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Imagined interactions as a link to political talk

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IMAGINED INTERACTIONS

AS A LINK TO POLITICAL TALK

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What is an Imagined Interaction (II)?

An II is a cognitive process where individuals indirectly experience themselves in past or future communication interactions with others through their imagination (Honeycutt, 2003).

Types of IIs

Proactive IIs: occur when individuals imagine a conversation before it takes place (Honeycutt, 2008).

Retroactive IIs: occur after a real interaction has taken place (Honeycutt, 2010).

Family Types (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997)

Pluralistic Families: Communication in these families is characterized by open, unconstrained discussions that involve all family members.

Consensual Families: Communication in this family type is characterized by a tension between pressure to agree and to preserve the existing hierarchy within the family, and an interest in open communication and in exploring new ideas

Protective Families: There is an emphasis on obedience and there is little concern for discussions of conceptual matters

Laissez-faire Families: Children from these families will likely be influenced more by external social groups such as teachers or peers.

Purpose of Study

The current study examined individuals' imagined interactions (IIs) regarding conversations about politics with family members. Researchers wanted to know the content and form of IIs about politics with a family member and if participants of different family types differed on their use of II functions and II characteristics.

Methods

Participants

Two hundred and thirty-eight undergraduates participated in this study. Participant age ranged from 17 to 48 ($M = 21.98$, $SD = 5.03$). The study included 133 women (56%), 100 men (42%), and five participants (2%) did not report their sex. The data included participants from pluralistic families ($n = 73$, 30.6%), protective families ($n = 71$, 29.8%), laissez-faire families ($n = 54$, 22.6%), and consensual families ($n = 40$, 16.8%). Participants reported party affiliation, which included Democrats ($n = 94$, 39.5%), Republicans ($n = 67$, 28.2%), Independents ($n = 50$, 21%), Libertarians ($n = 5$, 2%), other ($n = 17$, 7.2%) and five did not respond.

Procedures

Participants completed an online survey where they recorded retroactive and proactive IIs, and completed a set of measures regarding their family and political affiliation.

RQs and Hypotheses

RQ1: What are the content characteristics of proactive and retroactive IIs? (See table below)

RQ2: What are the most helpful II functions for conversations about politics with a family member? The participants' conversations about politics functioned most through catharsis ($M = 3.04$; $SD = .55$), self-understanding ($M = 3.02$; $SD = .797$) and rehearsal ($M = 3.01$; $SD = .86$).

RQ3: What are the characteristics of political IIs with a family member? The top three II characteristics were valence ($M = 3.05$; $SD = .66$), specificity ($M = 3.01$; $SD = .58$) and dominance ($M = 2.94$; $SD = .60$).

RQ4: Do family types differ on II functions? Individuals in consensual families had the highest II value for frequency ($M = 2.6$; $SD = .86$), proactivity ($M = 2.99$; $SD = .84$), retroactivity ($M = 3.16$; $SD = .80$), variety ($M = 2.97$; $SD = .50$), valence ($M = 3.35$; $SD = .61$), and specificity ($M = 3.16$; $SD = .59$).

H1: II frequency and valence will be positively correlated for individuals in pluralistic families. Hypothesis One received partial support.

H2: II valence will be highest for individuals in pluralistic families. Hypothesis Two received partial support

H3: II discrepancy will be lowest for individuals in pluralistic families. Hypothesis Three was partially supported

H4: II discrepancy will be highest for individuals in consensual families. Hypothesis Four was not supported

H5: Compared to other family types, individuals in protective families will reflect the most verbal aggression in their IIs about politics with a family member. Hypothesis Five was supported

H6: II frequency and valence will be negatively correlated for individuals in laissez faire families. Hypothesis Six received partial support

H7: II valence will be lowest for individuals in laissez faire families. Hypothesis Seven received partial support.

Proactive & Retroactive II Conversation Topics

Topic	Proactive (Frequency/ Percent)	Retroactive (Frequency/Percent)
Political Candidate	($n = 57$, 23.9%)	($n = 46$, 19.4%)
Domestic Issues	($n = 52$, 21.8%)	($n = 54$, 22.7%)
President Obama	($n = 50$, 21%)	($n = 53$, 22.3%)
Party Affiliation	($n = 25$, 10.5%)	($n = 16$, 6.7%)

Conversation Form

Exchange of ideas: An exchange of ideas including a two-way, in-depth discussion or exchange of feelings, opinions, or ideas (Proactive $n = 70$, 30.4%; Retroactive ($n = 82$, 35%).

Gossip/complaining: Conversations where there was an exchange of negative opinions or information about a person or topic (Proactive $n = 55$, 24%; Retroactive $n = 48$, 20.5%).

Information seeking: A two way conversation where one person is seeking information from the other (Proactive $n = 24$, 10.4%; Retroactive $n = 26$, 11.1%).

Recapping the day's events/forecasting: Conversations involving either an individual asking about another's day or forecasting a voting behavior (Proactive $n = 21$, 9.1%; Retroactive $n = 30$, 12.8%).

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