

UConn Cognitive Science Colloquium Series presents

The Psychology of Incitement and Hate Speech: A Dialogue Between Law and Social Science



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University of Connecticut**

Friday, February 22nd, 4pm, Oak 117

We live in an era of nativist populism, characterized by speech that incites violence on social media, and an escalation in hate crimes. Recent social science research has identified a correlation between online incitement and offline hate crimes in the United States and Europe. What kinds of speech are the most likely to instigate acts of violence? The current research identifies revenge propaganda as the most likely type to instigate atrocities. We coded 242 speeches by a Serbian politician for references to revenge, nationalism, stereotyping, dehumanization, justice, victimization, past atrocities, political institutions and direct threats. After reading one speech or a control, participants answered questions about empathy, intentionality, and whether violence is morally justifiable. Only speeches focusing on revenge and past atrocities intensified justifications of violence. Only revenge speech increased overall negative attitudes towards the out-group. On the level of personality, those who are more politically conservative, feel the world is unjust, engage more in violent media and are male are more likely to justify violence. These findings have implications for the elusive goal of preventing atrocities. The regulatory framework established fifty years ago in the United States is showing signs of severe strain, and this research draws upon behavioral research to construct a systematic evidence-based framework for analyzing the risk that inciting speech will result in imminent lawless action.

If you are interested in meeting with Professor Wilson on 2/22, please contact Dr. Xygalatas: dimitris.xygalatas@uconn.edu