

# Two Theories of Risk Perception

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1. **Rational Actor Theory:** The more knowledgeable a person is regarding a technology or practice, the more accurate their risk perceptions will be.
2. **Cultural Theory of Risk Perception:** People perceive risks in relation to cultural commitments.

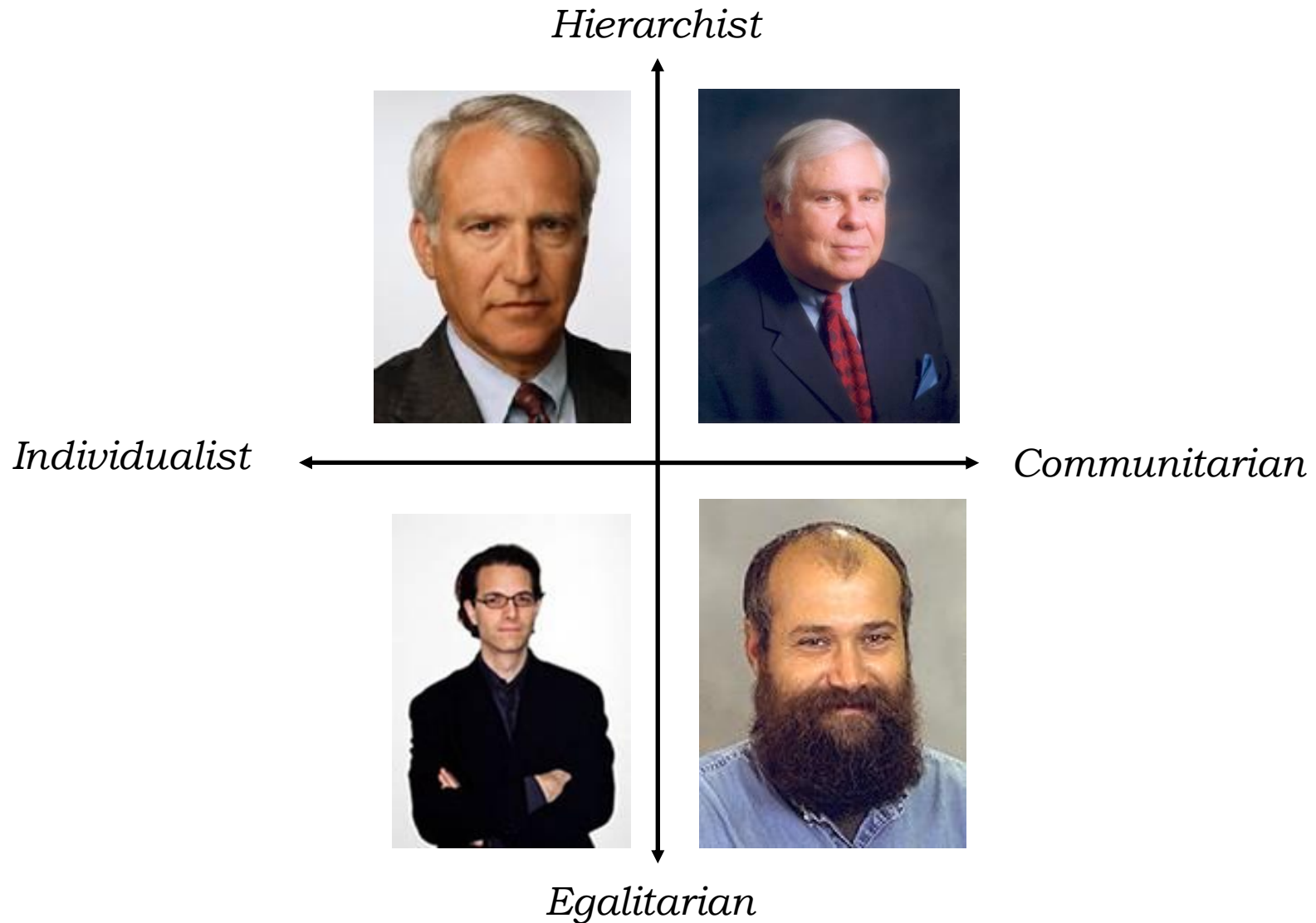
# Two Values

(there are many more, but these are a nice start)

Egalitarianism <-> Hierarchy

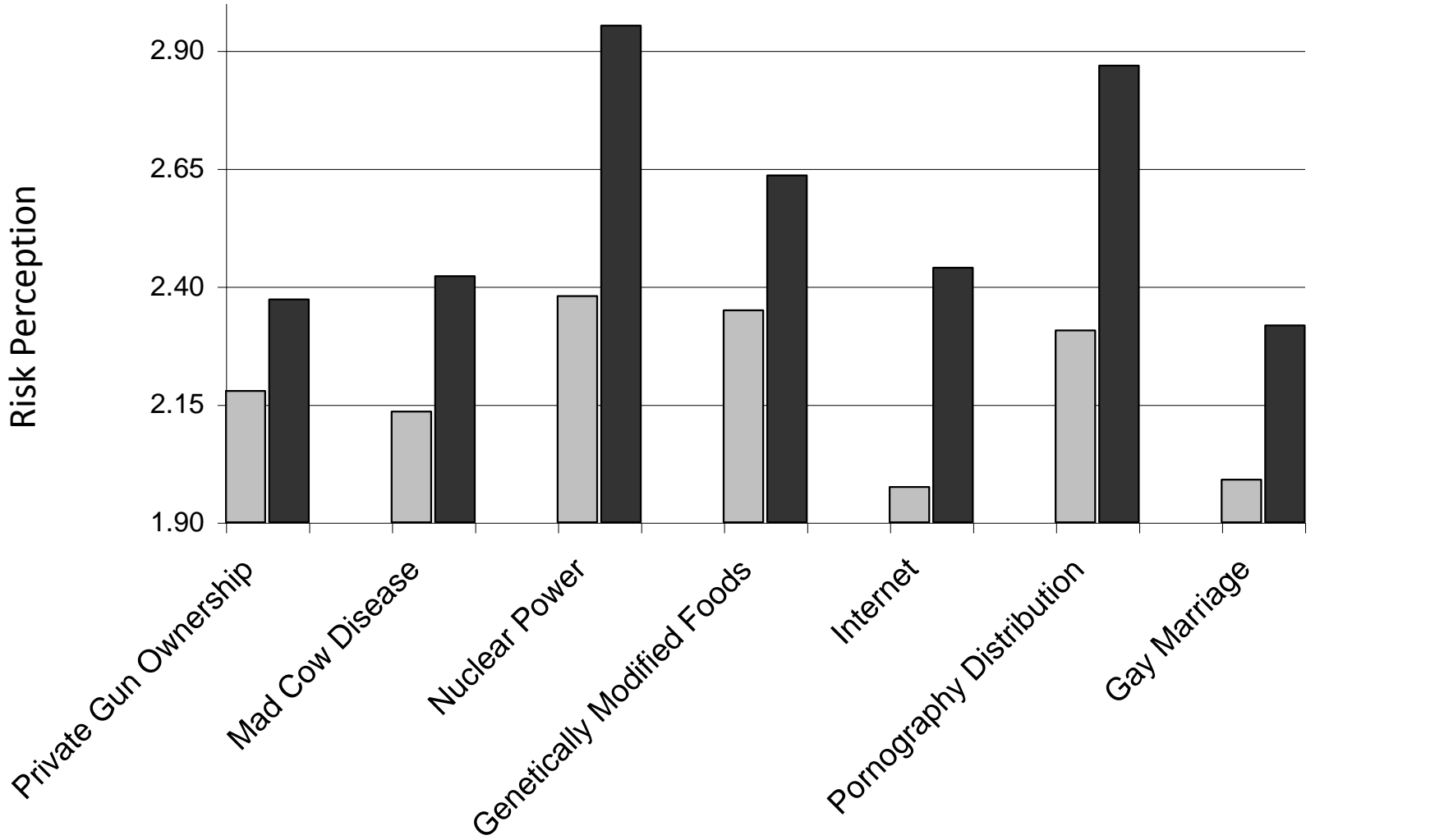
Individualism <-> Communitarianism

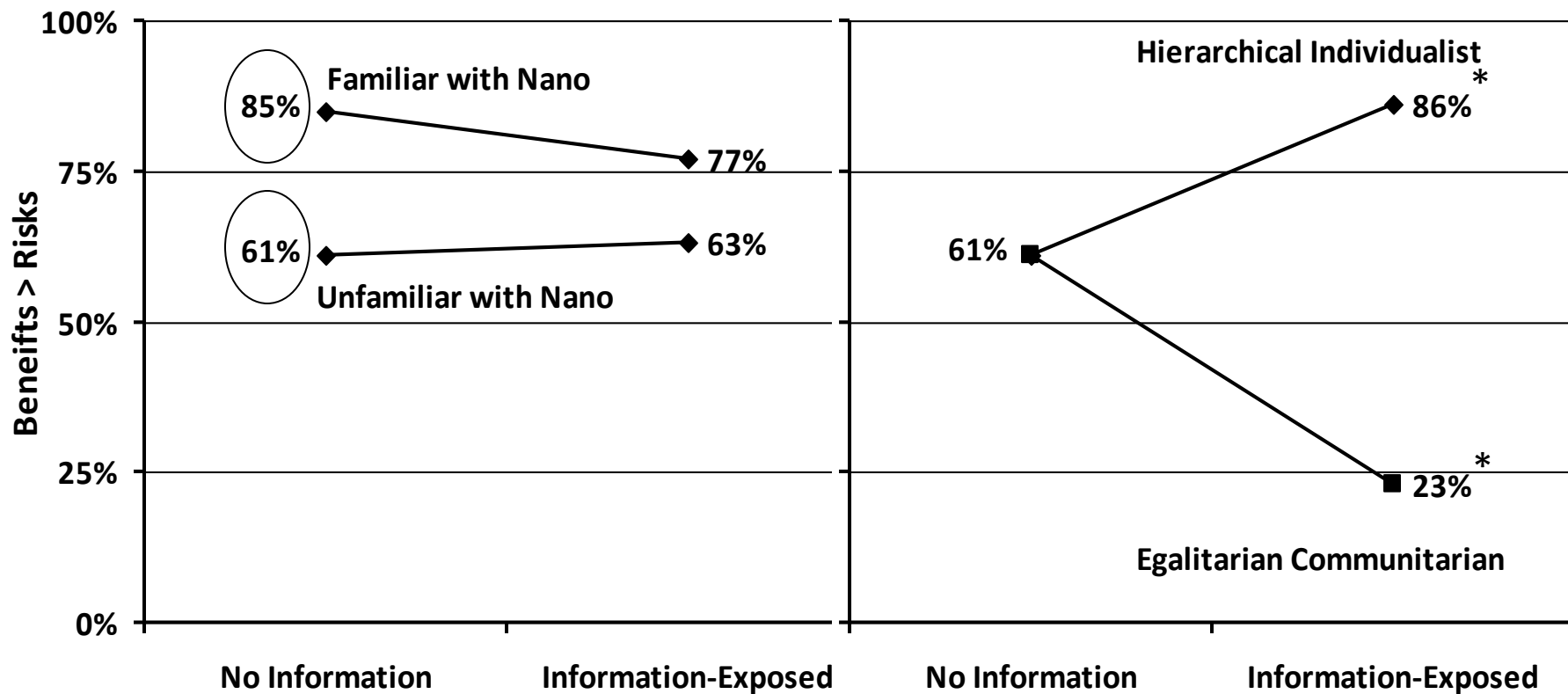
# Culturally Identifiable Experts



Source: Kahan, Braman, Cohen, Slovic, & Gastil, Who Fears the HPV Vaccine, Who Doesn't, and Why? An Experimental Study of the Mechanisms of Cultural Cognition, *Law & Human Behavior* (2010), advance on-line publication doi: 10.1007/s10979-009-9201-0

*“How much risk do you believe each of the following poses to the safety or health of people in our society?”*





\* Change across conditions significant at  $p < .05$

Source: Kahan, Braman, Slovic, Gastil & Cohen Cultural Cognition of Nanotechnology Risks and Benefits, *Nature Nanotechnology*, 4(2), 87-91 (2009)

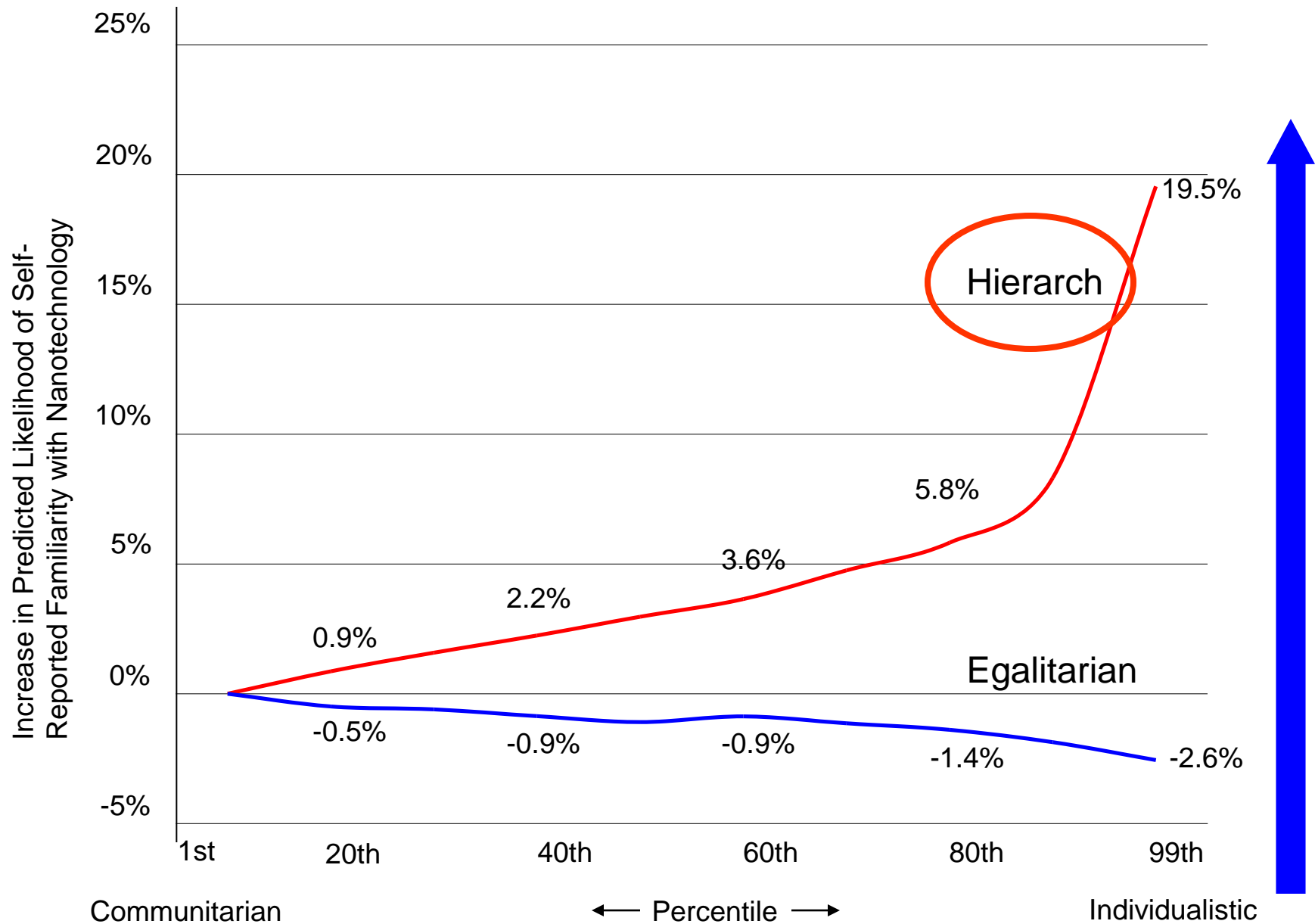
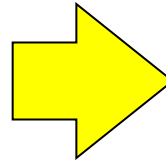


Figure S1

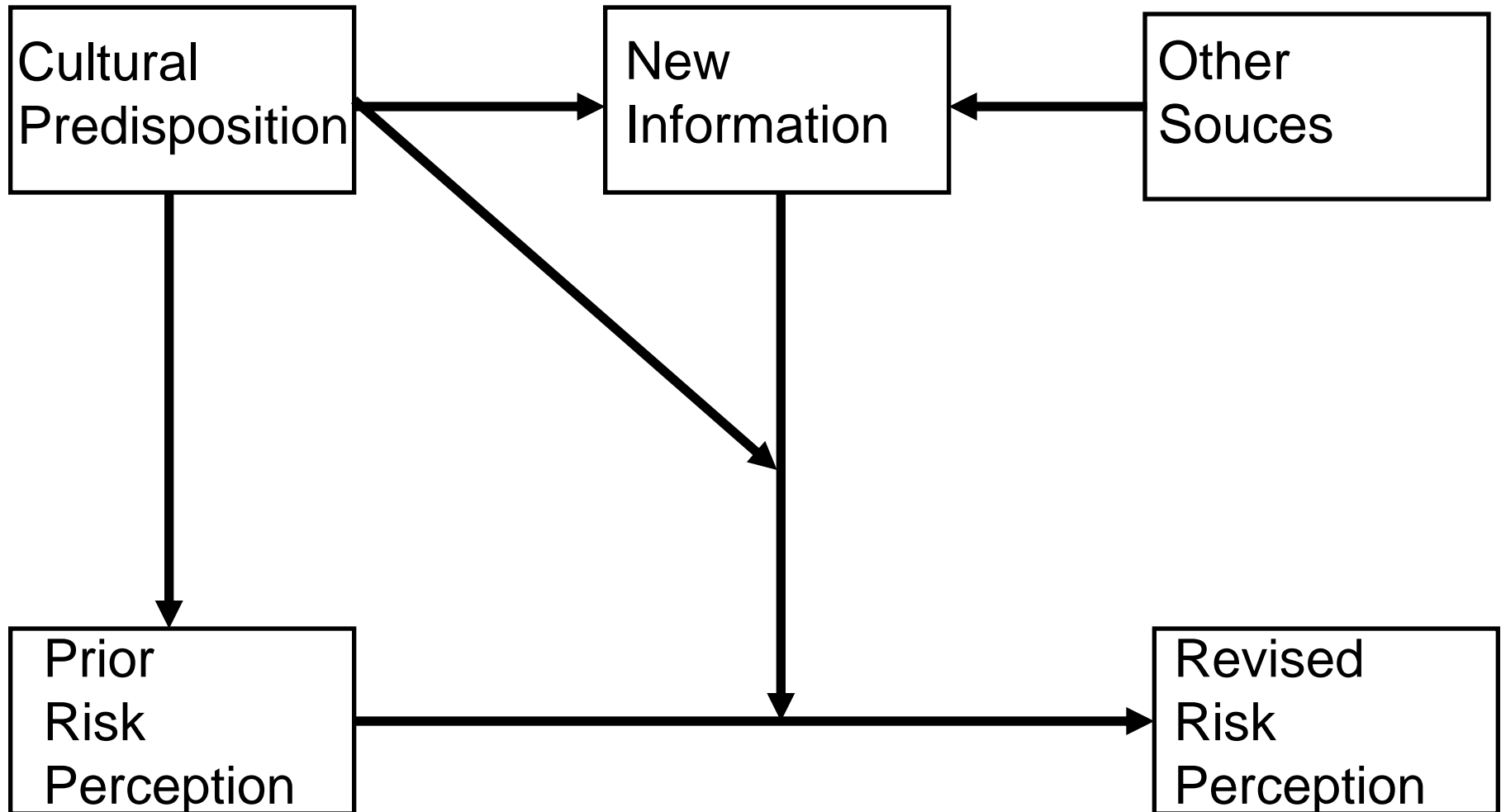
Source: Kahan, Braman, Slovic, Gastil & Cohen Cultural Cognition of Nanotechnology Risks and Benefits, *Nature Nanotechnology*, 4(2), 87-91 (2009)

## Two Mechanisms of Cultural Cognition

*Culturally biased information search*  
*Culturally biased assimilation*

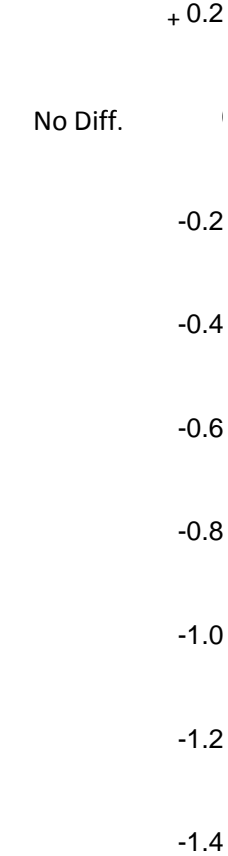


*Persistent cultural polarization*

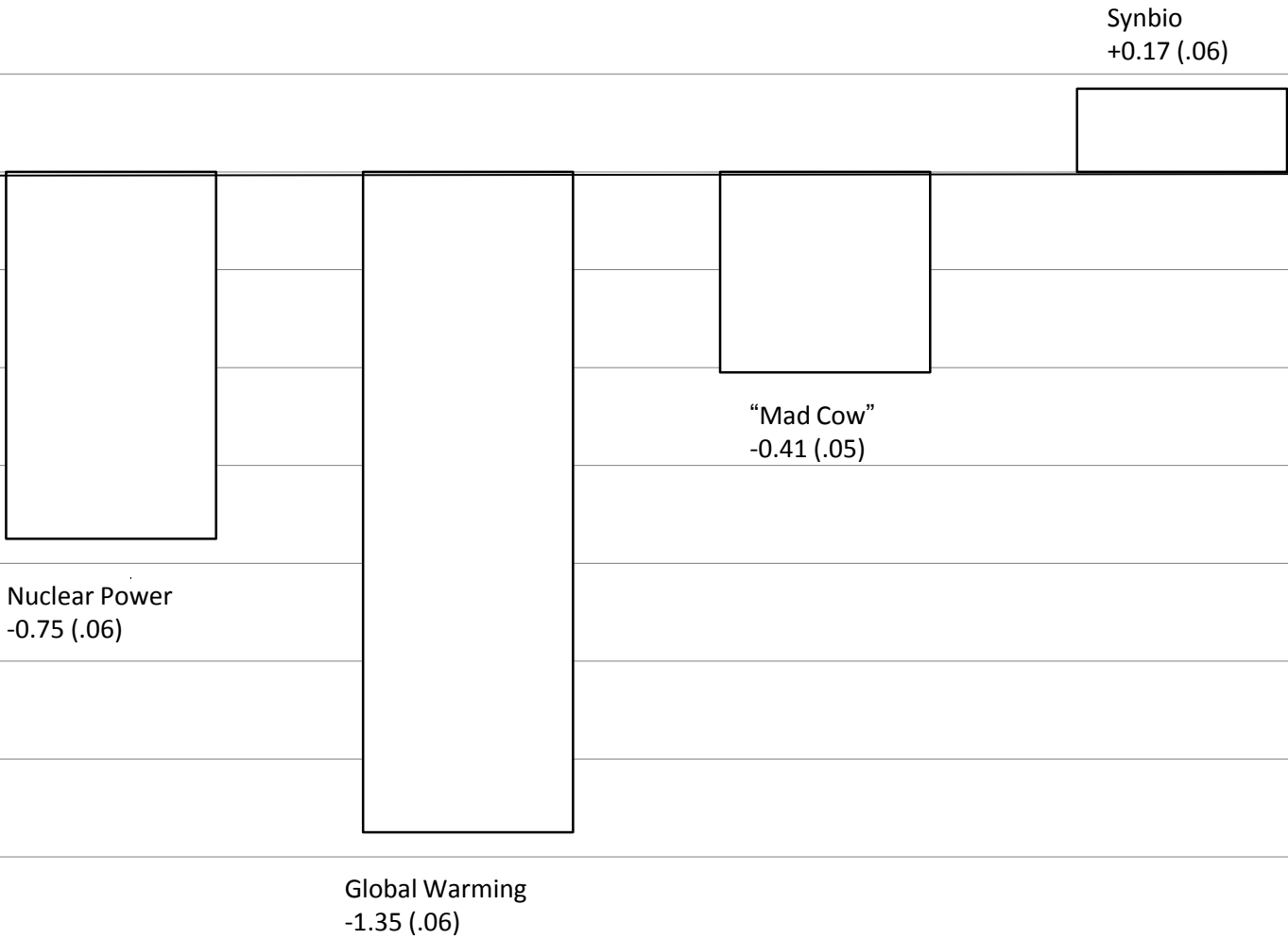




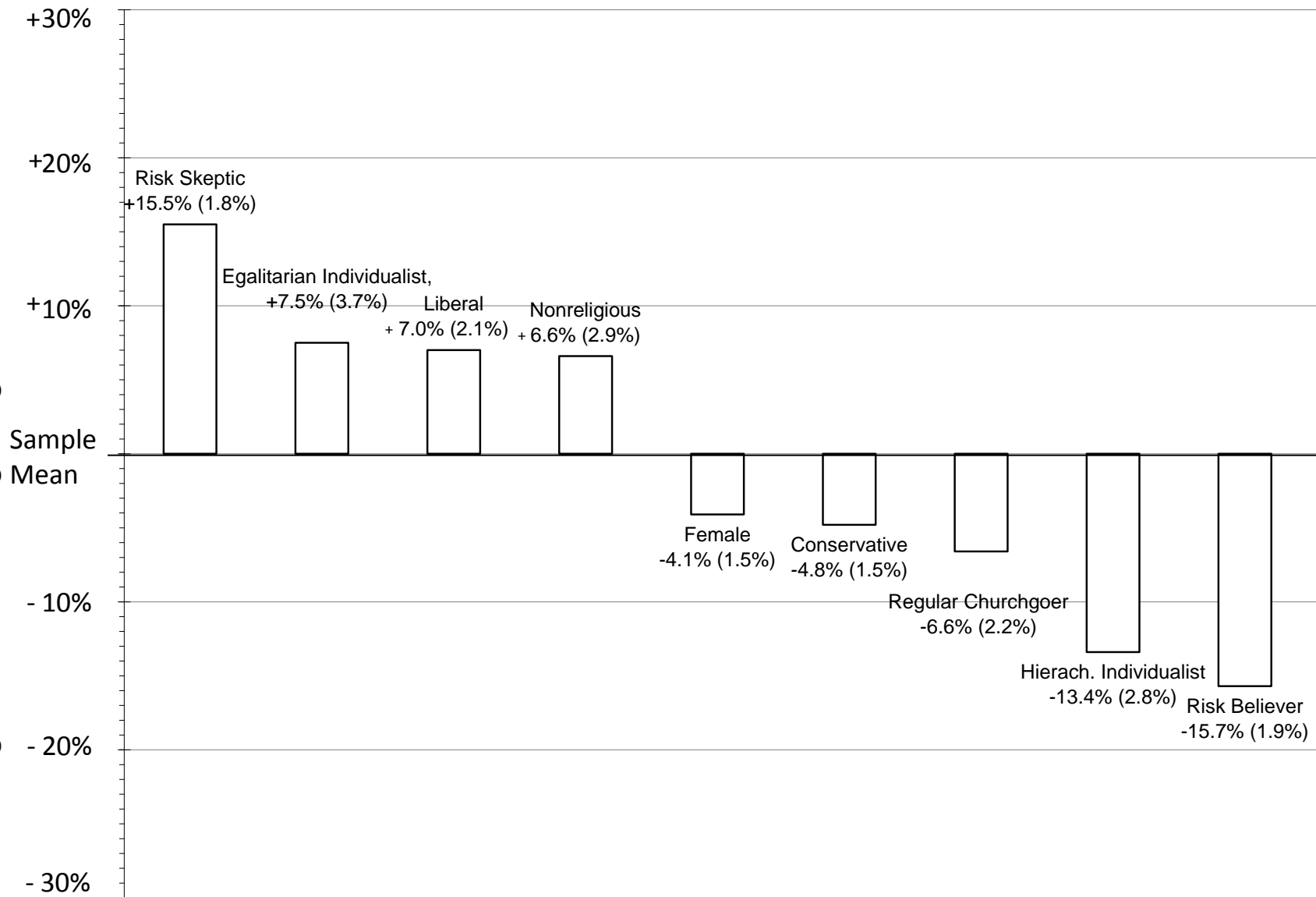
Hierarch-Individ.  
More Concerned.



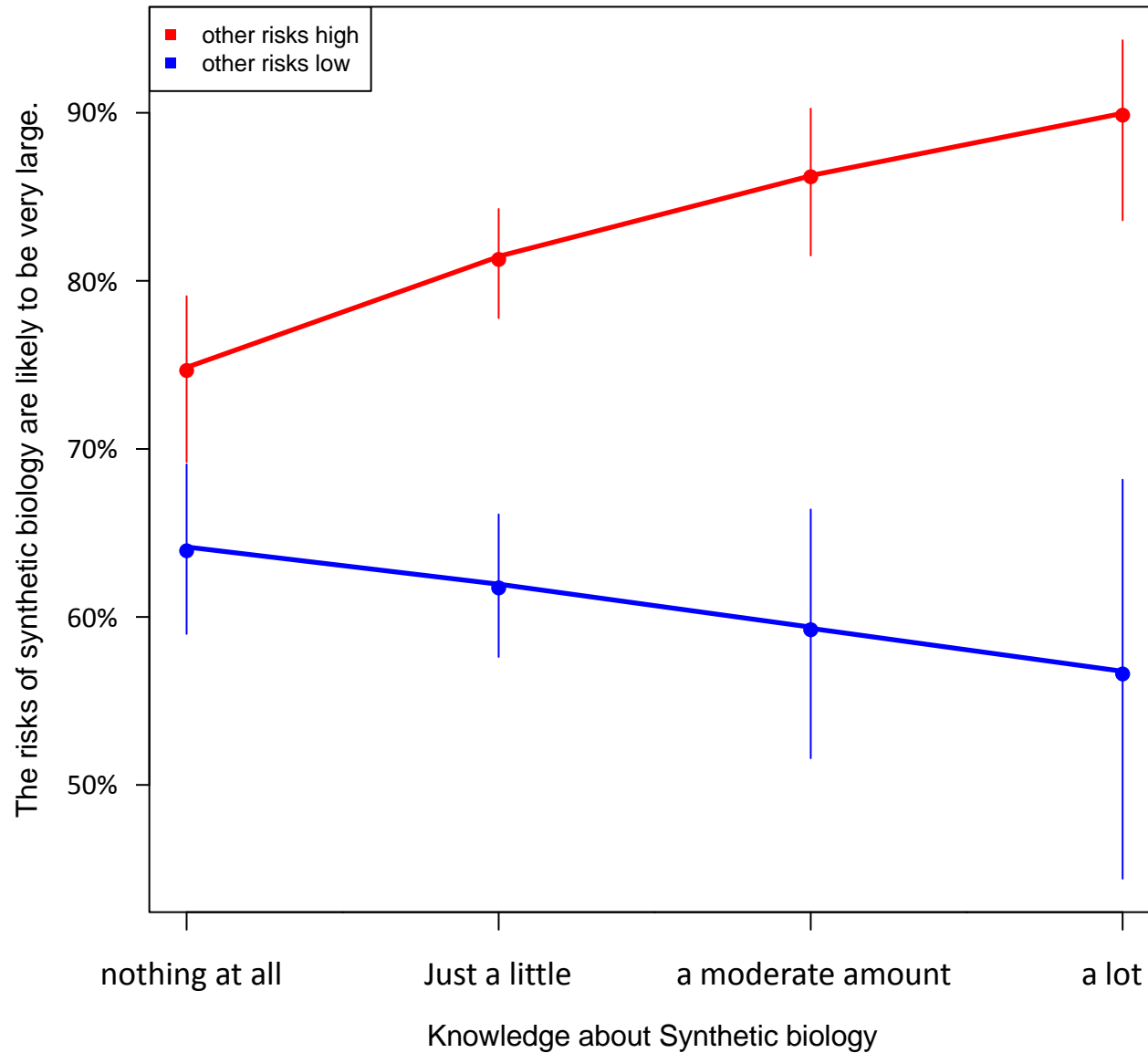
Hierarch-Individ.  
Less Concerned.



Change in Likelihood of Agreeing Benefits > Risks



## Knowledge and Risk Perception



# Governance

# Practical Upshot #1

- If your goal is consensus, public education and increased scientific literacy are unlikely to produce it.
- The more educated and informed people are, the more they disagree.
- Facts have a place, but they must come *after* (temporally, not normatively) cultural attentiveness.

# Practical Upshot #2

**Everyone** cares about risk, but risk perception is often a function of perceptions about whether one's values are being honored or disparaged.

(1) Attend to values first. Convey – *and intend!* – respect for non-risk related concerns.

(2) Once people feel respected, they are more likely to be receptive to science or (as some prefer) leave everything to experts.

# Practical Upshot #3

People care about what a regulatory scheme ***says about them*** as much as they care about ***what it does***.

- Bring members of diverse groups into the discussion so that the public sees that people like them – people from their tribe – are part of the process.
- ***Who*** is involved is just as important as ***what*** the end result is.



Shanahan

*"That one looks like a falling engine."*



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