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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



Inflexibility Research

- ▶ 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, Vilaradaga, Lillis, Nobles, & Hayes, 2015)
 - ▶ Inflexibility linked to prejudice against African Americans, obese individuals, women, gay men, and substance abusers ($r = .28$)

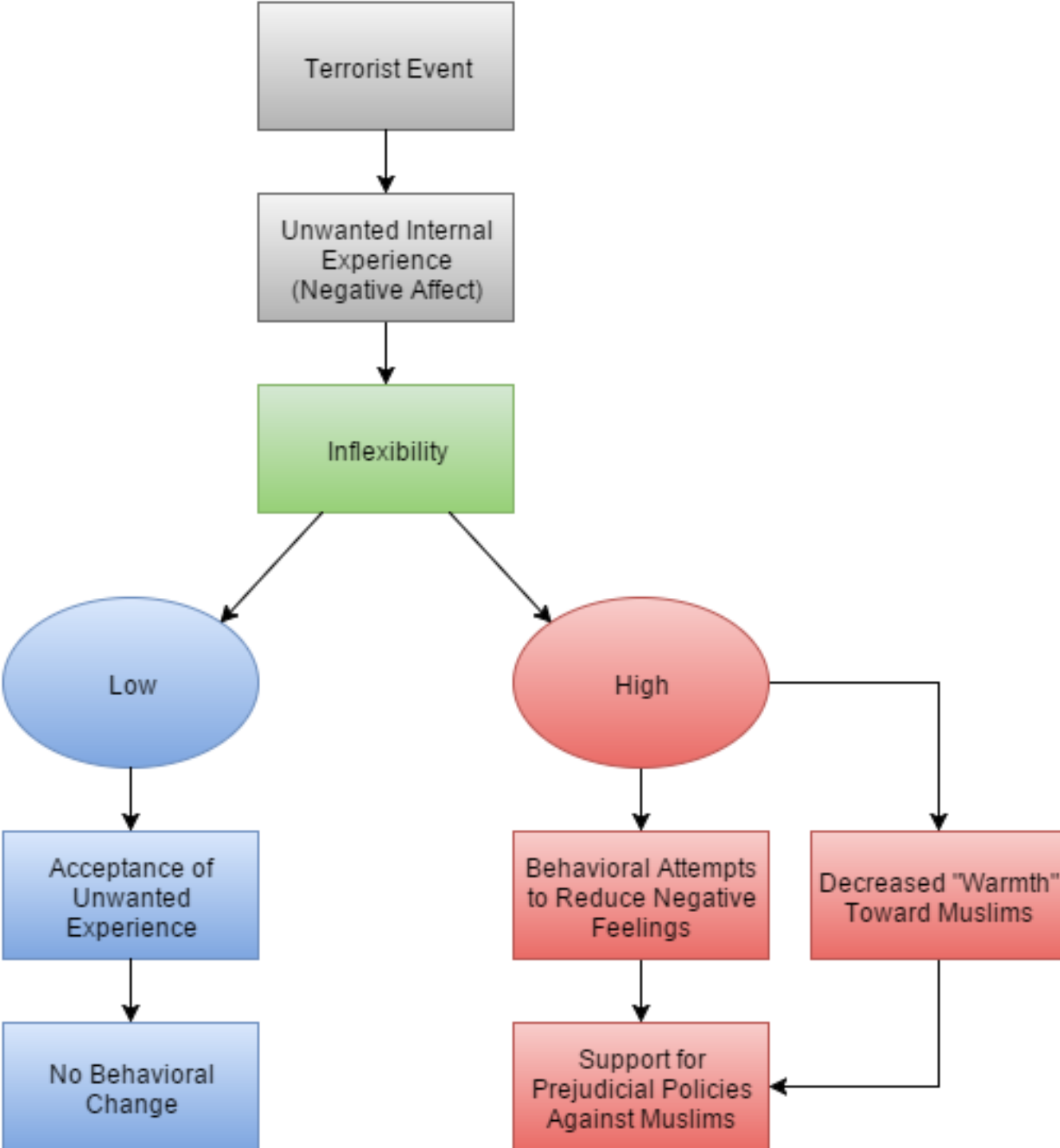


Responses to Terrorism



- ▶ 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





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

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