# *QUEST*

Sunday, January 11 at 9:15 in Dobkin Hall
Childcare Provided

## *Bridging the Divides*

## *with Heidi Kaufman*

When we think about making a convincing argument to someone who is more conservative or liberal than we are, we often assume our persuasiveness is based on the strength of the facts, information, or rationale.  But, what if that's not the case? What if the facts take a back seat to the moral values the argument is based on?

Johnathan Haidt and other social psychologists have found our ability to persuade may depend less on the quality of information and more on incorporating the other person's moral values in our arguments. Liberals tend to value fairness, reciprocity and caring above all others. Conservatives tend to value group loyalty, sanctity, and purity above all others.

To be persuasive they advocate including the moral perspectives of those more conservative or liberal than you are.

George Lakoff, who specializes in the way our brains use language, also believes underlying moral values provide a framework for understanding and interpreting the world we live in. He believes the words we use and how we frame the arguments from those moral perspectives are key to shaping how people think about an issue.

Bridging the divides may also depend on how well we can expand our vision of who WE are from the small tribal worldview to a much larger All of US.

Join us this Sunday as we discuss some of the ways in which we can bridge the divides, expand the WE and diffuse the power of those who fuel and exploit those divisions.

**Please see video, article and the Lakoff approach to prepare for the discussion**

Jonathan Haidt: Can a divided America heal? | TED Talk

To lead in a divided world, learn how to close the empathy gap | NDDCEL (see the video on Political Persuasion).

**George Lakoff's Approach**

George Lakoff argues that language frames shape thought and politics, advocating for progressives to use moral, value-based language like "protections" instead of technical terms like "regulations". He emphasizes that, from the public's perspective, most regulations exist to protect people from harm. Using this language focuses on care, safety, and mutual responsibility rather than just bureaucracy.

**Key Framing Strategies (Lakoffian Perspective):**

- **"Protections" over "Regulations":** Instead of saying "government regulation," use "public protection" to highlight the benefit (e.g., worker protection, consumer protection).
- **"Corporate Harm" over "Market Freedoms":** Shift the focus from free-market ideology to how specific actions impact the public's well-being.
- **"Public Resource" over "Burden":** Frame taxes and government programs as investments and shared resources ("public treasures") that protect our shared life.

- **"Nurturing Government" over "Nanny State":** Frame the role of government as a protector (or "nurturant parent") that provides safety, health, and a fair environment.
- **"Responsibility to Nature" over "Environmental Cost":** Frame climate change and ecological issues as the need to protect our, and future generations', living environment.

**Examples of Reframing:**

- Instead of "Tax Relief," use **"Tax Fairness"** or **"Public Investment"**.
- Instead of "Environmental Regulation," use **"Environmental Protection"**.
- Instead of "Health Care Overhaul," use **"Health Care Coverage"** or **"Protection"**.
- Instead of "No Tree Left Behind" (referring to forestry policy), use **"Clear-Cutting Protection"**.

By using words that evoke protection, care, and responsibility, the conversation shifts to the shared values that the community cares about, rather than technical debates.

## Questions to consider

1) What do you think about the claim that the moral values underpinning the argument are more important than the facts or logic?

1) In the TED interview they both talked about how the concepts of WE and US are fluid and the conceptual WE can be expanded. Can we think of some ways to expand the conceptual WE on the topic of immigration? How might we do that?

2) What are your thoughts about incorporating the moral perspective of the more conservative person?

3) What about Lakoff's approach using language that emphasizes protection, care and responsibility? Can we get more of that in our discourse with others on the other side of the divide?

4) Johathan Haidt talks practically about having conversations with that friend or relative on the other side of the divide. Have you had any conversations with a relative or friend where the conversation focused on finding points of common ground and the ability to reframe your point of view to include their conservative values or reframing using the type of words Lakoff suggests?