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 (experimental) 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 experimental 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