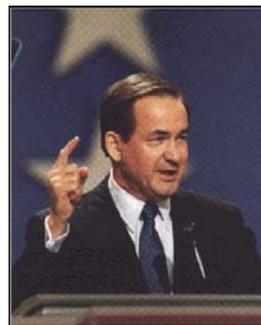


Politics of Denial—Politicians and Recent Research

Milburn
Psychology 335



Bush/Cheney Campaign

- Kerry cannot be trusted to keep America safe from terrorists, from “the enemy” (FEAR)
- War in Iraq was necessary to fight the terrorists there before they come here (FEAR)
- War in Iraq was necessary because we were attacked (FEAR and RETRIBUTION)
- As we saw at the beginning this talk: Activation of emotion → reduces cognitive complexity
- Campaign with this type of emotional content can trigger affect from childhood experiences
- Consistent with Brewin’s (2001) “dual representation theory” of traumatic stress—some memories of trauma (and associated fear) are not verbally accessible, but are situationally accessible through triggering
- Individuals with harsh parenting/trauma in their history will be most susceptible to this form of triggering

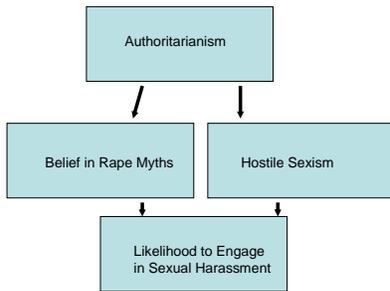
George W. Bush childhood

- Sister died of leukemia at age 3 when he was 7; was not told she was sick until after she died (trauma)
- Physical punishment
- Barbara Bush: Drunken rage at father
- →A pattern of denial (letter from Harvard Business School professor—Yoshi Tsurumi)

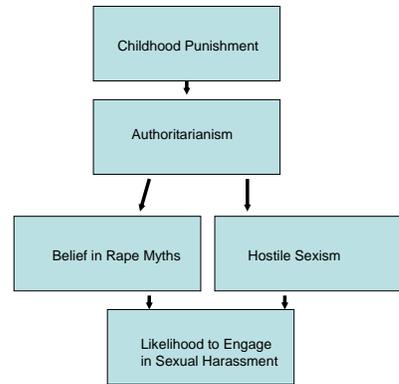
Recent research

- Begany and Milburn (2002)
 - Authoritarianism and sexual harassment
- Liss (2004)
 - Physical punishment, authoritarianism, and sexual harassment

Begany and Milburn (2002)



Liss (2004)



2004 Election year study

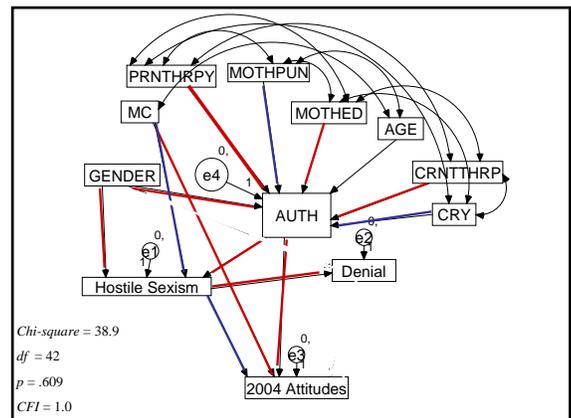
- Sample N=117
 - UMB students (psychology and political science courses)
 - community convenience sample (workers at a local country club)
- Age: mean = 23.2; range 18-50
- Gender: 64% female; 36% male
- Ethnicity: 68% White; 9% African American; 13% Asian American; 4% Latino; 2% Native American
- Therapy: 56% had ever had therapy; 11% currently in therapy; and 27% had cried in therapy; 26% said parents had had therapy

2004 Election year study

- 2004 Election Issues (Cronbach's alpha=.88)
 - Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse necessary for intelligence gathering
 - U.S. media exaggerated Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse
 - Use of torture is at times justifiable
 - War in Iraq necessary to protect US national security
 - Use of death penalty should be expanded
 - Bush handling of environment has been very good
 - Bush handling of economy has been very good

2004 Election year study

- Additional exogenous variables
 - Are you currently in therapy?
 - Have ever cried in therapy?
 - Have your parents had therapy?
- Mediating variables
 - Authoritarianism
 - Hostile Sexism (Fiske and Glick)
 - Denial (“The amount of physical and sexual abuse in this country is greatly exaggerated by the mass media”)
- Structural equation model estimated with AMOS



Conclusions

- Emotion from harsh childhood experiences appears to play a role in the formation of adult support for punitive public policy and authoritarianism
- Punitive authoritarianism is a very destructive force in our political culture
- To the extent to which unresolved emotion from childhood influences political attitudes, they make a poor basis for public policy and contribute to a distortion of the public policy process
- These processes appear to be playing a significant role in the 2004 Presidential election

Conclusions

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