

Polarization of Moral Judgments

Sarah Sullivan, KatieScarlett Ennis, Kaleigh A. Decker, Vishal J. Thakkar, Charles G. Lord, & Timothy M. Barth

Department of Psychology, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX

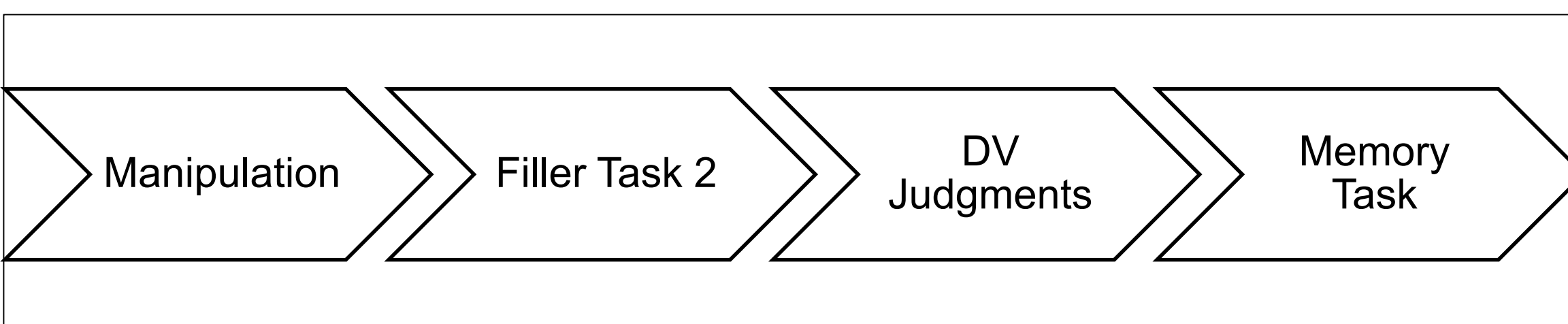
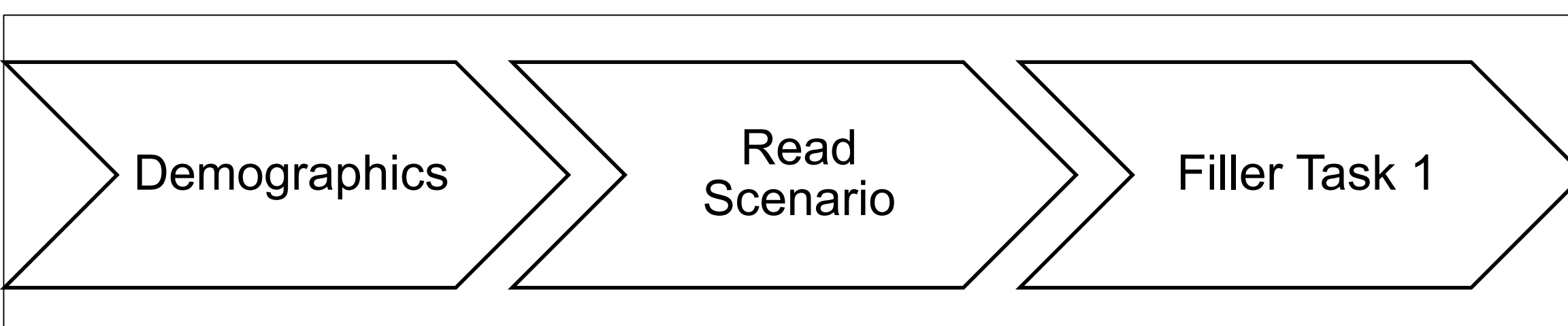


Introduction

- Recently, there have been more lone-wolf acts of violence than ever before, but little is known about the processes leading to this attitude radicalization.
- Attitude Representation Theory (ART; Lord & Lepper, 1999) discusses how individuals make judgments based on associations.
- Previous work suggests that source monitoring (Johnson, Hashtroudi, & Lindsay, 1993) errors can change how people respond to scenarios and remember information.
- Aim:** Here, we tested 3 different manipulations (e.g., extrapolation, embellishment, and biased assimilation) to see if participants would polarize moral judgments.

Method

As was stated in the large prescreen survey that you took at the start of the semester, some groups favor construction of the Keystone Pipeline because it will provide thousands of American jobs during its construction. Other groups oppose the pipeline because it will carry petroleum extracted from Canadian oil sands through methods that create more carbon pollution than the production of conventional oil. One anti-pipeline group, calling themselves the Sand Runners, has been carrying out various acts of sabotage.



Knowing what you know about them, how would you rate the morality and ethics of the Sand Runners members?

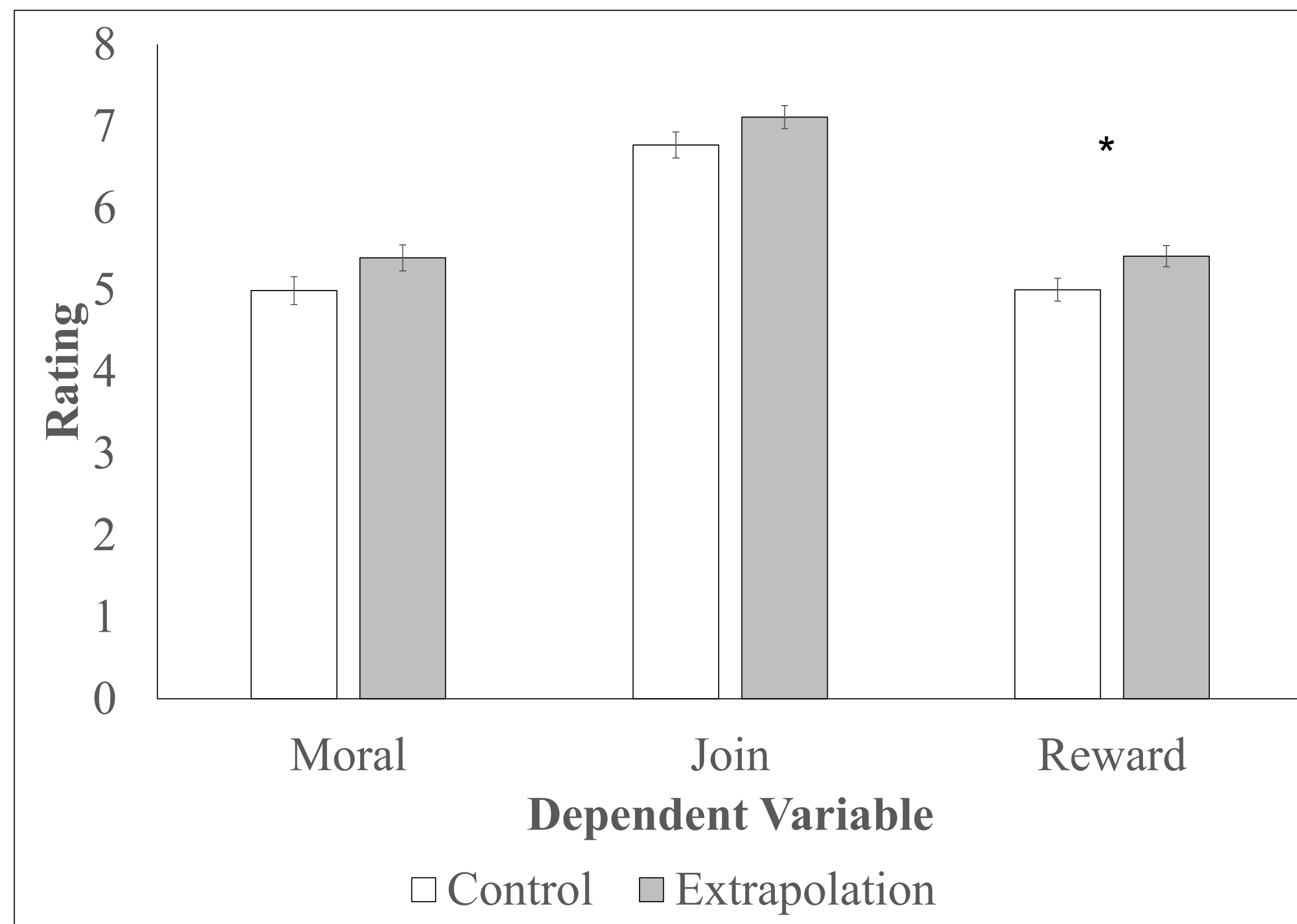
- 1 = extremely moral
 - 2 = very moral
 - 3 = moderately moral
 - 4 = somewhat moral
 - 5 = somewhat immoral
 - 6 = moderately immoral
 - 7 = very immoral
 - 8 = extremely immoral
- Knowing what you know about them, how likely would you be to join the Sand Runners, or a similar group, if you had the chance?
- 1 = extremely likely
 - 2 = very likely
 - 3 = moderately likely
 - 4 = somewhat likely
 - 5 = somewhat unlikely
 - 6 = moderately unlikely
 - 7 = very unlikely
 - 8 = extremely unlikely
- I would like to see the Sand Runners group given
- 1 = very large rewards
 - 2 = large rewards
 - 3 = medium rewards
 - 4 = small rewards
 - 5 = small punishments
 - 6 = medium punishments
 - 7 = large punishments
 - 8 = very large punishments

Experiment 1

Control ($n = 79$) vs. Extrapolation ($n = 75$), between groups

Now we want you to think more about the Sand Runners group. Considering their general approach, how likely are members of the Sand Runners to steal important, costly items from businesses, workers, and families involved in building the Keystone Pipeline?

Why do you believe that people who belong to the Sand Runners are the type of people who would do that? (Please write 200-250 words).

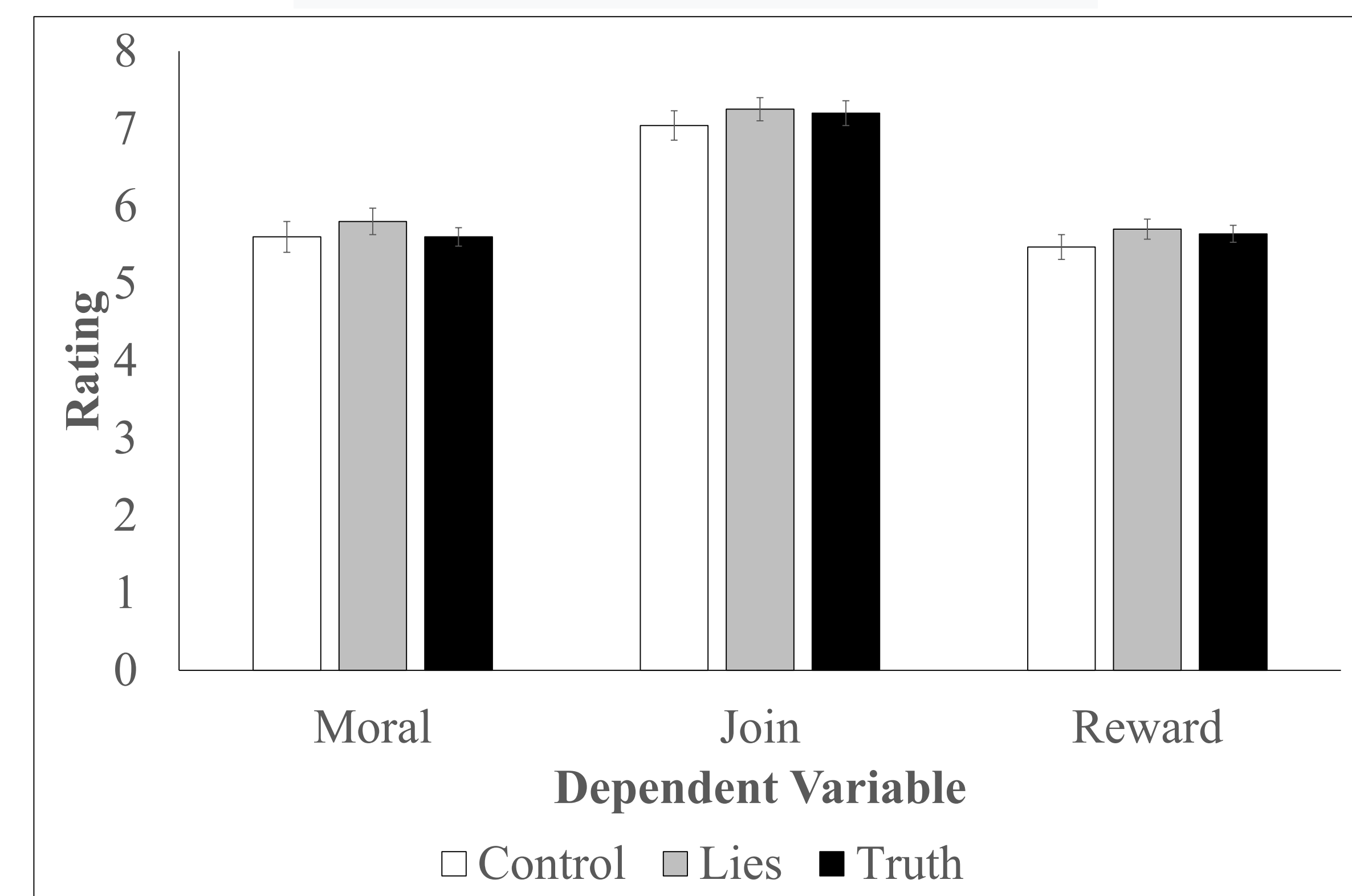


Experiment 3

Control ($n = 46$), truth ($n = 40$), vs. lies ($n = 50$), between-groups

The investigative team of the Citizens Talk radio network reported that several members of the Sand Runners were widely known as dissemblers who had lied on resumes to get key jobs, claimed previous educational degrees and work experiences that they did not have, and failed to mention having been fired by one or more previous employers.

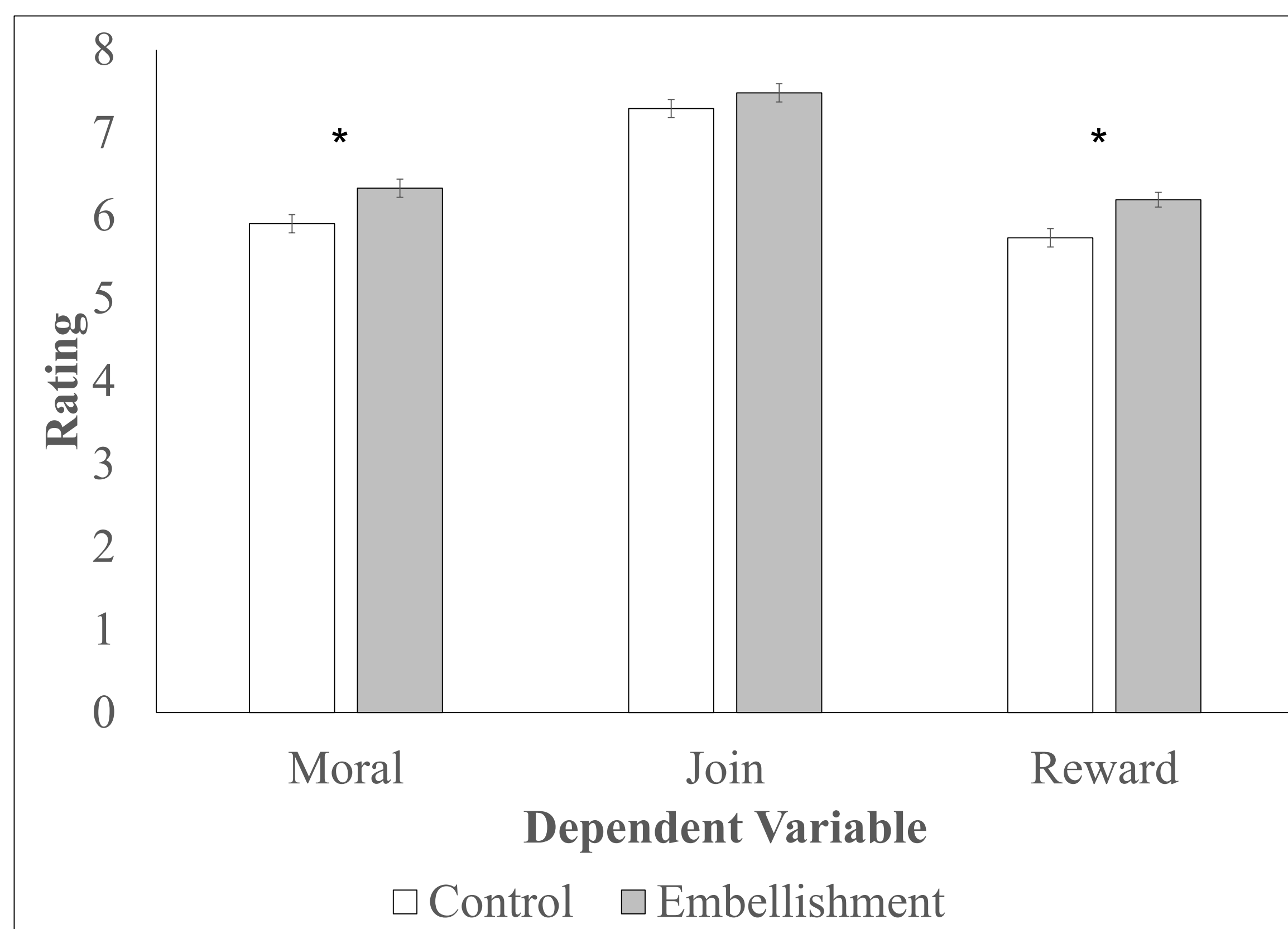
The investigative team of the Citizens Talk radio network reported that several members of the Sand Runners were widely known as truth-tellers who had been rewarded for honesty by appointment to key jobs, based on their previous education...



Experiment 2

Control ($n = 79$) vs. Embellishment ($n = 81$), between groups

Please think back again to the Sand Runners group. Given what you learned about that group, suppose that your best friend liked their name but knew nothing else about them and was thinking of joining. In the space below, please write 200-300 word persuasive message telling your best friend why you think that joining that group would be a big mistake. Go into detail about exactly what you think they would be exposed to and what experiences they could expect if they were to join, being as forceful and emphatic in your persuasive communication as possible.



Discussion

- Results suggest that participants do not differ, across studies, in judgments of wanting to join the group.
- Embellishment exercise showed the most polarization, in two of the dependent variables.
- Limitation: Parts of the studies lacked engagement, participants' responses from pre-screen survey lacked reliability.
- Future Direction: Conduct a follow-up session, to track changes over time, also include an issue that most people may be familiar with in current events.

Poster presented at the 2019 Michael and Sally McCracken Annual Student Research Symposium in the College of Science and Engineering, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX.