



Presentation Abstract

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Presentation Title: Neural responses to narratives framed with sacred values

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Authors: ***S. I. GIMBEL**¹, J. T. KAPLAN¹, M. H. IMMORDINO-YANG¹, C. M. TIPPER¹, A. S. GORDON², M. DEHGHANI¹, K. SAGAE², H. DAMASIO¹, A. DAMASIO¹;
¹Brain and Creativity Inst., ²Inst. for Creative Technologies, USC, Los Angeles, CA

Abstract: A listener's psychological reaction to narrated events is influenced by how the narrator frames the events and appeals to a variety of values, knowledge, and experiences of the listener. Narrative framing that targets the *sacred values* of the listener, including core personal, national and/or religious values, may be particularly effective at influencing the listener's interpretation of narrated events. *Sacred values* are values that resist compromise; they are closely tied with the psychology of identity, emotion, moral decision-making, and social cognition (Baron & Spranca, 1997; Tetlock et al. 2000, Tetlock, 2003). We refer to narrative framing that appeals to sacred values as *sacred framing*. When sacred framing is applied to mundane issues, listeners may react to the issues differently, relying on sacred principles instead of engaging in utilitarian reasoning. In this study, we sought to understand the neuropsychological mechanisms underlying the effects of sacred framing on a listener's interpretation of events. We began by distilling real-life stories of moral transgressions justified using sacred values from millions of personal blog posts on the web, annotated and piloted in 200 subjects. We then presented 30 American participants with these stories during fMRI scanning, and asked participants to answer questions about the motivations and values of the narrative protagonist. Brain responses to narratives were examined based on whether the narratives resonated with a reader's own sacred values, which had been collected prior to the fMRI experiment. We found that when participants believed that the blog-writer was appealing to a sacred value in framing their transgression, there was greater activity in brain regions known to be key hubs linking emotion, cognition, and action, including bilateral posteromedial cortices (PMC) and left temporal-parietal junction (TPJ).

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