***un-Spun***

by Brooks Jackson and Kathleen Hall Jamieson

* Telling fact from fiction in advertisements, essays, speeches, and editorials
* Painful to be confronted with information that contradicts what we believe
  + Tend to find weak evidence to support beliefs
  + Ignore evidence that violates beliefs
* When people are forced to “counterargue” they are more likely to accept new evidence rather than reject it

**Spin Warning Signs**

If Scary, Be Wary

* “FUD Factor” – fear, uncertainty, doubt
* Clouds our judgment
* Raw appeal to fear 🡪 covers lack of evidence that a real threat exists

A Story That’s “Too Good”

* Data fits too neatly
* Buying into something because it fits ideologies

The Dangling Comparative

* “Larger, better, faster, better-tasting…”
* Should state what’s being compared

The Superlatives Swindle

* “Most, highest, biggest in history, smallest ever…”
* By what measure?

The “Pay You Tuesday” Con

* Do something today and get rewarded later
* Someone will end up getting hurt or owe a lot

The Blame Game

* points finger at unpopular group
* hope to divert attention from weakness in evidence
* one-sided case

Glittering Generalities

* attractive-sounding but vague terms
* get you to buy into product without asking too many questions
* “freedom, dignity, honor, integrity…”

**Tricks of Deception Trade**

1. Misnomers – doesn’t do what name implies
2. Frame it and claim it
   1. makes people think of it unfavorably before considering any facts
   2. diction choices – fetus vs. baby
3. Weasel Words
   1. Suck meaning out of a phrase or sentence
   2. “**Up to** 50% off,” “You **may** already be a winner,” or “**Many scientists** agree”
4. Eye Candy
   1. says one thing while visually showing another
   2. ex. drug commercials
   3. humans tend to process more with eyes than ears
5. Average Bear – “average” doesn’t necessarily mean “typical”
6. Baseline Bluff – cut in a program a politician favors, cut compared to what?
7. The Literally True Falsehood
   1. Picking deceptive words that aren’t technically false
   2. Bill Clinton
8. Implied Falsehood
   1. strongly implied but not stated outright
   2. what the speaker wants you to believe isn’t true
   3. exercise machinery paired with images of people with gorgeous bodies

**Finding the Best Evidence**

* **Not all studies are equal**
  + Who stands behind the information?
  + Does the source have an ax to grind?
  + What method did the source use to obtain the information?
  + How old are the data?
  + What assumptions did these collecting the information make?
  + How much guesswork was involved?
* There is no such thing as a neutral viewpoint
* Extraordinary claims need extraordinary evidence
* Can results be replicated?
* Factcheck.org’s Guide to Testing Evidence (p. 121 *un-Spun*)

**Non-Evidence**

Appeals to authority

* Somebody who is an authority in one field is not necessarily qualified in another
* Is source competent? Does he know what he’s talking about? Does she have any real evidence? Do other authorities in the same field agree?

Appeals to popularity

* Preferred over, top-selling, number one…
* Is it popular because it’s good or for some other reason?

Logical Fallacies – flaws in logical arguments (see separate notes)