

Fear Tactics & Persuasion

- Short lecture
- Film demonstrating fear tactics
- Post-film discussion
- Successful persuasion often depends on appealing to our _____ more than our reason
- The _____ does not have to be positive
 - Charitable foundations use guilt
 - Advertisers use insecurity (e.g., body odor, bad breath)

Fear tactics

- Insecurity or anxiety-driven ads are an example of “fear tactics”
- Scaring people into doing what you want them to do can be extremely effective
- Parents, teachers, and preachers alike appear to THINK they work
- But only when you provide a _____

Fear tactics model

You can sketch it in here, but the main point is that you need to provide a solution in order to be persuasive.

What happens if you don't provide a solution? _____

Political Ads & Fear Tactics

- Lyndon Johnson vs. Barry Goldwater
 - LBJ ad showed a little girl in a flower garden
 - A countdown began, ending with nuclear blast

The message?

- Goldwater was a warmonger
- The ad played only once, never mentioned Goldwater's name, but was extremely effective because it played on people's fears of a nuclear holocaust
- A solution was provided (vote for Johnson)

Willie Horton

- When Michael Dukakis ran against George Bush (Sr.), he was the victim of scare tactics
- Bush claimed his opponent was “soft on crime” because Willie Horton was paroled (and subsequently raped again)
- The ad also played to racist attitudes because Willie was Black

“ _____ ”

- Scare tactics are so common they can boomerang
- During the 2000 presidential debates, Gore frequently announced he would put Medicare into a “locked box” to keep it safe for Seniors
- Bush (Jr.) successfully undermined this tactic by repeatedly calling it “ _____ ”

Using fear tactics to do good

- In the late 70’s, NJ noticed a large increase in juvenile crime
- Lifers at Rahway prison created a program, documented in *Scared Straight*

Did it work?

- We’re about to find out:
- *Scared Straight: 10 Years After*

Post-film

- _____ of the JD’s in the program responded to the Scared Straight program
- But is there any other factor we should consider? What else, besides the program, were the kids involved in? _____
- What would you need, as a scientist, to be convinced that the program works?
- An _____ – you’d need to randomly assign some kids to program, some not
- Later, see how many crimes they committed

Rutgers study

- Dr. James Finckenauer (RU sociologist) tried to do just that
- He was concerned about the hype surrounding the film (which won awards and put pressure on politicians to instigate similar “miracle” programs in their own states)

Film Publicity

- I don't want you to think these facts are true, so I won't include them in the notes; instead, consider these statements (including the one below) to be HYPE
- 80% - 90% of the kids in THIS unique program are 'Scared Straight'
- Take an hour and watch this powerful approach work.

Finckenauer

- Wasn't convinced – he wanted hard data to answer the questions:
- What is the actual success rate of the program?
- Does it change the attitudes or behavior of juveniles?
- Has deterrence, the theory upon which the program is based, been shown to be effective?

RU Study

- NJ social workers were responsible for determining who went to Rahway
- He asked 21 NJ agencies to help him with the study, but only 9 agreed (very protective of the program)
- He was given 81 kids to study – 45 went to Rahway (experimentals) and 36 did not (controls)
- They were similar in age, race, SES, and propensity to commit a crime before the study

RU Study

- For example, 19 kids in the experimental group had a prior record, comparable to the 21 in the control group
- 6 months afterwards, the kids who went to Rahway were _____ to commit crimes than controls
- In fact, ___ who went to Rahway *with a prior record* were subsequently arrested, compared with ___ in the control group

Attitude change?

- He also looked at attitude change, and found that experimentals and controls showed approximately the same attitudes toward crime, the police, and prison
- He concludes that deterrence _____

Key Conclusions

Just listen to what Finckenauer wrote in his paper about his study.

The result?

- States like MN rejected a plan to instigate the program (it appeared not to work)
- And the program today has fallen on hard times (it no longer exists)
- But from a scientific standpoint, should we question the RU study? Yes/No

The fatal flaw

- Unfortunately, the researcher depended on NJ agencies (e.g., social workers) to give him the subjects for his study
- He then used random assignment – but only after they had pre-selected the group
- It turns out that the agencies were not choosing _____ juvenile delinquents for the study
- In a misguided effort to protect the program, they were choosing basically “ _____ ”
- As a result, do we know whether the program is really effective or not for JDs? Yes/No

Why not re-do the study?

- The judge in charge of the program was furious about the results
- He refused to allow any other researchers to re-do the study – he was so convinced the program worked he didn't want to be contradicted again
- Because the program is now defunct, we will NEVER know what, if any, real effect it had on JDs
- Why don't we know from the ones used in the film? _____

Summary

- Fear tactics work best when you provide _____
- The Rahway program certainly scared people, and seems to have worked on the kids in the film, but the program was confounded with _____
- Due to a failure of _____, we do not know if the program works
- And we'll never know, given the politics that prevented good science from taking place

For more information

- You can go to Finckenauer's website
- <http://www.ncianet.org/scared.html>
- Or type into your browser: Scared Straight – A Second Look