

(CR)²

Center for Risk Communication Research

Department of Communication
University of Maryland

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Risky Business

A Note From the (CR)² Director



The ongoing economic crisis has Americans across the nation feeling like they are on an emotional rollercoaster. We do not have to look very far to understand why. Most everyone has friends or family members who is at risk of losing their life savings, having their homes foreclosed on, or losing their jobs. Research has shown that these stress-laden risks can negatively impact individuals' health and well-being in many ways. The reality of risks is compounded by the endless stream of media messages warning about the

risk severity, telling us how we should think about risks, and coaching us on ways to handle risk. Competing messages from media, friends and family members, troubled companies (call AIG's 1-800 number and press "1" to hear a note from their CEO), and government agencies leave consumers wondering who to trust. Should struggling homeowners call their mortgage lender to renegotiate loan payments or try to sell the house to avoid foreclosure? Should investors get out of the stock market to protect their retirement accounts or, as billionaire mogul Warren Buffet suggested, "be greedy when others are fearful?" And what about savings—are banks still the best place for nest-eggs or should we return to the days of stashing cash under mattresses? As Americans face risk-related decisions head-on, anger, confusion, and frustration are just a

few of the emotions shaping decision making processes. Media messages, emotions, and perceptions intersect to affect how decisions are made and whether risks are effectively mitigated, but we still have little understanding about this intersection. Much is to be discovered about how risks are defined by media, how risk perceptions are formed, and how emotions affect future behaviors. This is true for all kinds of risk—food safety, public health, environmental protection, and national security included.

(CR)² continues to expand the body of knowledge related to understanding many aspects of crises and risk. The theoretical areas we have expertise in—risk perception, prevention, decision making, and media influence—will allow us to generate research findings that will help practitioners and scholars alike. I want our research to advance theory and push the scientific envelope, and help people that actually have to communicate about risk, help others make decisions, or develop risk prevention messages. As risk communication scholars we have a unique role in the field of scholarly research. Our research will impact the way that decisions—large and small—are made for years to come. We understand that responsibility and are committed to working with experienced practitioners and top scholars to produce the highest quality research possible.

Please continue to visit our website and stay up-to-date on the research projects being conducted at the center. Let us know what questions you would like elucidated. We appreciate the work many of you are doing to help others handle the risks they face. We are privileged to have the opportunity to conduct the research that helps you do your job.

Until next time,

Dr. Monique Mitchell Turner, Director



Risky Business

(CR)² Fall Reception 2008

(CR)² hosted the center's annual campus reception on Tuesday, October 14, 2008 from 4:00-6:00 pm in the Benjamin Banneker Room of the Stamp Student Union. With over 40 individuals in attendance, including graduate students, faculty, and staff from campus departments and colleges including the School of Public Health, the College of Journalism, Environmental Research and Safety, Nutrition and Food Science, and Communication, the fall reception was largely successful.

The (CR)² Fall Reception provided a chance for interested faculty and staff members and graduate students in related areas to learn more about the center and how to become involved for research collaboration. Interested parties could sign up to be involved with the center more in the future and to be informed of center updates. Center Director, Dr. Monique Mitchell Turner, presented on the center and collaboration opportunities. Researchers affiliated with the center displayed posters on selected center research projects and were available for discussion of these initiatives. Light refreshments were served. If you missed out on the fall reception and would like to be involved with the center in the upcoming year or would simply like to find out more information about possible collaboration opportunities, please email the center at riskcenter@umd.edu.



Fall Reception: (CR)² affiliates and interested individuals mingle and talk about risk communication.



Fall Reception: (CR)² graduate student, Rowie Kirby, discusses center research projects with an interested individual.

(CR)² Featured Research Project: Retailer Grant

Oftentimes, after a food recall, sales in that particular food decrease. Such decreases can lead to economic problems and may have health related consequences as well. Such was the case after the 2006 spinach recall. But, what is unclear is whether the plummeting sales of spinach, for example, were due to consumers' lack of desire to eat spinach or the lack of spinach being sold in grocery stores. That is, it might be that produce managers assumed people would not eat spinach and therefore bought less of the product. Professors Monique Turner and Xiaoli Nan along with Dr. Linda Verrill from the FDA will be investigating this issue with their new \$200,000 grant from the Joint Institute for Food

Safety and Applied Nutrition and the FDA. They will examine the predictors of retailer's decisions to stock particular foods following a food recall. The researchers hope that their data will help practitioners understand the risk perceptions of retailers and develop effective risk messages tailored at this audience.



Fall Reception: Center Director Monique Turner presents about the Center for Risk Communication Research to interested faculty, staff, and students.



5th Annual Advisory Board Meeting

The Center for Risk Communication Research will hold the 2008 Annual Advisory Board Meeting Monday, December 1 through Tuesday, December 2, at the Greenbelt Marriott in Greenbelt, MD. Advisory Board Meetings provide a chance for members to offer advice and direction to the (CR)² in terms of research goals and center projects. Board members will learn about the work taking place in the center and have the opportunity to reevaluate the center's strategic vision, and share in dialogue about risk communication research.

The Advisory Board Meeting will begin the evening of Monday, December 1, from 4:30-7:30 pm at the Greenbelt Marriott with a welcome reception, colloquium, and dinner. The keynote speaker for the evening will be Dr. Issac Lipkus, Duke University Medical Center, speaking on "Cancer Risk Communication: Glimpses into a Program of Research." The meeting will reconvene on December 2, from 8:30 am to 4:00 pm with breakfast and lunch included.

Center affiliates including faculty affiliates, working group members, and research and grant team members are all welcome to attend the 2008 Advisory Board Meeting. To RSVP for the event, please contact Christine Skubisz at riskcenter@umd.edu.

*Note: CORRECTION—The last issue of *Risky Business* listed the Annual Advisory Board meeting at the "3rd Annual Meeting." Last year's meeting was the 4th Annual Meeting.

(CR)² Names 2008- 2012 Advisory Board Members

The new Advisory Board for 2008-2012 has now been named, and all new and continuing members are listed below. More information about these individuals will be posted soon on the center's Web site.

Ileana Arias, Dir., National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC
Christine Bruhn, Dir., Center for Consumer Research, Univ. of California, Davis
David Cantor, Westat and Joint Program in Survey Methodology, UMDCP
Carol Freeman, VP, Communication and Health Marketing, Macro International
Robert S. Gold, Dean, School of Public Health, UMDCP
Jim Hammitt, Prof. of Econ. and Decision Sciences, Dept. of Health Policy & Management, Harvard Center for Risk Analysis
Gary LaFree, Dir., START, DHS Center of Excellence, UMDCP
Richard Muth, Dir., Maryland Emergency Management Agency
Nancy M. Ostrove, Dir. of Risk Communications, FDA
Roxanne Parrot, Prof., Dir. of Center for Health and Risk Communication, Dept. of Communication Arts & Sciences, Penn State Univ.
Richard C. Pleus, Director, Intertox
Rajiv Rimal, Assoc. Prof., John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
Kathy Rowan, Prof., Assoc. Chair, Dept. of Communication, George Mason Univ.
John Strand, VP and Dir., Center for Social Marketing and Behavior Change, AED
Jana Telfer, Assoc. Dir. of Communication, National Center for Environmental Health, CDC
Rear Admiral Robert C. Williams, P.E., DEE, U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps

(CR)² Research Project: TESS

Events like 9-11, Hurricane Katrina, and other intense natural disasters have intensified scrutiny of government's approach to emergency preparedness. Unfortunately, most Americans have not taken action to prepare for possible disaster or terrorist activity in their community. Despite an effort by the government at increasing preparedness, these campaigns have been largely ineffective.

"It is critical for campaign message designers to understand how to communicate disaster preparedness messages to effectively influence attitudes and behaviors regarding preparedness," noted Dr. Monique Mitchell Turner, "Practitioners would be well served to focus on increasing risk perceptions and behavioral intentions." Because a major research objective of Turner's is to study the interplay of emotion and risk, she saw an opportunity to test and advance theory within the timely context of emergency preparedness.

Dr. Turner proposed a field experiment to the Time-sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (TESS), which is part of a larger National Science Foundation grant (NSF Grant 0647660, Diana C. Mutz and Matthew Davis, Principal Investigators). The proposal, which was awarded, paid for Dr. Turner, and her graduate assistant Jill Cornelius Underhill, to examine the effects of emotional appeals on preparedness. The field experiment drew a random sample (N = 551) from Knowledge Network's nationally representative panel.

Emergency preparedness public service announcements that varied by emotional appeal and intensity level were created. All versions of the PSA made recommendations on simple preparedness activities (i.e. making a first aid kit) and directed listeners to visit Ready.gov for more information about preparing. The PSAs were designed to elicit anger, guilt, fear, or no emotion. The intensity of the emotional appeals was then adjusted by varying the severity of consequences and intensity of adjectives used in the PSA.

All participants listened to one PSA and then completed posttest measures assessing emotional reaction, risk perception, and behavioral intention. Results showed that the emotion and intensity of an appeal can affect risk perceptions. Participants who listened to a fear appeal perceived different levels of risk from those who received the other messages, when making assessments for the likelihood of a terrorist attack in his or her community. Moreover, high intensity appeals elicited the highest perceptions of risk. Although the emotion and intensity of the appeal affected risk perceptions, only intensity of an appeal significantly influenced behavioral intentions to prepare. Moderately intense appeals were most effective in motivating intentions to prepare.

Overall, results of this study show the utility of emotional appeals for increasing risk perceptions and motivating preparedness behavior. Dr. Turner is looking forward to presenting these results at the annual meeting of the Society for Risk Analysis this December in Boston.



Spotlight on New (CR)² Faculty Member: Xiaoli Nan

This issue, (CR)² is highlighting Dr. Xiaoli Nan, a new Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland and the newest faculty addition to the Center for Risk Communication Research. Dr. Nan's research focuses on persuasion in the contexts of health and risk communication. She is interested in research topics such as how people form health beliefs and risk perceptions, what motivates people to adopt preventative health behaviors, and the influence of media messages on health attitudes and behaviors. An overarching goal of her research is to theorize the processes through which people are persuaded by health and risk communication messages, as well as offer practical guidance on communicating effectively to the public about health- and risk-related issues.



Dr. Xiaoli Nan

Originally from China, Dr. Nan received her Master's and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Minnesota. Prior to joining the University of Maryland, she was a faculty member in the Department of Life Sciences Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dr. Nan's research has appeared in leading communication journals such as *Communication Research*, *Human Communication Research*, and *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*. She has received top paper awards from professional organizations such as the International Communication Association and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Dr. Nan's research has been funded by the US Department of Agriculture and the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Currently, Dr. Nan is working on a number of projects for (CR)², including two externally funded projects on consumer and retailers' perceptions of the 2006 spinach recall and a study aimed at extending the Risk Perception Attitude Framework. Dr. Nan is also leading two student research groups that conduct health and risk communication research. For details about (CR)² projects, please visit www.riskcenter.umd.edu.

(CR)² Colloquium Series

(CR)² has another exciting speaker series lined up for Fall of 2008. On November 7 at 12:00 pm in 0200 Skinner, Dr. Carl W. Lejuez Professor in the Department of Psychology and Director of the Center for Addictions, Personality, and Emotion Research (CAPER) at the University of Maryland, College Park, will present on *Development of a Laboratory-based Model of Positive and Negative Reinforcement Processes Underlying Adolescent Risk-taking Behavior*. Disinhibition and negative affect reduction are commonly cited mechanisms underlying adolescent risk taking, but are rarely considered together in a more comprehensive framework. Dr. Lejuez will present a model of the development and maintenance of adolescent risk taking rooted in positive and negative reinforcement processes, focusing on behavioral, genetic, and neurobehavioral assessment.



Dr. Carl W. Lejuez

Later in the semester, Dr. Isaac Lipkus, Associate Professor of Medical Psychiatry at Duke University will present at a brown-bag luncheon at 12:30 pm on December 1 in Skinner Hall, room 2117. Dr. Lipkus' research interests include: the communication of cancer risks, health cognitions broadly defined, teen smoking cessation, and quality of life among cancer patients and their spouses. Dr. Lipkus has conducted experimental studies to test psychological mechanisms involving risk communication and other health messages.

More information about both presentations can be found at the (CR)² website: www.riskcenter.umd.edu.



Dr. Isaac Lipkus

The (CR)² welcomes collaborators on research projects and center affiliates. If you are interested in becoming more involved with the (CR)², please contact Jill Cornelius Underhill or Lucinda Austin at riskcenter@umd.edu. We welcome new colleagues! To view a current list of (CR)² working group members, faculty affiliates, graduate researchers, and advisory board members, please visit the website at www.riskcenter.umd.edu.

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