



Conquering *(or at least understanding)* the Polar Divide in Your Community

MYIAH J HUTCHENS, PH.D.

ASSOCIATE CHAIR & ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

Goals for Today

- ▶ What influences how we process information?
- ▶ What are the consequences of how we engage?
- ▶ What should we do?

Our biases...

► Cognitive dissonance



I am a
foodie

Biology is
hard to
override

Cheetos
are the
perfect
food

Cheetos
are
cheese

Our biases...

- Confirmation bias

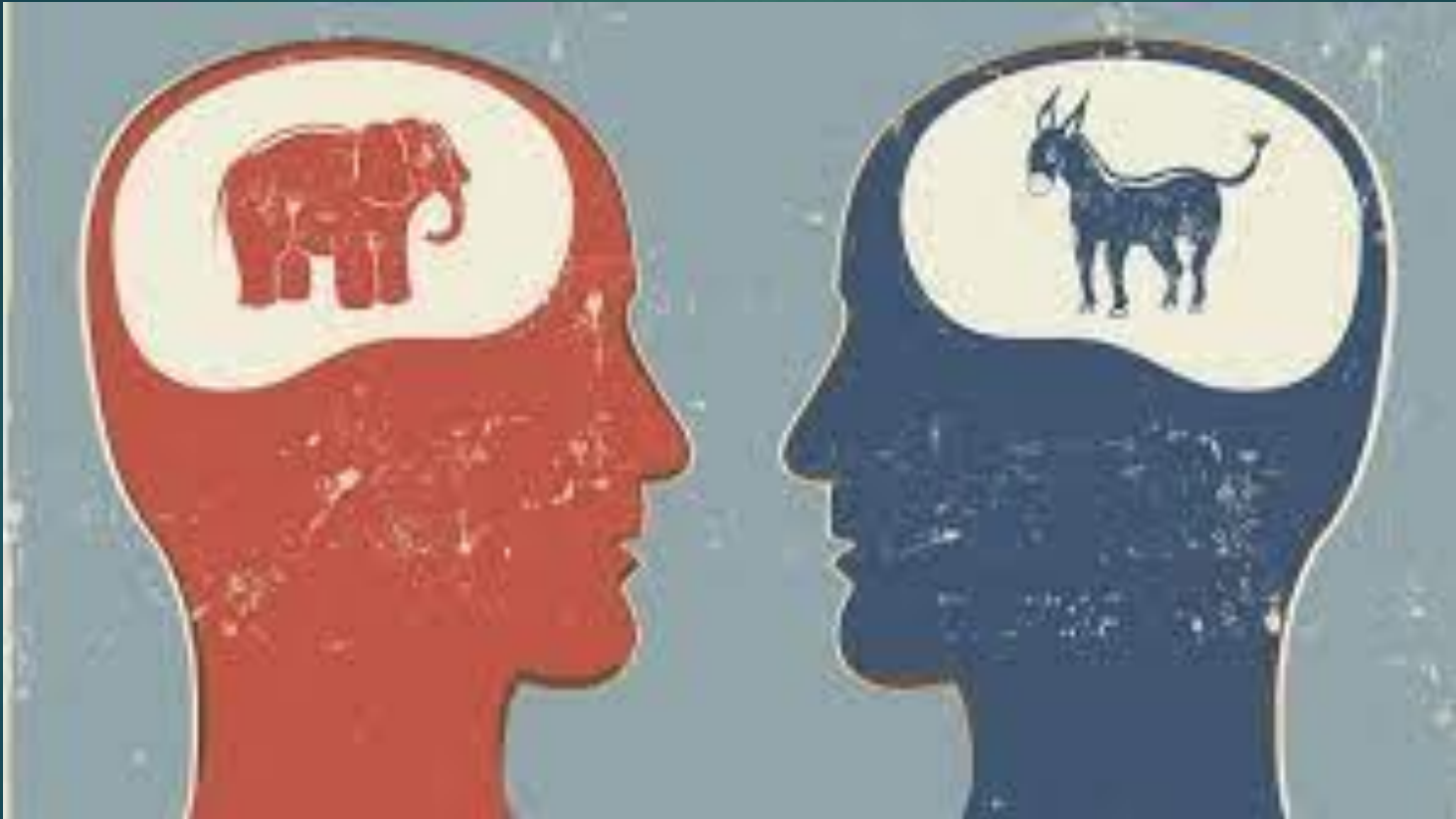


Our biases...

- Motivated Reasoning



Polarization



Attitude/Issue Polarization

- Increasingly different views on political topics

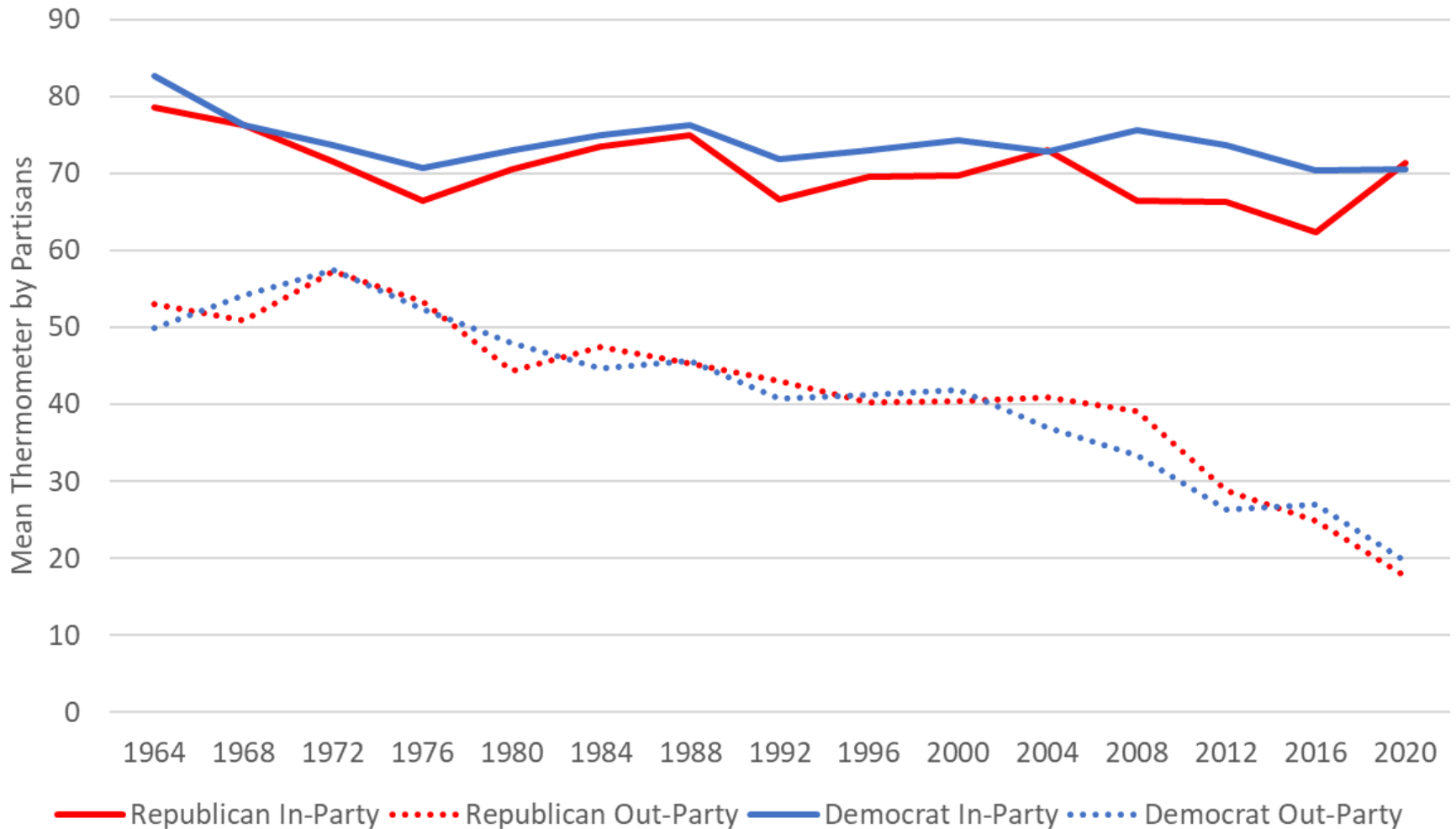


Affective Polarization

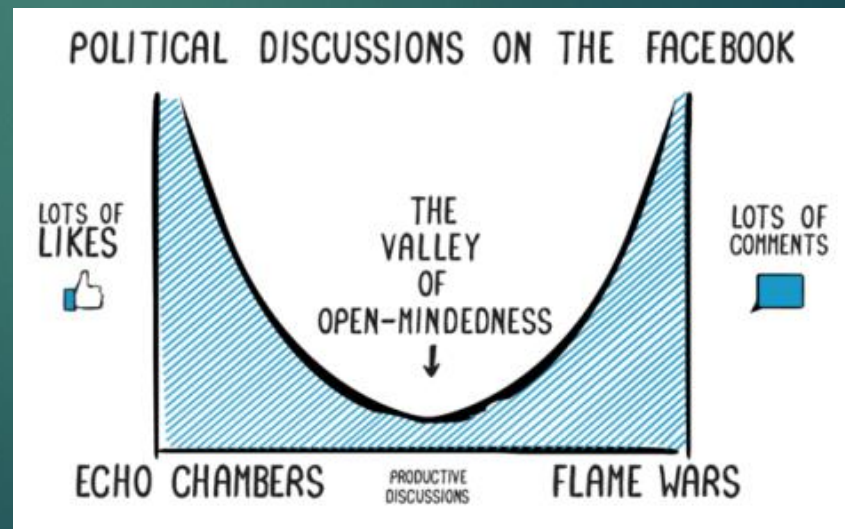
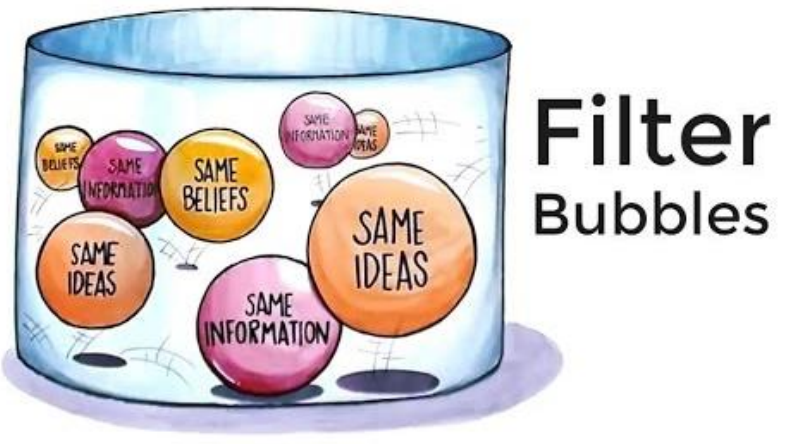
- ▶ Gap between positive feelings towards “our side” versus “their side”



Party favorability 1964-2020



Communication's role

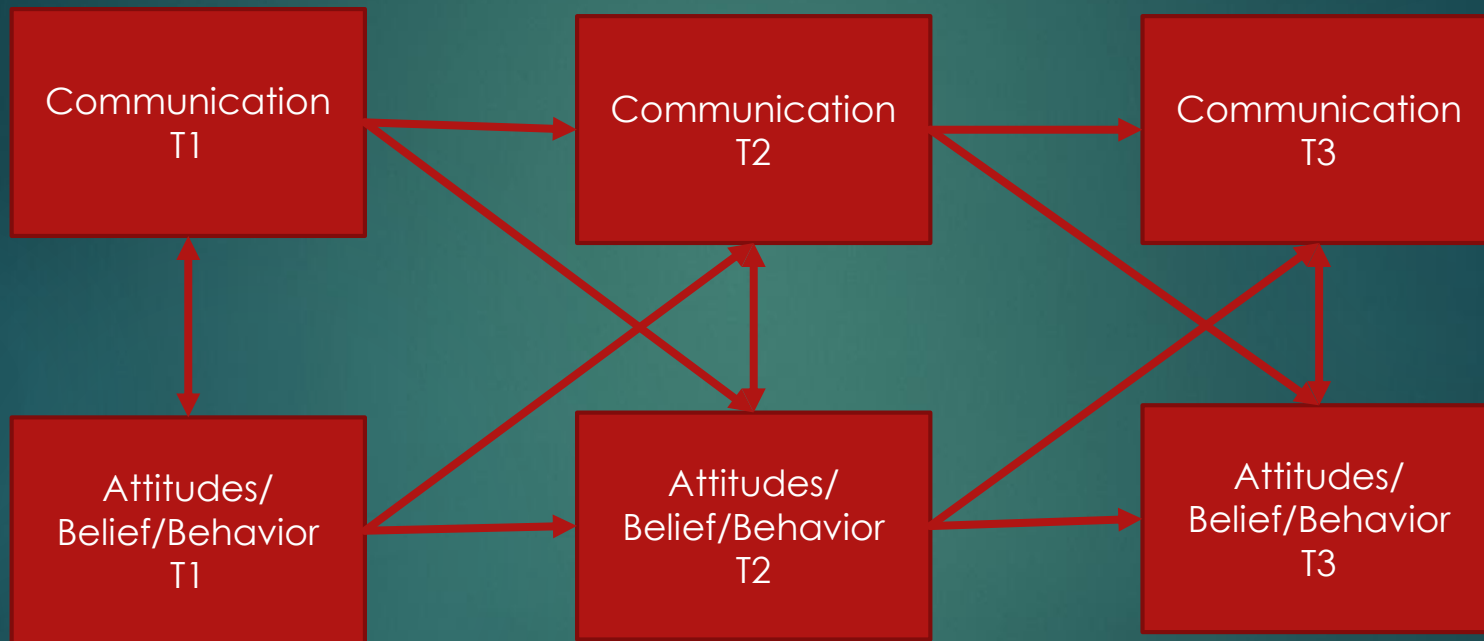


How Much Counter Attitudinal Information Do We See?

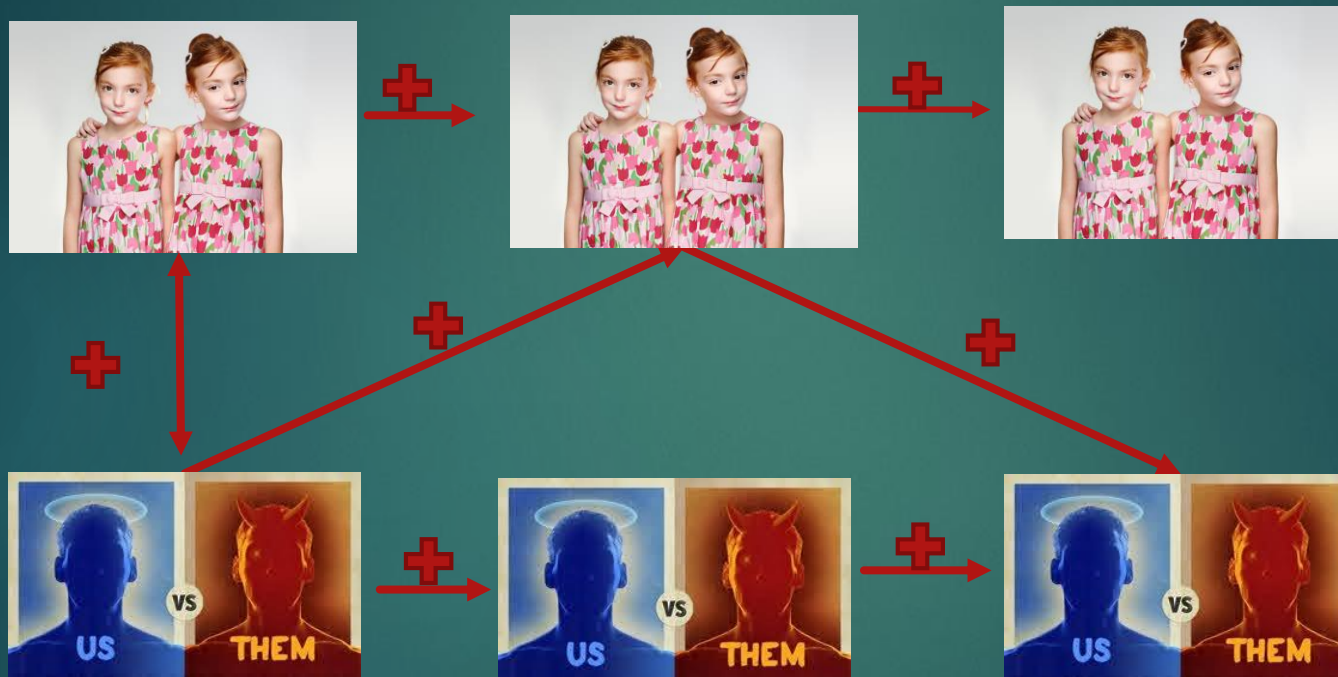
- ▶ Some!
- ▶ Preference for similar others
- ▶ Junkies vs. avoiders is more common with media
- ▶ Only about 10% of people say they never discuss politics with people they disagree with
- ▶ More common to get counter attitudinal views through mediated sources



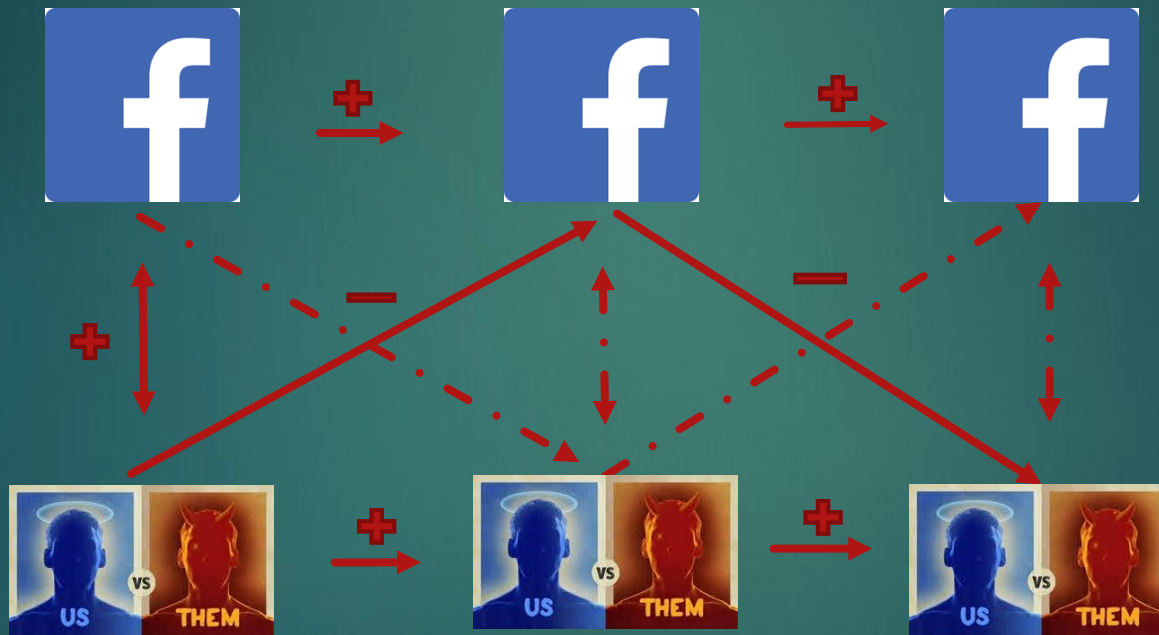
Reinforcing Spirals



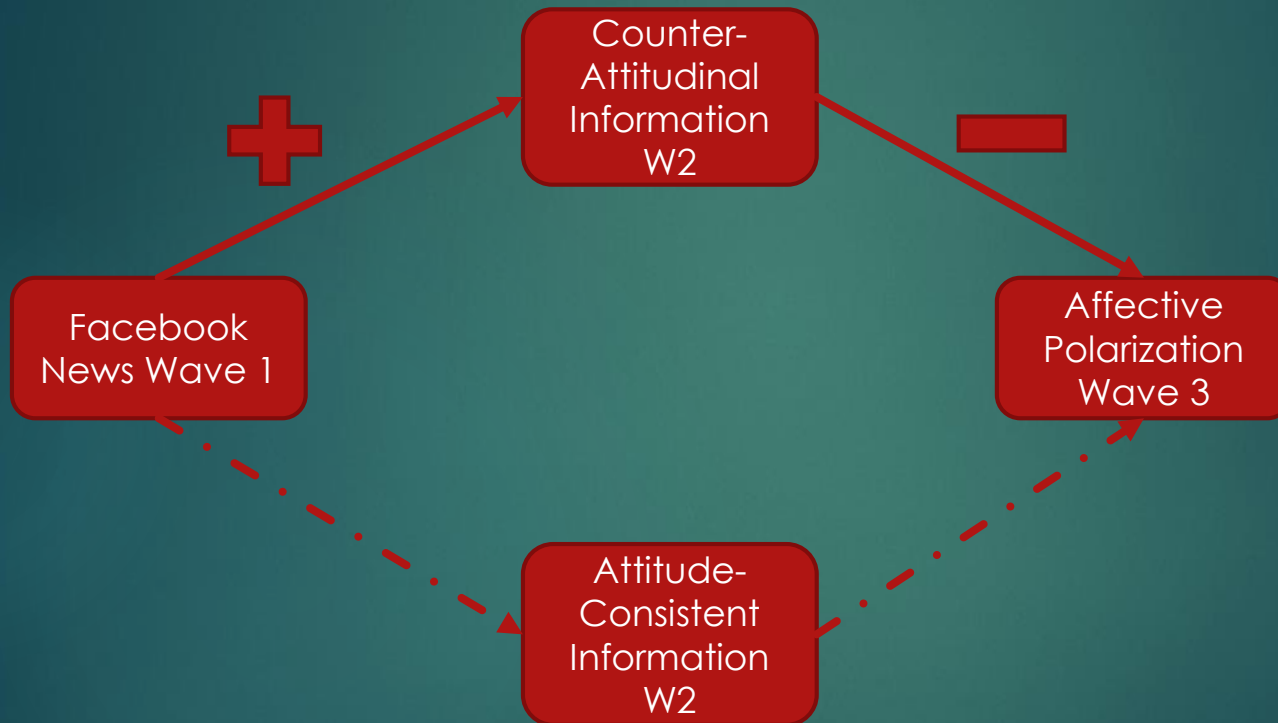
Overtime Relationships Interpersonally



Over-time Relationships On Social Media



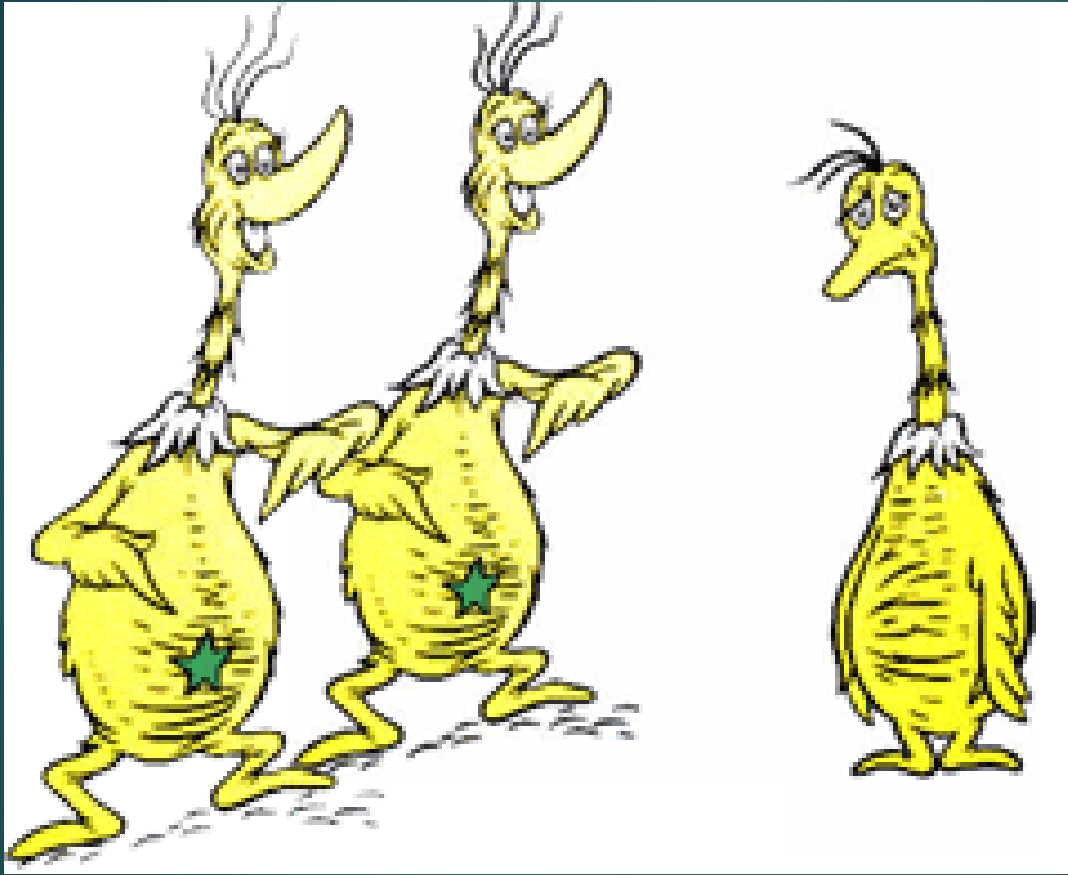
Mediation Based on Information Type



Conclusions

- ▶ Facebook doesn't appear to be facilitating filter bubbles
- ▶ When looking at over-time results, using Facebook for news is related to *depolarization*
 - ▶ This is due to increased exposure to counter-attitudinal news sources
- ▶ Talking to people like ourselves does increase polarization, so what is the effect of online discussions?

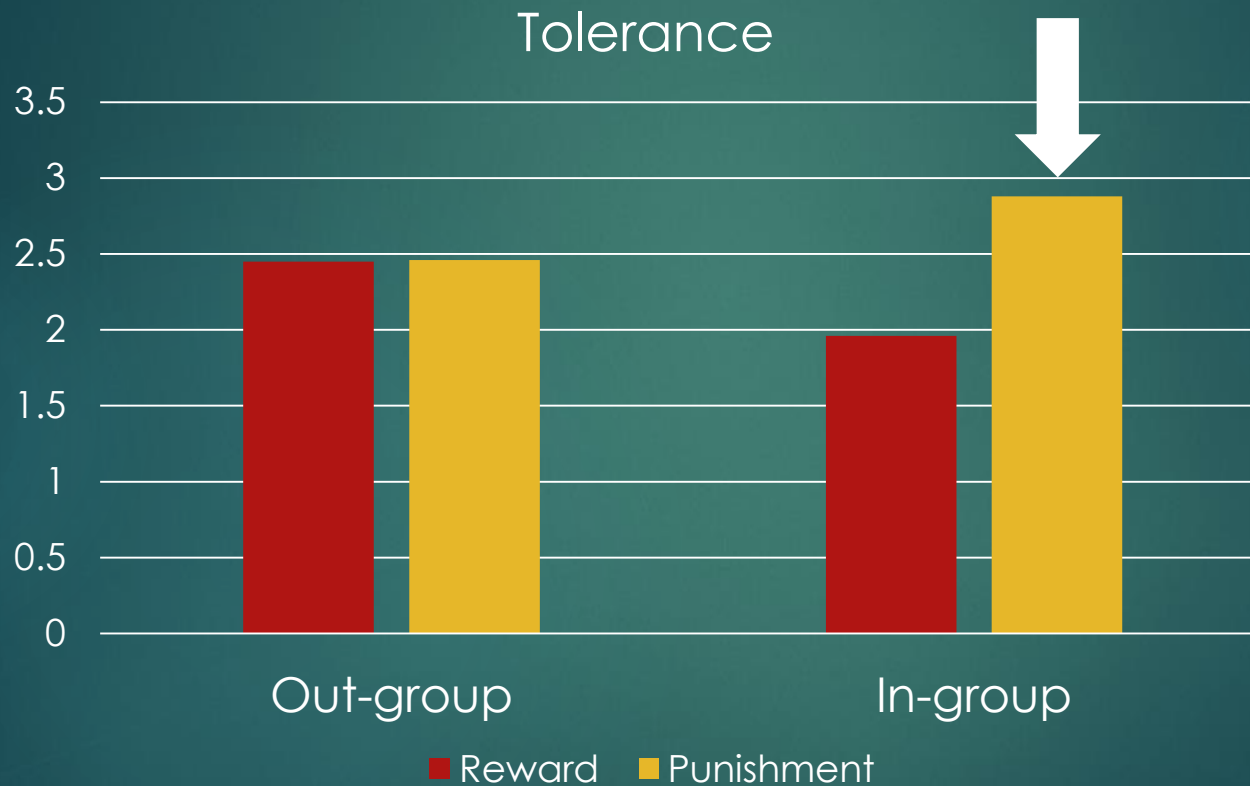
Group Identification



Power of Modeling



Results: Manipulation Effects on Tolerance



Conclusions

- ▶ What your in-group does matters
- ▶ Disagreement can have positive effects
- ▶ Exposure to incivility does not in and of itself lead to negative outcomes, but changes based on responses to that incivility
- ▶ Who is participating, and what we expect to see, matters for how we react to these situations

Key Recommendations

- ▶ Challenge yourself to seek out diverse perspectives
- ▶ Call out people on your “team” when they are behaving badly
- ▶ Try to reinforce shared identities when talking to someone you politically disagree with
 - ▶ LISTEN in these conversations
 - ▶ Remember you are talking to a person, not a media caricature



Thank you!

MYIAHHUTCHENS@UFL.EDU