

The pot calling the kettle black

The Australian Psychological Society wishes to register its strong objection to the 'advertisement' posted by the Climate Study Group in The Australian (7 August). The advertisement, 'Psychology and the New Climate Storm' misuses psychology-based arguments to add credibility to myths and misinformation about climate change. In doing so, the authors illustrate aptly the very error bias (confirmation bias) they are erroneously attributing to the climate science community.

To accept the evidence for human-caused global warming is not an 'error bias'. It is a rational conclusion following from a 97% scientific consensus that fossil fuel usage is causing climate change. This established scientific fact has been succinctly summarised by the two most prestigious scientific institutions in the world, The Royal Society (founded in 1662) and the US National Academy of Sciences. In February 2014 they jointly published '[Climate change: Evidence & Causes](#)' which outlines unequivocally how fossil fuel burning is dangerously altering our climate and how urgent action is required.

Rather, the authors, are demonstrating their own cognitive biases, favouring information that confirms their previously existing beliefs or biases, and maybe their vested interests, and ignoring the conclusions of a huge body of published scientific evidence conducted by thousands of different scientists from across the globe on how fossil fuel usage is causing climate change.

There is a growing body of empirical research into the psychology of climate science denial, and a number of these characteristics are on display in the Climate Study Group's advertisement. One example is cherry picking (overlooking all the warming indicators observed all over our climate, to choose isolated indicators of the contrary). Another characteristic is the deployment of logical fallacies, such as the common "jumping to conclusions" fallacy when arguing that natural past climate changes rule out a human role in modern climate change.

We do have very good evidence from published social science studies that most Australians accept that climate change is real (despite some media statements to the contrary). According to the social psychology theories on which the concept of confirmatory bias is based, we would expect the Australian public to be motivated to deny the disturbing realities of climate change, so that their relatively comfortable fossil-fuel dependent lifestyles could remain undisturbed. Yet this is clearly not the case.

There is little question that the threat of climate change is a powerful and ongoing environmental stressor, which is already having very real and adverse impacts on psychological health and well-being, on perceived quality of life and environment, and on the very survival of whole populations.

The Australian Psychological Society was disturbed to see psychology being misused to mislead the public on such an important topic as climate change, and for this to be published in a reputable newspaper.

Professor Lyn Littlefield
Executive Director
The Australian Psychological Society
Please contact: Karen Coghlan on 03 8662 6638
k.coghlan@psychology.org.au