Psychological Inflexibility and Prejudiced Reactions When Exposed to Violent ISIS Propaganda

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Psychological Inflexibility and Prejudiced Reactions When Exposed to Violent ISIS Propaganda

Arthur Hatton, M.S.
Events

- June 17, 2015: Dylann Roof, AME Church in Charleston, SC
  - 9 dead, 1 injured
- Nov. 13, 2015: Two suicide bombers, Beirut, Lebanon
  - 40 dead, 200+ wounded
- Nov. 14, 2015: Attacks in Paris, France
  - 129+ dead, 300+ wounded

- Commonalities: All intended to provoke a response/send message – terrorism as “spectacle” (Cowen, 2006)
- Political, social, religious agenda
**ACT Theory**

**Psychological (In)flexibility (Hayes et al., 2006)**

- Stimulus causes **internal discomfort** (thoughts, emotions, sensations)
- Behaviors (internal or external) intended to “downregulate” unwanted internal experiences
  - **Experiential avoidance**
  - External behaviors: e.g., compulsions, avoiding environments or stimuli, sleep, self-harm, suicide
  - Internal behaviors: e.g., rumination, thoughts intended to “fight” unwanted thoughts
High Inflexibility linked to:

- **Psychopathology**
  - Depression, anxiety, stress, somatic symptoms (Bond et al., 2011)
  - Across cultures
    - Spain (Ruiz, Herrera, Luciano, Cangas, & Beltran, 2013)
    - Netherlands (Boelen & Reijntjes, 2008)
    - Asian Americans (Dosheen & Hayes, 2010)
    - Korean-born American adoptees (Sarubbi, Block-Lerner, Moon, & Williams, 2012)
    - Chinese students in Hong Kong (Zhang, Chung, Si, & Liu, 2014)

- **Prejudice**
  - Prejudicial behaviors may be attempts at reducing negative feelings associated with out-groups (Levin, Luoma, Vilardaga, Lillis, Nobles, & Hayes, 2015)
    - Inflexibility linked to prejudice against African Americans, obese individuals, women, gay men, and substance abusers ($r = .28$)
Responses to Terrorism

- Terrorism responses mediated by **fear and anger** (Lerner, Gonzalez, Small, Fischhoff, 2003)
- **Anxiety** mediates support for stronger antiterrorism policies (Huddy, Feldman, Taber, & Lahav, 2005)
Terrorist Events and Inflexibility

Terrorist Event → Unwanted Internal Experience (Negative Affect) → Inflexibility

Low: Acceptance of Unwanted Experience → No Behavioral Change

High: Behavioral Attempts to Reduce Negative Feelings → Decreased "Warmth" Toward Muslims → Support for Prejudicial Policies Against Muslims
Other Question

- Correlation between high inflexibility and intentional news avoidance?
  - Some people intentionally avoid news because it troubles them (Van den Bulck, 2006)
Hypotheses

- H1: **Inflexibility** predicts intentional news avoidance.
- H2: Terrorism video increases **Negative Affect**.
- H3: Terrorism video increases **support for policies that target Muslims**.
- H4: Inflexibility influences **relationship** between Negative Affect and Prejudice.
Method

- **Online sample, student sample**
  - Online sample: Amazon Mechanical Turk
  - Survey built and distributed in Qualtrics
Videos

- **CNN Videos taken from YouTube**
  - CNN video of witnesses testifying in James Holmes Trial
  - CNN video of ISIS beheading 21 Egyptian Christians
    - Shown in previous research to strongly influence mood and opinions toward Muslims
  - CNN video of teacher winning an award
- **Option to skip video**
  - Way to test intentional news avoidance
Measures

- **Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II (AAQ-II)**
  - Measure of psychological inflexibility (Bond et al., 2011)
  - “I’m afraid of my feelings”
  - “My painful memories prevent me from having a fulfilling life.”
  - 1-7 Likert scale (1 = “never true,” 7 = “always true”)

- **PANAS**
  - Measure of both positive and negative state affect (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988)
  - Respondents indicate to what degree they experience various emotions words (e.g., “afraid,” “interested”)
  - Can be modified for various situations or time frames
  - Pre and Post
Policies

- Law enforcement random searches based on Middle Eastern ethnicity
- Law enforcement random searches based on having a Muslim name, clothing, books
- Bans of Syrian refugees entering the country
- All three significantly correlated
  - Student sample ($r = .573-.917$)
  - Online sample: ($r = .598-923$)
Preliminary Analysis

- **Does Inflexibility predict intentional news avoidance?**
  - Answer: **NO**
  - What does predict intentional news avoidance?
    - Negative Affect at beginning of study

- **Does ISIS video increase Negative Affect?**
  - Answer: **YES**

- **Does ISIS video increase support for anti-Muslim policies?**
  - Answer: **NO**
  - What does predict support for anti-Muslim policies?
    - Students: Positive Affect at beginning of study, Negative Affect afterward
    - Online: Negative Affect after video

- **Does inflexibility explain relationship between negative affect and Prejudice?**
  - Answer: **NO**
Conclusions?

- **Inflexibility** does not seem to influence:
  - News avoidance
  - Support for policies that target Muslims

- However, **Affect** does have an influence on both.
  - **Affect at beginning of study** influences news avoidance
    - Whether they watch the video
  - **Affect after watching video** influences policies that target Muslims

- Even if the video had nothing to do with ISIS or terrorism
  - **Affect** still connected
References


