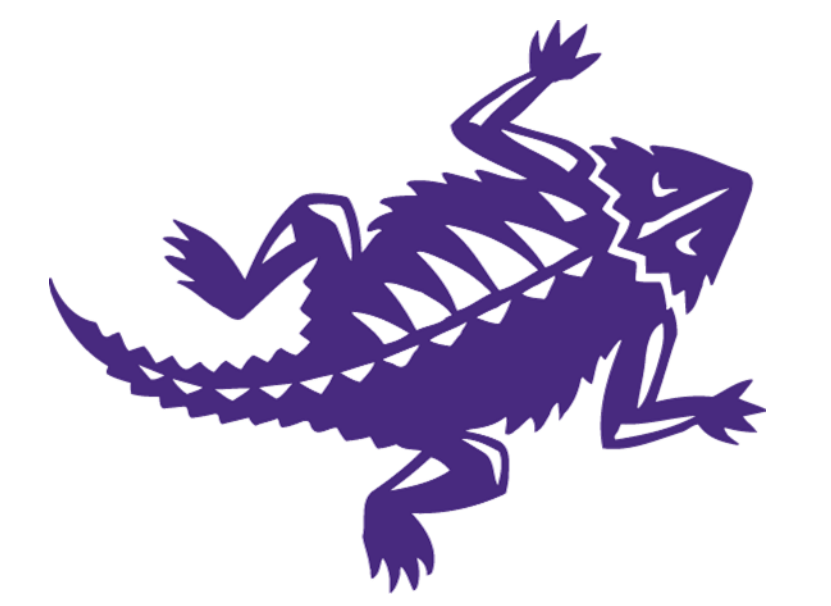
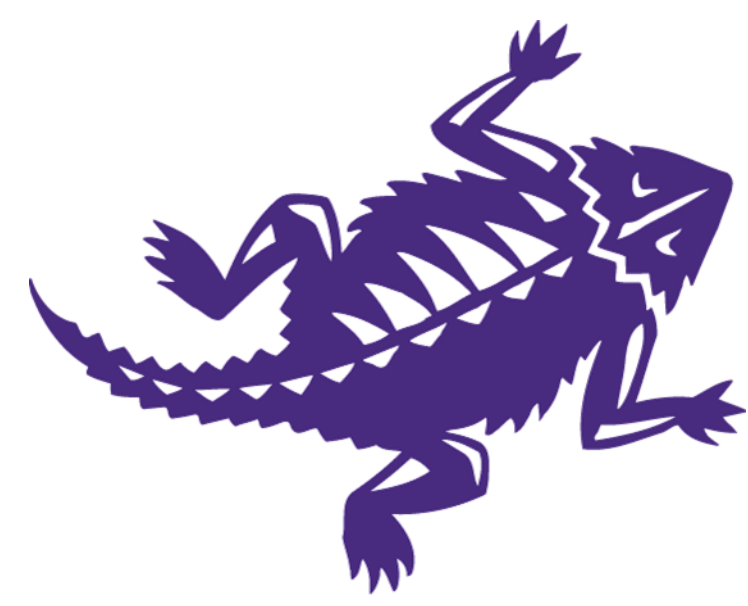


Effects of Cross-Situational Generalization on Memory and Attitude Polarization Toward Social Groups

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Introduction

- People often overestimate dispositional causes for behavior and underestimate situational causes for behavior (Ross, 1977; Jones & Davis, 1965).
- This can lead to the expectation that expressed traits from one setting would also be present in other, empirically distinct settings, and ultimately polarize people attitudes.
- The current research examined if generalizing about a social group's traits across settings would polarize attitudes in the absence of new information. We also examined how memory for the initial group information is influenced after generalizing.
- We hypothesized that participants would report more negative attitudes toward a fictitious target group after generalizing about the member's traits across settings, compared to their initial attitudes toward the group. We further predicted that participants would misremember the generalized settings as having been part of the initial group information.

Method

- 284 U.S. MTurk workers (108 men and 176 women; 20-78 years old [$M_{age} = 44.00$, $SD_{age} = 13.47$, $Mdn_{age} = 42$]) participated for payment.
- Participants first read that a fictitious region, New Caledonia, applied to be recognized as a country, which would allow them to apply for immigration to the United States.
- Participants were then told that eight U.S. citizens who lived in New Caledonia for over a year witnessed them acting either argumentative and critical (i.e., hostile; Kiesler, 1982) or crafty and cunning (i.e., mistrusting; Kiesler, 1982) in either eight different street, sport, or business/misc. settings (Barker, 1968; Kenrick et al., 1990).
- After participants read the initial group information, they reported their impressions of the group, willingness to admit members to the U.S., willingness to socialize and do business with the groups, and how likely group members would lie and cheat to enter the U.S.

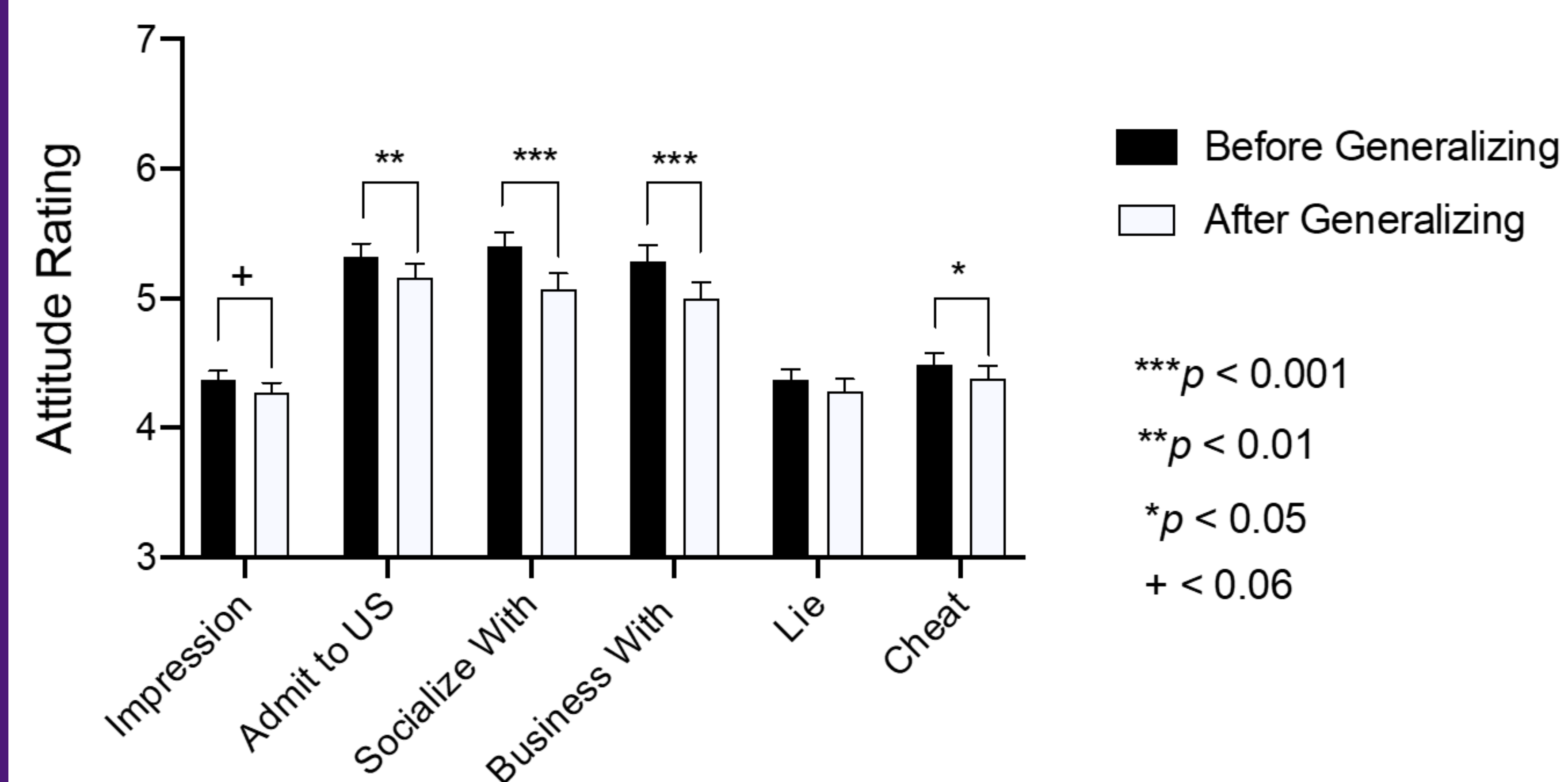
Method (cont.)

- All participants then generalized from the initial information by estimating the likelihood of and giving a brief example of people from New Caledonia exhibiting the traits given in one of the other two setting categories.
- After the generalization task, all participants completed the same six attitude measures a second time, and then completed a memory test about the initial settings the group members were observed in.

Results

- Participants reported marginally more negative overall impressions of New Caledonians after than before generalizing, $F(1, 283) = 3.59$, $p = .059$, $d = .08$.
- They were also significantly less supportive of admitting New Caledonians to the U. S., $F(1, 283) = 8.77$, $p = .003$, $d = .09$, and less willing to socialize with, $F(1, 283) = 32.27$, $p < .001$, $d = .17$, or do business with, $F(1, 283) = 25.19$, $p < .001$, $d = .14$, people from New Caledonia if they were admitted.
- They did not adopt more negative views of New Caledonians lying to enter the U. S., $F(1, 283) = 1.20$, $p = 2.75$, $d = .05$, but they did on the issue of cheating to do so, $F(1, 283) = 4.08$, $p = .044$, $d = .07$.
- The mean estimated likelihood for the traits generalizing was significantly above the scale mid-point, $M = 6.39$, $SD = 2.19$, one sample $t(283) = 49.12$, $p < .00001$, and their likelihood estimates for cross-situational consistency significantly predicted combined post-generalization attitudes, $t(282) = -8.02$, $p < .001$.
- However, generalization memory errors were not associated with either post-generalization combined attitudes, $r = -.08$, $t = 1.38$, $p = .168$, or with attitude change, $r = -.02$, $t = .38$, $p = .705$.

Mean Attitudes Before and After Generalizing



Discussion

- Generalizing polarized impressions of New Caledonians, attitudes toward admitting their members to the U. S., and willingness to socialize and do business with their members. Participants also reported a greater likelihood that their members would cheat to enter the U.S. after generalizing.
- The more likely participants thought it was that New Caledonians would display the same traits across different settings, the more negative were their post-generalization attitudes and the more their attitudes polarized.
- These results suggest that attitude polarization from merely thinking beyond the settings given is strongly related to overestimating the cross-situational consistency of behavior, but not to salience of or memory for the specific situations involved.