Moral politics
how big business bought your brain
(and how you might resist)
the science of framing political debate

How Donald Trump was elected to the US presidency
presentation of ideas of George Lakoff
Strict father model

• **gendered** system

• child is inherently **bad**, needs discipline (punishment) to become **moral**

• **moral beings** are disciplined and can successfully pursue self-interest

• **wealth** accrues to moral beings

• moral people should **rule**
Moral order

- God above Man
- Man above nature
- adults above children
- Western above other cultures
- US above other nations

BIGOTED VERSION
- men above women
- whites above non-whites
- straights above gays
- Christians above non-Christians
Nurturing parent model

- both parents have equal responsibility
- parents should nurture children and bring them up to become nurturers
- to nurture you need empathy and responsibility
- government should protect people like this (environmental protection, consumer protection, worker protection)
- you need to be happy to nurture others (fair, caring, honest communities)
Moral politics: Lakoff

- everyone grows up with both models
  Schwarzenegger movie (strict family morality)
  Oprah (nurturing parent morality)

- mixed morality: many people are in the middle and can be persuaded by appeals to morality rather than issues

- blue collar union member with strict father morality at home can be attracted to conservatism by strict father metaphors
Progressive thought

• Enlightenment: rationalism

• we are all equally rational beings so we can govern ourselves => democratic government

• it’s irrational to be against material interests

• facts matter because they have consequences for materials interests

• so if people are given facts they will act rationally
BUT framing

- metaphorical thought
- subconscious
- influences our perceptions and decisions
1971 Chamber of Commerce

- **best and brightest** of American students were *not* becoming conservative businessmen

- wealthy conservative businessmen need to pool resources to
  - endow *university* chairs
  - set up *think tanks*
  - publish *research* and control *media*

- **train conservative leaders** using Orwellian language when necessary
Strict father: fundamental frames

• it’s only individual initiative that’s made this country great

• everyone can pull themselves up by their own bootstraps

• government interferes with process of individuals pursuing wealth

• individuals know better than government how to spend their money
Nurturing parent: fundamental frames

- use common wealth for common good
- public resources make private enterprise possible
- freedom from ignorance, disease, and want is essential for everyone
Donald Trump and the strict father frame

Unconscious thought works by certain basic mechanisms. Trump uses them instinctively to turn people’s brains toward what he wants: Absolute authority, money, power, and celebrity.
1 Repetition

• *Win, win, win*

• the more a word is heard, the more people expect to hear it
2 Framing

• Crooked Hillary

• immorality (in strict father terms) equals illegality
3 Repeated examples

• news reports of black, Muslim, Latino shootings

• creates fear and desire for strict father
4 Grammar

- radical Islamic terrorist
- suggests that terrorism is inherent in Islam
5 Metaphor

- make America great again
- as if a past ideal can be recreated (by electing Trump)
other metaphors

- country as person (strong leader, strong country)
- nation as family (strong head of family)
- national heritage equals nationality
- naming is identifying (*call someone out*)
Moral politics
how big business bought your brain

How can Americans resist?
What the Majority Can Do

• strong **American Majority movement** is necessary

• **framing American values** accurately and systemically day after day

• appealing honestly and forthrightly to those **in-group nurturant values** in small towns across America.

• basic **progressive thought**: citizens care about citizens and provide public resources for all, maximizing freedom

• it **undermines** — rather than negates — strict father morality.
Moral politics

What of the role of business interests and media manipulation in Europe?

What can we learn from the American example?
Sources

- https://georgelakoff.com
- Images: pixabay.com