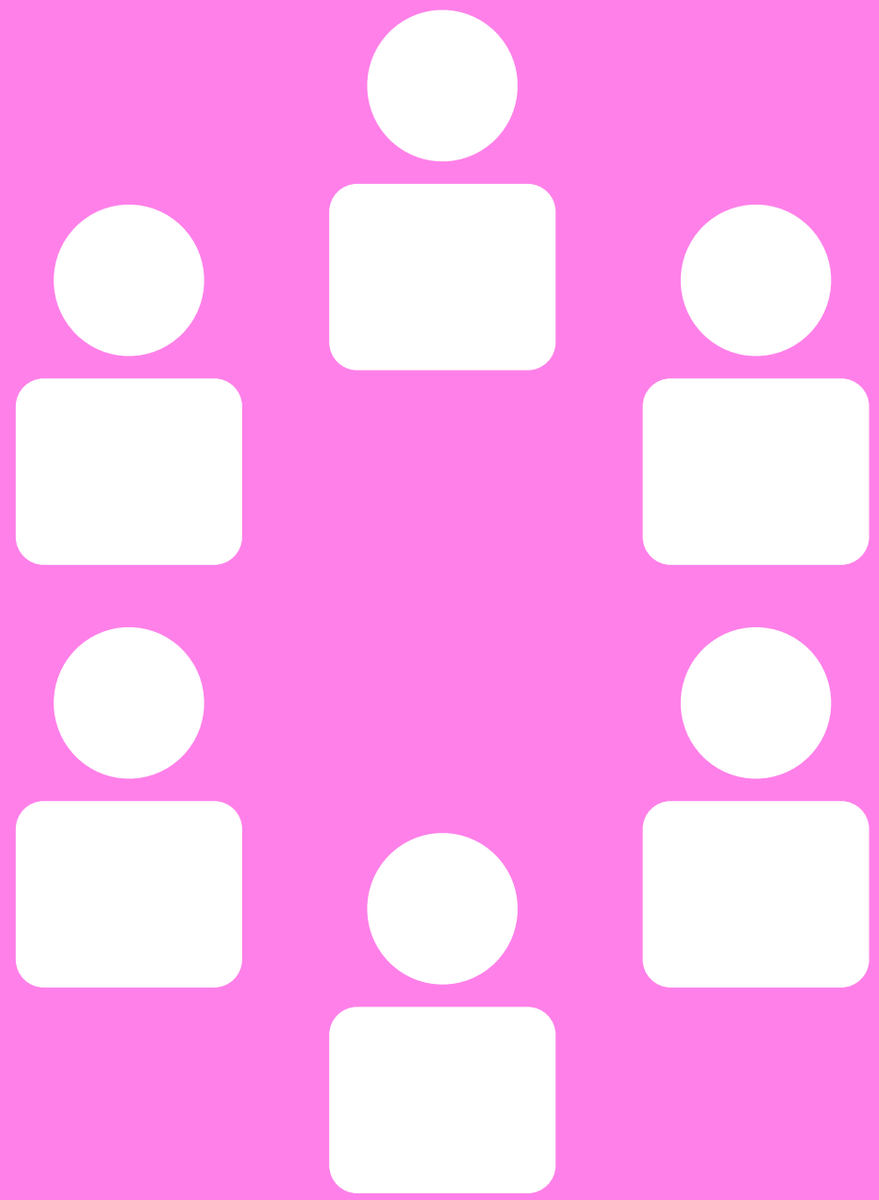
PRACTICAL UPSHOTS

- Main mechanisms for change on this normative framework:
  - Awareness raising to fight pluralistic ignorance about existing norms
  - New scripts!
    - Trendsetters to enact those scripts
      - Not just representation, also social interpretation!
- Main challenges:
  - General stakeholder analysis of script design
  - Underlying psychological features of scripts poorly studied



4 INTEGRATION
With Previous Analyses





INTEGRATION

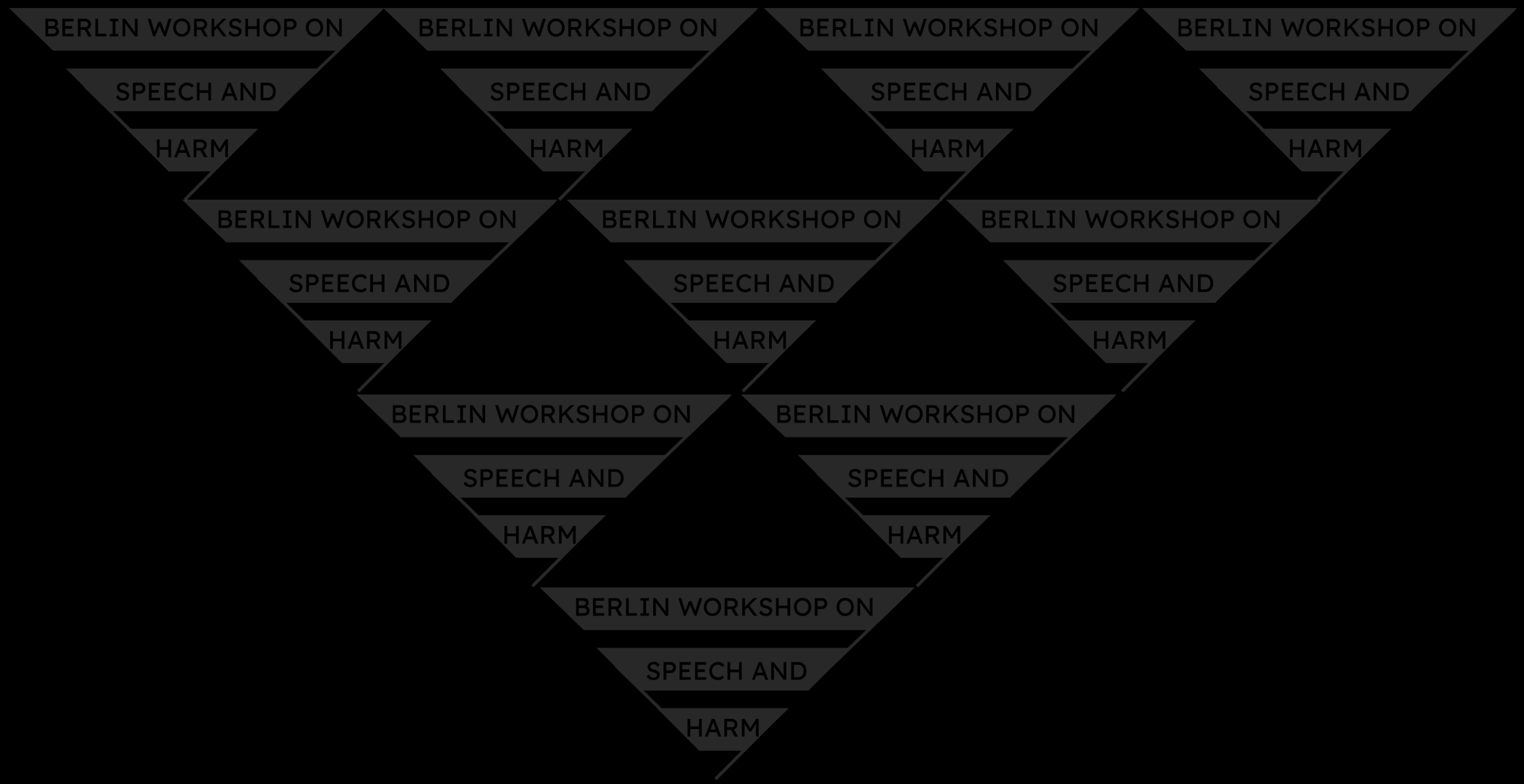
- How does this differ from other normative/pragmatist theories?
  - E.g. Peirce (1932), Brandom (1983), Kukla & Lance (2009), Tirrell (2012), McGowan (2004, 2019)
- These accounts characterize speech acts in terms of how they transform normative statuses
  - E.g. speaker's responsibility, hearer's license
- My social normative account offers an account of what communicative norms are this makes a range of interesting predictions
  - But it's also worthwhile seeing how things go when normative status are basic!
- My social normative account can say more about an issue McGowan (2019) does not fully answer: what mechanisms relate local communicative norms influence general ones? (Thanks to Adriene Takaoka for highlighting this issue)

INTEGRATION

- What about conventionalist accounts?
  - E.g. Austin (1956), Lewis (1979), Langton (1993, 2018)
- These accounts struggle with cases like Kukla's (2014) Celia case, Lemon Twitter case and Soap Box Instructor
  - E.g. speaker satisfies conventions, still doesn't get uptake
- They also struggle with the authority problem (Maitra 2012, Bauer 2015)
  - Many forms of problematic speech operate in the absence of conventional authority
- By replacing conventions of accommodation with norms of communication
  - It looks possible to preserve the insights of these accounts without inheriting some major challenges.
  - Also, maybe I should write a chapter about accommodation being norm-driven...

THANK YOU!

Special thanks for conversations and inspiration: audience @ SLIME 2, Kate Manne, Sally McConnell-Ginet, Sarah Murray, Shaun Nichols, Carlotta Pavese, Alejandro Vesga, Adriene Takaoka, and my Spring 2023 seminar @ Cornell.



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