

The Effects of Biased Extrapolation on Extreme Attitudes Toward Social Groups

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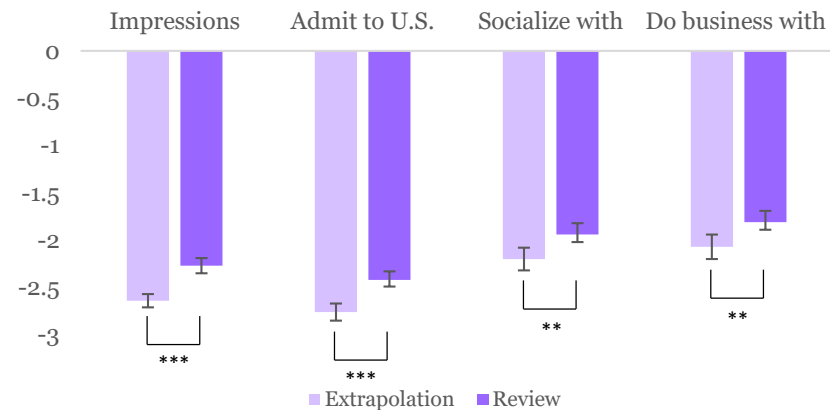
INTRODUCTION

- Past research has shown that merely thinking about an attitude object can make attitudes more extreme.
- Specific types of thought have also been shown to polarize attitudes, such as *generalizing* a social group's personality traits across empirically distinct settings, and *elaborating* and *exaggerating* in online social media posts about a social group.
- The current study examined whether a different type of thought—self-generated extrapolations about a social group's traits— would make subsequent attitudes toward the group more extreme than reviewing the initial trait information for another social group.

METHOD

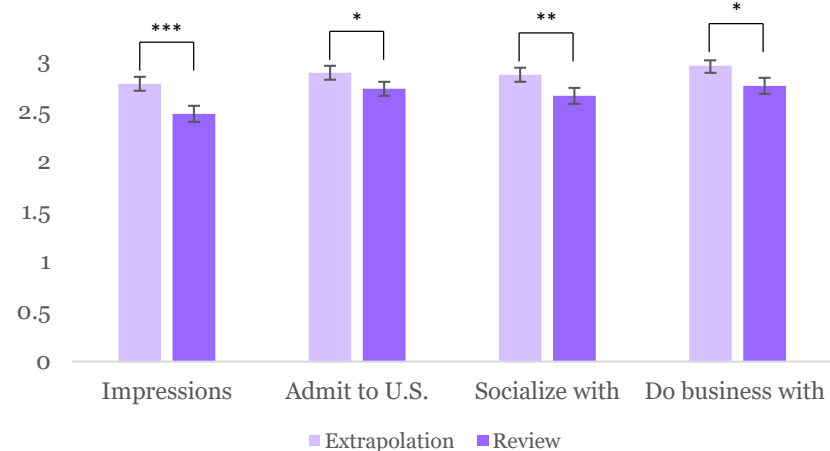
- $N = 382$ (195 women, 185 men, 2 unspecified)
- Read about either two moderately positive or two moderately negative potential migrant groups
- Randomly assigned to completed an extrapolation task for one of the groups and a review task for the other
 - **Extrapolation task:** self-generated 8 additional traits they believed one of the target groups to have
 - **Review task:** re-typed the personality traits from the initial information
- Reported their impression of each group, whether they supported or opposed admitting them into the country, and their willingness to socialize with and do business with group members

Negative Attitudes & Behavioral Intentions



NOTE: *** = $p < .001$; ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$

Positive Attitudes & Behavioral Intentions



RESULTS

- For the positive target groups, participants reported more extreme positive attitudes on all attitude and behavioral intention measures (impressions, admit to U.S., socialize with, and do business with) after extrapolating than after reviewing, $ps < .05$.
- For the negative target groups, participants reported more extreme negative attitudes on all attitude and behavioral intention measures (impressions, admit to U.S., socialize with, and do business with) after extrapolating than after reviewing, $ps < .05$.
- Extremity of the associations that came to mind after extrapolating vs. reviewing mediated the effect of extrapolation on attitudes, significant indirect effect: $b = 0.18$, 95% CI [.13, .24]

DISCUSSION

- The results of this study provided insight into how mere thought can make attitudes more extreme through an extrapolation thought strategy.
- Further research should attempt to replicate these effects using a different extrapolation task or type of target group.