

Affective Forecasting, Comparison Standards, and Attentional Collapse

With Carey Morewedge (CMU), Timothy Wilson (U. Virginia), & Kristian Myrseth (U. Chicago)



- An *affective forecast* is a conscious or nonconscious prediction about the hedonic impact of a future event.
- A discrepancy between a forecast and an experience constitutes an affective forecasting error.
- These errors are well-documented, sizeable, pervasive, and self-erasing.
- What causes them?



“As for the terms good and bad, they indicate no positive quality in things regarded in themselves, but are merely modes of thinking, or notions which we form from the comparison of things with one another.

Benedict Spinoza (1677)

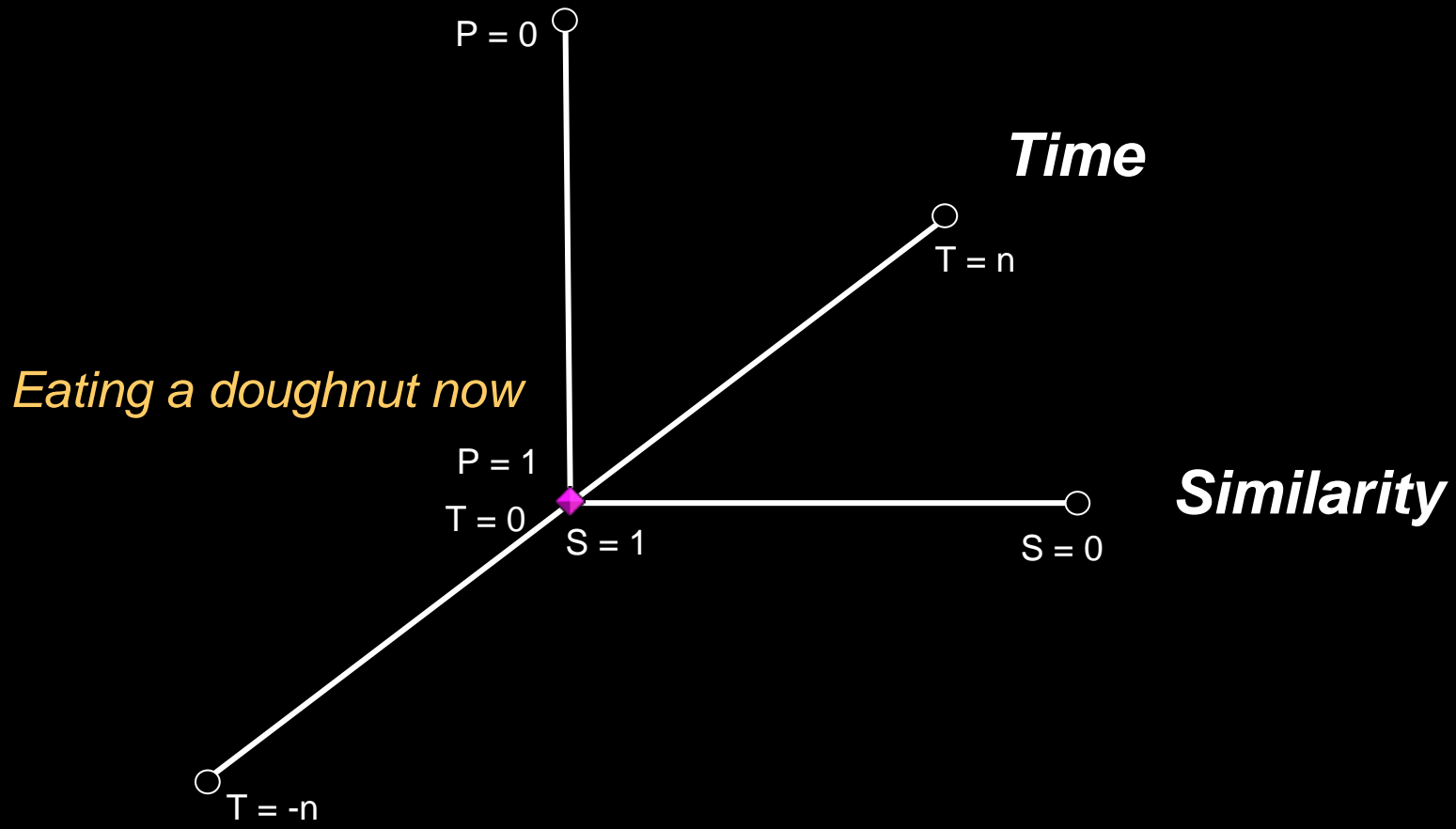
- Judging the hedonic value of a target experience involves comparing it with a standard experience, and different standards may yield different judgments.

- Sta



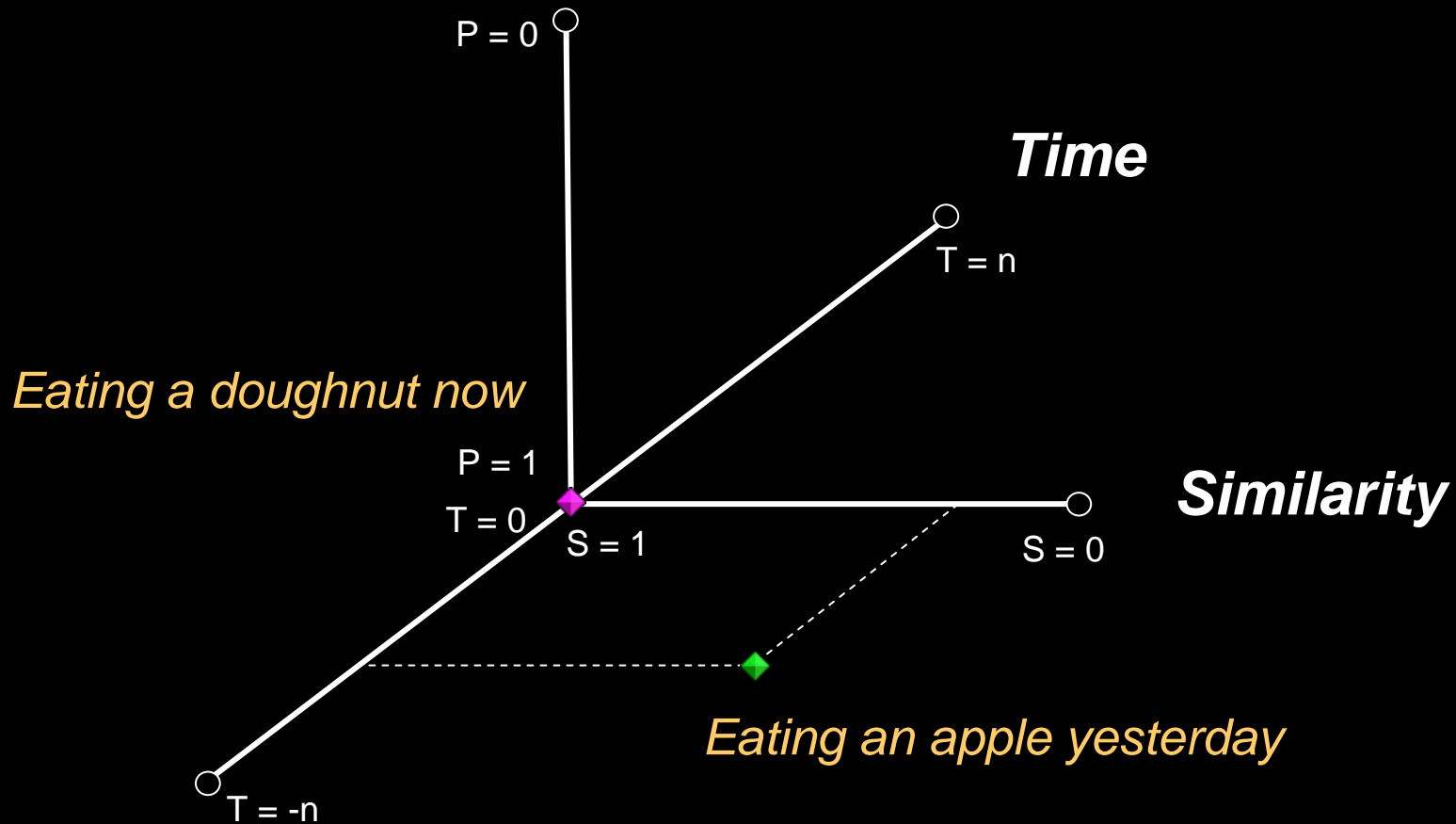
- Time of occurrence

Probability



◆ Present experience

Probability



◆ Present experience

◆ Dissimilar actual past experience

Probability

Eating an éclair now

$P = 0$

Time

$T = n$

Eating a doughnut now

$P = 1$

$T = 0$

$S = 1$

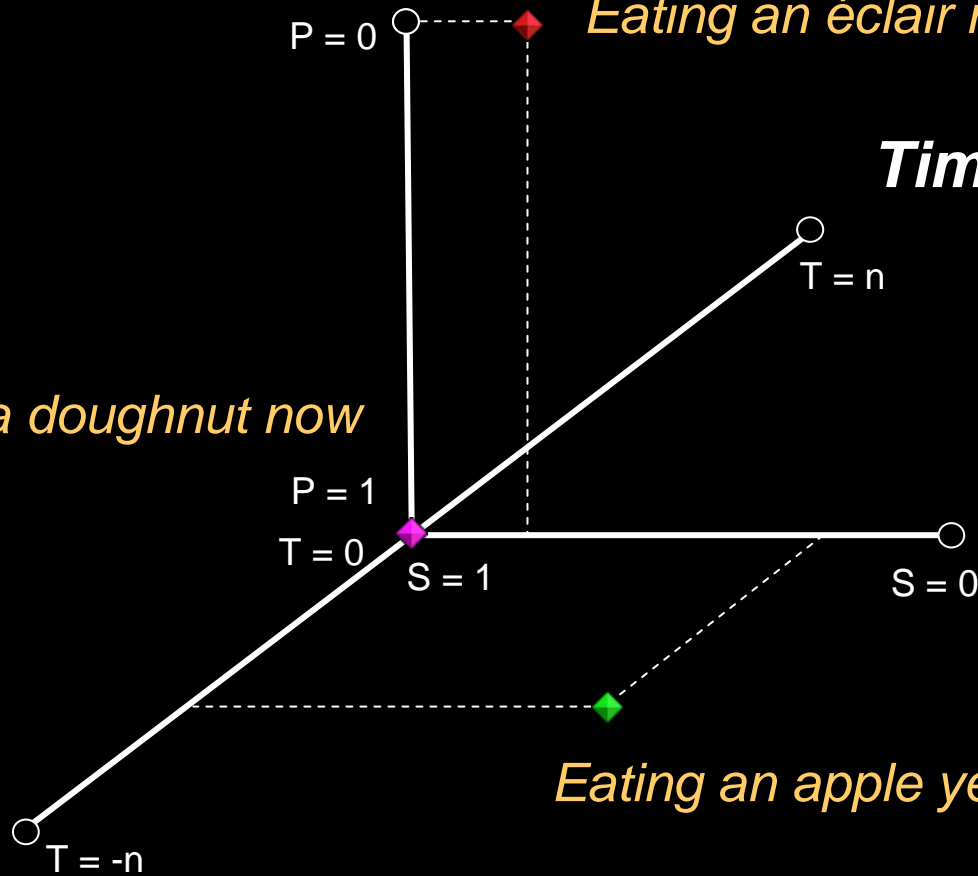
Similarity

$S = 0$

Eating an apple yesterday

$T = -n$

- ◆ Present experience
- ◆ Dissimilar actual past experience
- ◆ Similar counterfactual present experience



Probability

Eating an éclair now

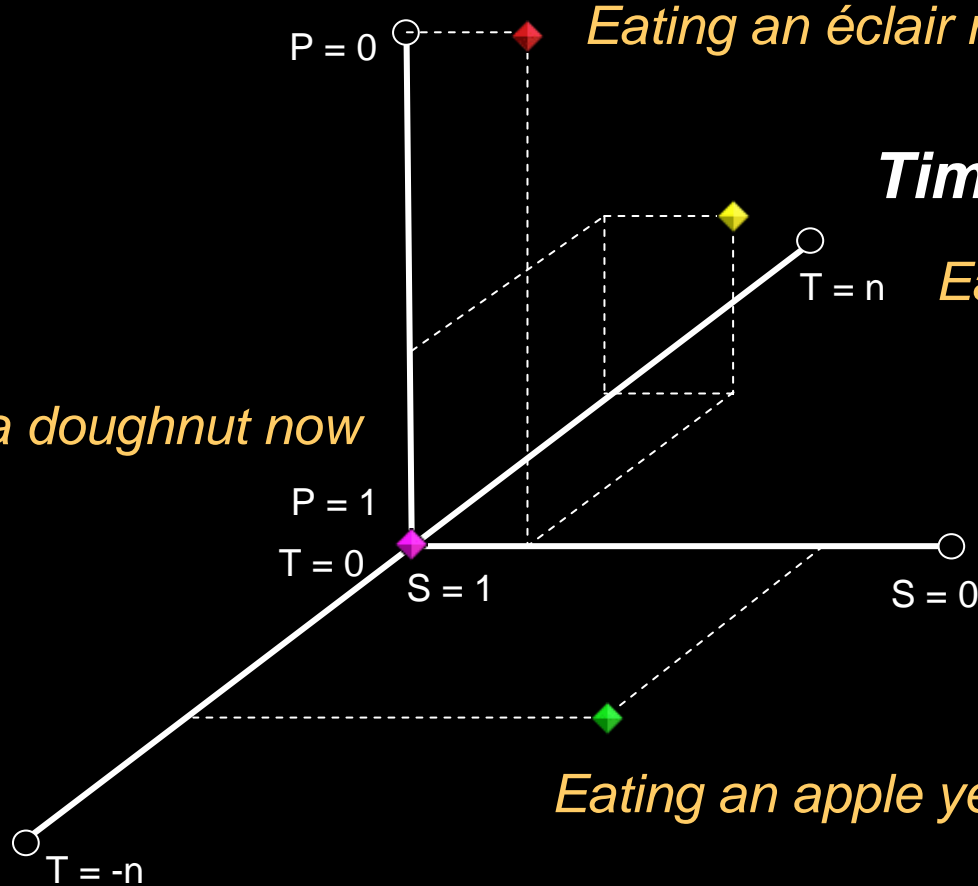
Time

Eating an éclair tomorrow

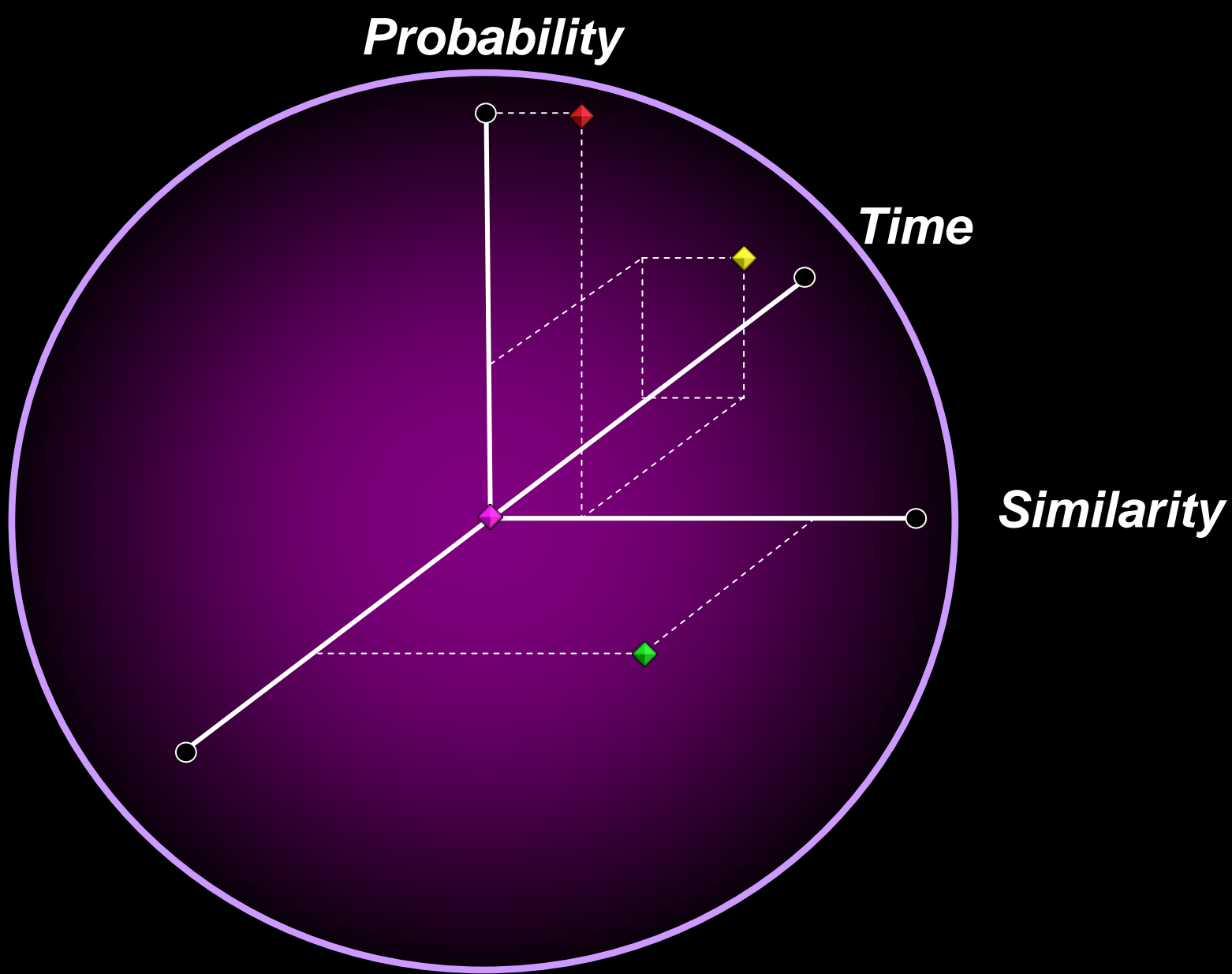
Eating a doughnut now

Similarity

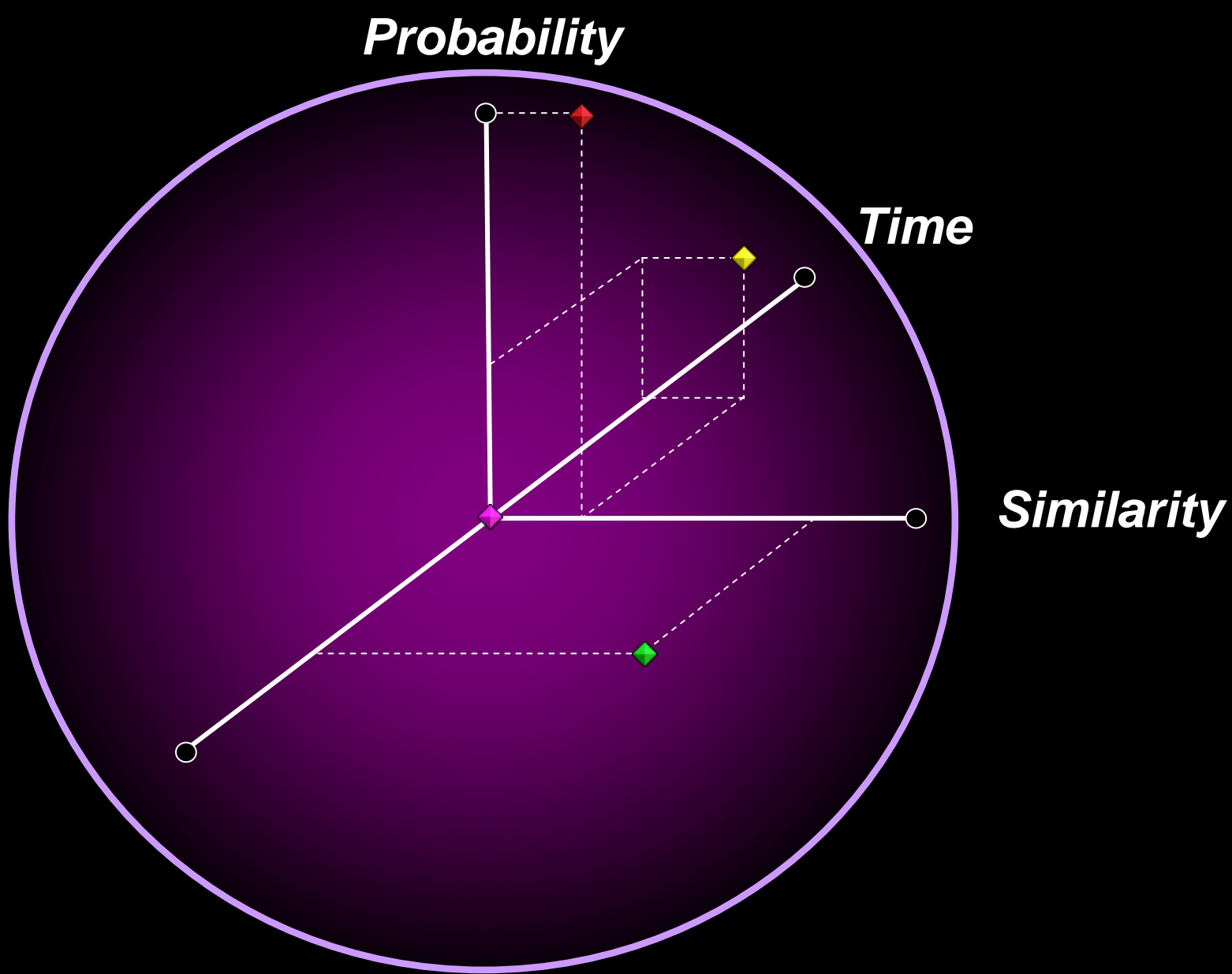
Eating an apple yesterday



- ◆ Present experience
- ◆ Dissimilar actual past experience
- ◆ Similar counterfactual present experience
- ◆ Similar possible future experience



Proposition 1: Mental Travel in SPT Space Requires Conscious Attention Proportional to Distance



Proposition 2: Experience Consumes Conscious Attention and Thus Restricts Mental Travel in SPT Space

The Shifting Standards Hypothesis

- Having an experience consumes attention and thus restricts the range of standards with which the experience may be compared.
- Thus people who are forecasting an experience will use more “distant” standards than people who are actually having the experience.
- Using different standards during forecast and experience is a fundamental source of error in affective forecasting.

Study 1: Dissimilar Probable Past Standards

■ Forecasters

- Imagined eating standard food and then potato chips

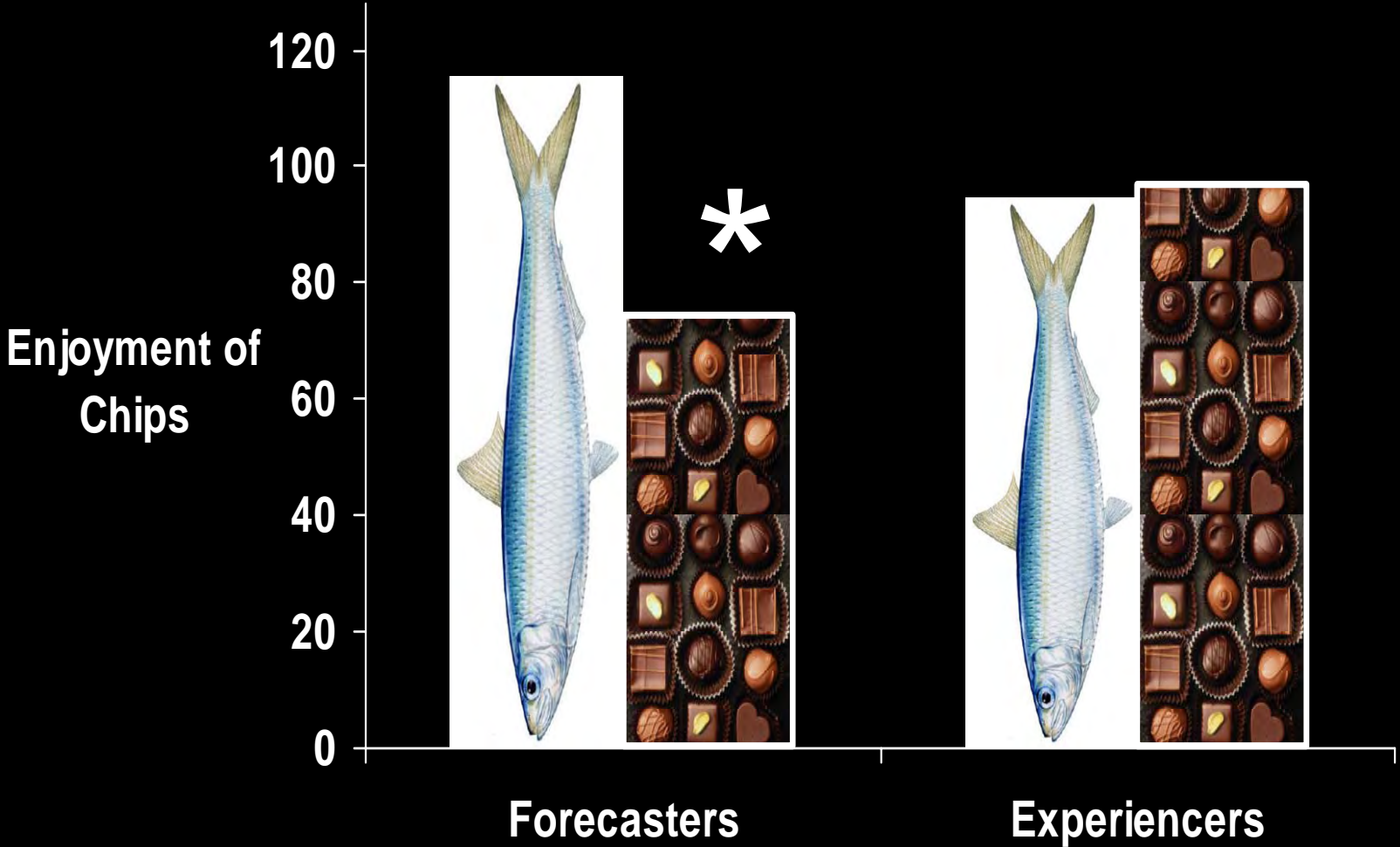
■ Experiencers

- Ate standard food and then ate potato chips

■ Standard Food = Sardines or Chocolate



Study 1: Dissimilar Probable Past Standards



Study 2: Dissimilar Probable Future Standards

■ Forecasters

- Imagined eating potato chips and then standard food

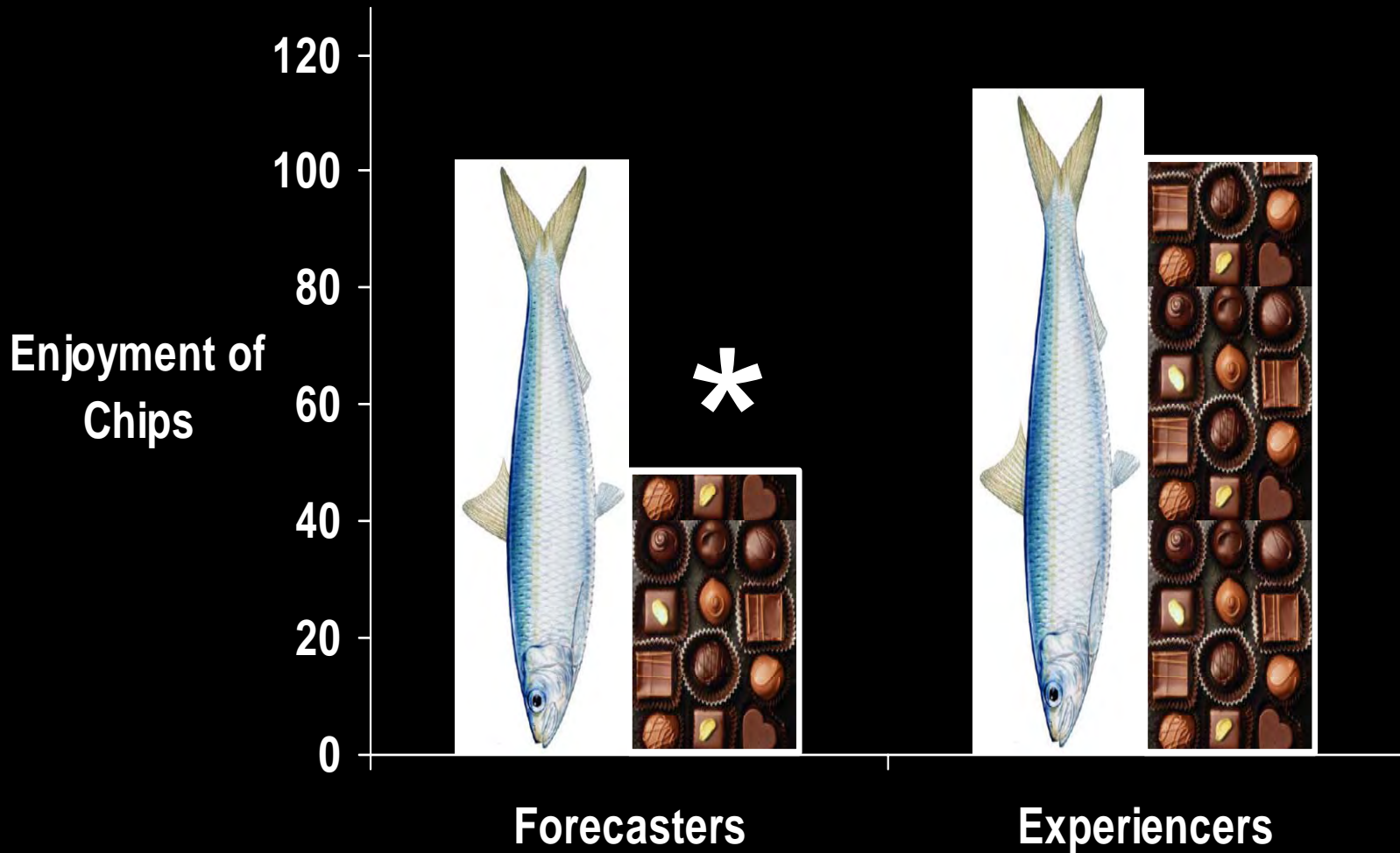
■ Experiencers

- Ate potato chips and then standard food

■ Standard Food = Sardines or Chocolate



Study 2: Dissimilar Probable Future Standards



Study 3: Dissimilar Improbable Present Standards

■ Forecasters

- Imagined eating potato chips with standard food in room

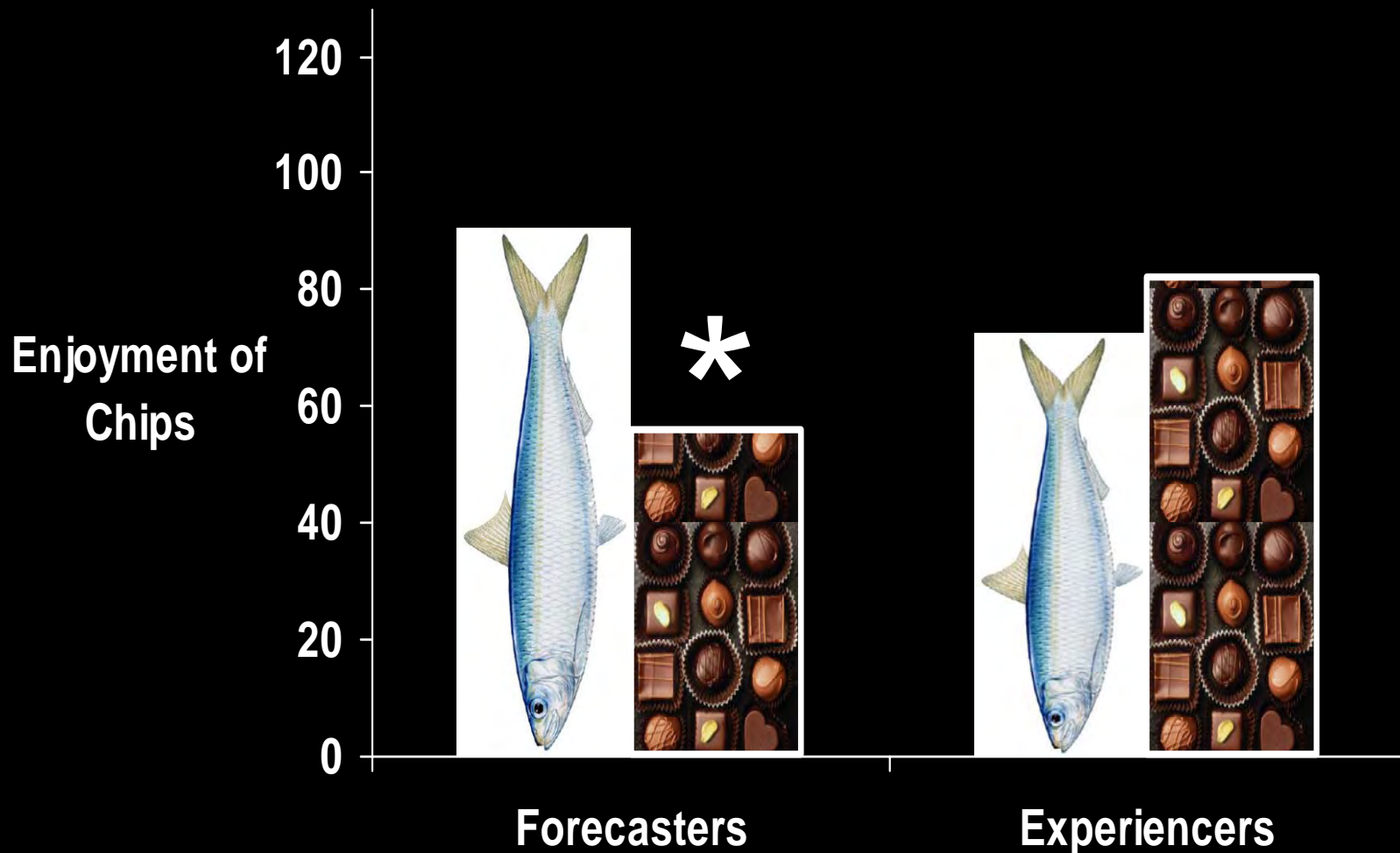
■ Experiencers

- Ate potato chips with standard food in the room

■ Standard Food = Sardines or Chocolate



Study 3: Dissimilar Improbable Present Standards

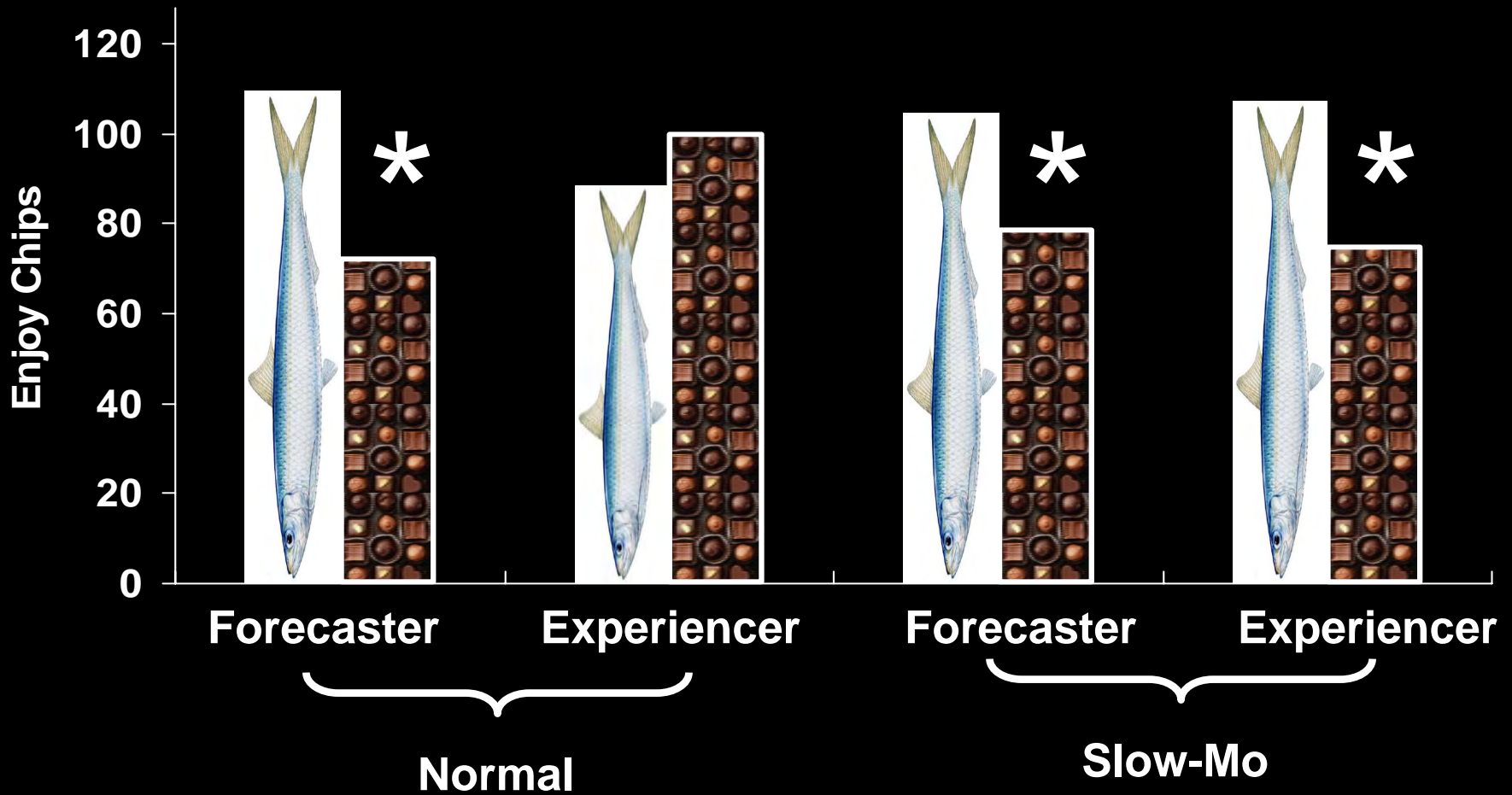


Study 4: Attentional Collapse



- **Standard Food = Sardines or Chocolate**
- **Role**
 - Forecasters imagined eating 5 chips and then standard food
 - Experiencers ate 5 chips and then standard food
- **Pace:**
 - Normal (1 chip per 15 seconds)
 - Slow-Mo (1 chip per 45 seconds)

Study 4: Attentional Collapse



Conclusion

- Experience causes “attentional collapse” thus restricting the range of standards with which it is likely to be compared.
- Forecasters use more “distant” standards than Experiencers do and thus mispredict the hedonic value of future experience.