POLES APART? EXPLORING THE EXTENT OF SIMILARITY BETWEEN EXTREME AND NON-EXTREME MESSAGE CONTENT

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EXTREME ON NON-EXTREME?

- "You don't want to be caught red-handed… smash her on a park bench. That used to be my trick"

- "You know girls in general are all right. But some of them are bitches…The bitches are the type that…need to have it stuffed to them hard and heavy"

PERSPECTIVE 1: EXTREME VS. NON-EXTREME

- Grounded in the assumption that extremists possess unusual ways of thinking, or a differing psycho-logic (Merari)

- Language use reflects this (Pennebaker)

- Authors may actively seek to differentiate their rhetoric from that of the 'enemy' (Chowdhury & Krebs, 2010; Awan, 2007)

PERSPECTIVE 1: EXTREME VS. NON-EXTREME

- Smith, Suedfeld, Conway, and Winter (2008)
  - Compared 2 terrorist and 2 non-terrorist groups
- Angie et al. (2011)
  - Compared 29 violent and non-violent message boards
- Payne (2009)
  - Compared Al-Qa'ida and Western Government narratives

PERSPECTIVE 2: EXTREME & NON-EXTREME OVERLAP

- Extremists have been found to demonstrate rationality, which is reflected in their rhetoric (Sprinzak 2000; Stout 2009)

- Mainstream and extreme sources have been found to speak to the same concerns (see Awan, 2007)

- Political and extreme – similar strategies to win over supporters (cf. unifying terms)

PERSPECTIVE 2: EXTREME & NON-EXTREME OVERLAP

May not be strategic or overt…

- Sociolinguistic theory (Joseph, 2004)
- Social identity theory (Tajfel)

Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins (2009) argue against extreme vs. non extreme classification

PERSPECTIVE 2: EXTREME & NON-EXTREME OVERLAP

- Gutmann (2007): extreme literature demeans the out-group and narrows understanding

- Studies of press discourse
  - Discourses of xenophobia, sexism & homophobia; legitimize & remediate extremism

- Studies of political discourse
  - In/out group features; social and moral argumentation; warfare justification

CURRENT STUDY

- Aim: to establish whether there is significant overlap in content between an exemplar set of extreme and non-extreme online messages

MATERIALS

- Extreme corpus: 250 messages, 425,516 words, written by members of known extremist groups

- Counter-extreme corpus: 250 messages, 208,932 words, from Muslim clerics and British Officials

- Mainstream corpus: 250 messages, 107,018 words, drawn from four ME news outlets

PROCEDURE

- Texts analysed via Wmatrix – subject to CLAWS and USAS tagging

- Semantic category lists retrieved for each of the three corpora

- Transferred to log-likelihood spreadsheet

- Used an adaption to keyness to look at both similarities and differences

PROCEDURE

	observed frequencies			Totals	expected frequencies						
Tag	Ext	Coun	Main		corpus1	corpus2	corpus3	LL	Ext O/U	Coun O/U	main O/U
A1.1.1	4799	2829	1175	8803	5110.57	2407.11	1285.32	99.11	U	O	U
A1.1.1-	4	0	0	4	2.32	1.09	0.58	4.35	O	U	U
A1.1.2	1010	454	204	1668	968.36	456.10	243.54	8.57	O	U	U
A1.1.2-	0	1	1	2	1.16	0.55	0.29	3.67	U	O	O
A1.2	4	0	3	7	4.06	1.91	1.02	6.33	U	U	O
A1.2+	89	57	18	164	95.21	44.84	23.95	5.06	U	O	U

<u>Three comparisons:</u>
A1: Extreme, Mainstream and Counter
A2a: Extreme, Mainstream and Muslim Counter
A2b: Extreme, Mainstream and British Official Counter

All use: LL = 3.84; $p < 0.05$

RESULTS: ANALYSIS 1

Category distinction	Extreme	Mainstream	Counter
Significantly overused (LL => 3.84; p < 0.05)	142 $LL < 1$	144	187
		$LL = 10.85,\ p < .001$	
Significantly underused (LL => 3.84; p < 0.05)	200	198	155
		$LL = 11.89,\ p < .001$	
No significant difference across corpora (LL = < 3.84; f > 10)	49	49	49

Number of semantic categories significantly over and underused, and semantic categories showing no significant difference between the extreme, counter and mainstream messages

RESULTS: ANALYSIS 2A

$_{LL}$ = 1.02, p < .5

Category distinction	Extreme	Mainstream	Muslim Counter
Significantly overused (LL => 3.84; p < 0.05)	166	153	120
Significantly underused (LL => 3.84; p < 0.05)	167	180	213

$_{LL}$ = 6.77, p < .01

$_{LL}$ = 13.01, p < .001

Number of semantic categories significantly over and underused, and semantic categories showing no significant difference between the extreme, mainstream, and Muslim authored counter-extreme messages

RESULTS: ANALYSIS 2B

$$_{LL} = 1.35, p < .5$$

Category distinction	Extreme	Mainstream	British Official Counter
Significantly overused (LL => 3.84; p < 0.05)	162	147	152
		$_{LL} < 1$	
Significantly underused (LL => 3.84; p < 0.05)	174	189	184
		$_{LL} < 1$	

Number of semantic categories significantly over and underused, and semantic categories showing no significant difference between the extreme, mainstream and British Official authored counter-extreme messages

SUMMARY

- Analysis 1: extreme and mainstream - close alignment, counter – opposing profile

- Analysis 2a: Muslim counter - opposing

- Analysis 2b: British Official aligns with mainstream & extreme

- Links to work on terrorist pathology
  - Silke, 1998
  - Merari, 1999

What could explain the relationships observed?

- Verbal aggression models from linguistics and psychology

LEVINE ET AL. (2004): MULTIDIMENSIONAL VAS

- Developmental Interactionist Theory and NS
  - two emotional circuits: self protection and social behaviours
- self protection - negative/competitive/aggressive; social behaviours - positive/cooperative
- High cooperativeness + low competiveness or aggressiveness = low relational negativity
- Low cooperativeness + high competitiveness or aggressiveness = high relational negativity

ARCHER (2014): VERBAL AGGRESSION

- Assigns a particular set of USAS categories to verbal aggression
  - *Violent/Angry, Im/politeness, (Lack of) Respect, Damaging and Destroying, Evaluation: Good/Bad, Evaluation: True/False, Comparing: Different, Speech: Communicative/Uncommunicative*, and *Speech Acts: Speaking/Not Speaking*

- Addition of *Warfare* category

ARCHER (2014): APPLICATION

- *Evaluation: Good/Bad, Damaging and Destroying, (Lack of) Respect, Impoliteness* overused by the ext. messages

- shared overuse of *Evaluation: True/False* between ext. and B/O counter messages

- shared overuse of *Violent/Angry* between m/s and B/O counter messages

- overuse of *Warfare* in the m/s messages

ARCHER (2014): APPLICATION

- overuse of *Speech: Communicative* and *Speech Acts* in the mainstream messages

- overuse of *Calm* (an opposition category to *Violent/Angry*), *Anti-War* and *Speech Acts* in the Muslim counter messages

COMBINING ARCHER (2014) & LEVINE ET AL. (2004)

- *Speech: Communicative/Uncommunicative*, and *Speech Acts: Speaking/Not Speaking* taken as 'verbal (un)cooperativeness'

- *Warfare, Violent/Angry, Damaging and Destroying, Im/politeness, Evaluation: True/False, Evaluation: Good/Bad*, and *(Lack of) Respect* are taken as 'verbal (non)aggressiveness'
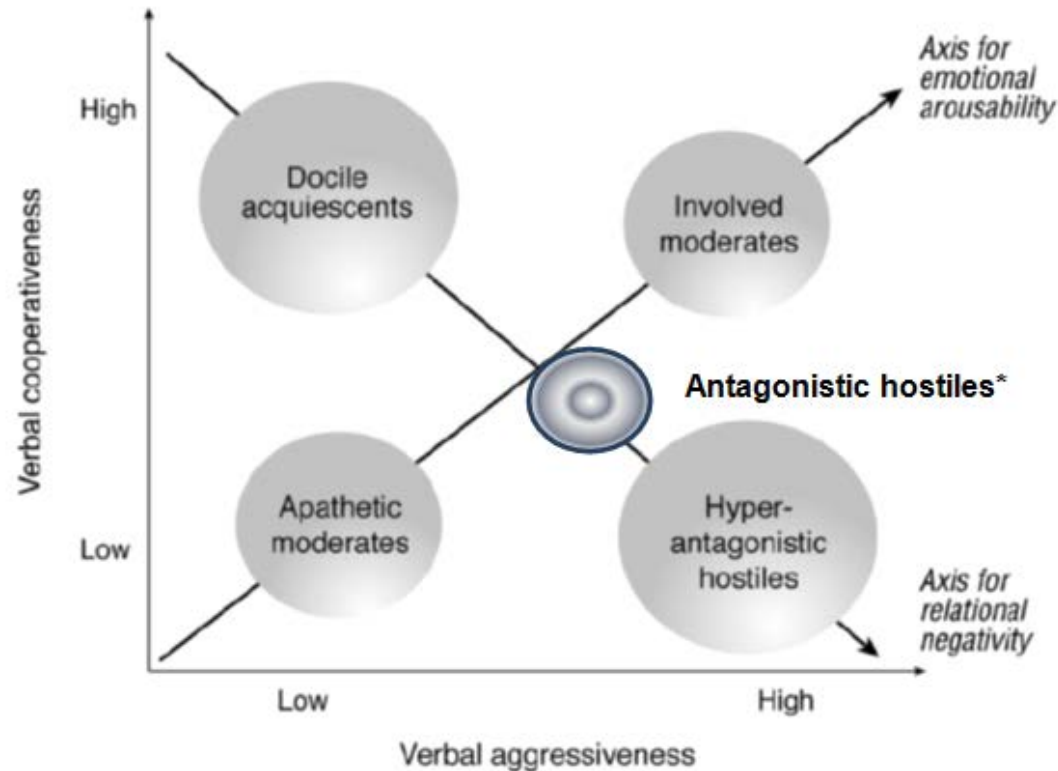
LEVINE ET AL. (2004): APPLICATION

Figure 2: Multidimensional scale of verbal aggression and cooperativeness, adapted from

Levine et al. (2004). The asterisk (*) indicates author's addition.

LEVINE ET AL. (2004): CAUSAL CHAIN

- Belief Systems Theory
  - one's self concept acts as an "antecedent to generalized beliefs about others such as hostility and anxiety or attachment and caring" (Levine et al. 2004, 264; citing research by Hamilton and Mineo 1999)

LEVINE ET AL. (2004): CAUSAL CHAIN

- egocentric standpoint > hostile beliefs > verbally aggressive predisposition > aggressive message selection

- personally empathetic > attachment/care > verbally cooperative predisposition > cooperative message selection

- Originally developed for individuals
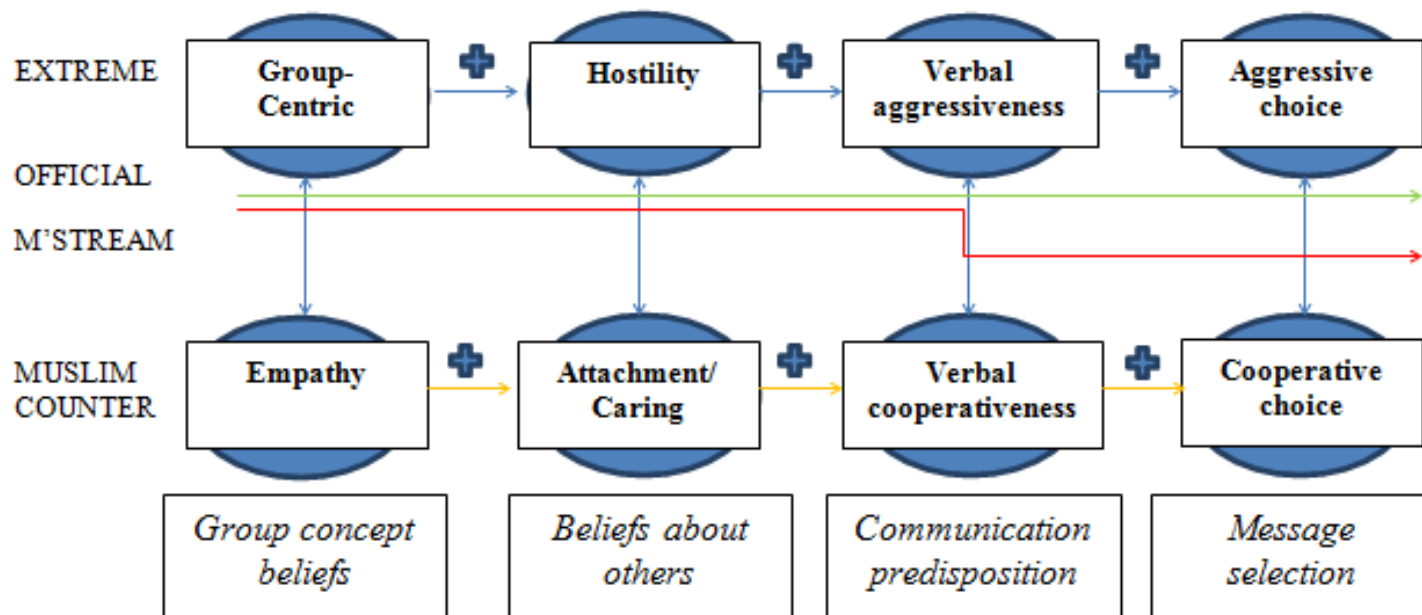
LEVINE ET AL. (2004): APPLICATION

Figure 3: Causal chain model, adapted from Levine et al. (2004, p. 264).

CONCLUSION & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Further work needed
- Key finding
- Implications for counter-terrorism research and policy
- Method may be underestimating similarities
- Effects of differing content coding system or comparison statistic

Thank you!

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