Political Values and Responses to Fear Messaging: An Australian Perspective

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Herald Sun
27 AUSSIES KILLED IN MISSILE ATTACK

Teen allegedly hid pipe bombs from parents
Police say lives saved when attack foiled

The instant we changed forever

TEROR ALERT NOW 'HIGH'
'CHATTER' ABOUT AUSSIE ATTACK
POLICE SWARM MAJOR EVENTS

WAR ON OUR WAY OF LIFE

DEATH CULT CBD ATTACK
Fear Messaging: What, Why and How?

Not just media - Politics
- Analysis of Howard’s speeches

Linked to conservative politics

Fears and trust in government/nationalism

Conservative policies better suited to provided sought after certainty?

Conservative shift or worldview defence?
Terror Management Theory

Terror Management Theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986)

Fear of certain death = Potential for terror

Reminders of mortality increases this fear, or mortality salience

Escape fear by clinging to aspects of the individuals world view that will exist after the death of the self

Research indicates that once wider aspects of worldview made salient, more likely to see worldview defence in the face of fear messaging
Conservatism and Progressivism

What do these labels actually mean?

- Rigidity yet inconsistency

US and Australian political parties as proxies for conservatism and progressivism?

Australians still self-identify along these lines (Charnock, 2010)

Haidt and colleagues (2004, 2007) moral foundations

- Harm/Care
- Inggroup/loyalty
- Fairness/reciprocity
- Authority/respect
- Purity/Sancity
Study Overview

N=13

13 hours of interviews,

Discussed: Haidt and Graham's moral foundations, and

Responses to media images
Participants

Two cohort search unsuccessful

Student sample,
- Age range, 23-45 (median = 31)
- Locations: Melbourne (n=8), Sydney (n=2), Sunshine Coast (n=1), Cairns (n=1), London/Sydney (n=1)
- Field of study: Psychology (n=9), Law (n=3), International development (n=1)
Results

Moral foundations
  ◦ Expected: Grouping per moral foundations
  ◦ Results: No grouping possible, strong conditionality theme

Allowed for a more open ended investigation
  ◦ Foucauldian Discourse Analysis
Discursive Object Constructions

Media and Political Interests → The other → The Ingroup

Our way of life
Reactions

Safety vs danger
- More likely to accept the constructions when perceiving danger

Personalisation vs politicisation
- More likely to accept the constructions when engaging personally

Desensitisation vs emotional response
- More likely to accept the constructions when reacting emotionally
Conclusions

Holistic labels of people as conservative or progressive warrants further consideration

Participants here were able to paint a clear picture of the messages included implied or made explicit by the media content

Acceptance or rejection depends on how they reacted on three spectrums
In their own words

“It narrows the us instead of broadening the us because it encompasses everyone but if you narrow it then it’s easier for a community to become to feel justified in a reaction to it. And I think the media is very good at this. Like it sells more papers to get people wound up, you know?”

“there’s been more people killed by cows or something like that in Australia than there has by terrorists...”

“Remember when the government, John Howards government wasn’t doing very well and the election was coming up. And the big issue was children overboard. And suddenly because everyone was worried about law and order and being overrun by refugees, their tough stance, and ultimately it was a lie, but their poll seemed to go up. It seemed to be related.”

“Nationalism is so easily manipulated to become racism”

“I think we’ve become totally desensitized. We, we take this shit in our stride. We, we barely see it.”

“We’re part of a global community. We’re not distinguished by our geographic lines. We’re not, we’re not separated by the place that we were born..”
Key References


