

# COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AFFECTED BY AUDIENCE OPPOSITION, FEEDBACK AND PERSUASIBILITY

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IT is generally accepted in rhetorical theory that speakers systematically alter their message presentations to suit differing audiences. Aristotle argues that the speaker needs to take into account the views of his audience<sup>1</sup> and Burke's concept of identification focuses on the speaker finding common ground with his audience.<sup>2</sup> Brockriede and Scott said of Stokely Carmichael's speeches to a black and white audience, "He makes many of the same points. . . . The two speeches differ distinctively in style and persuasive appeals, however; in each instance style and appeals are appropriate to the audience addressed."<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, experimental studies of persuasion have almost exclusively investigated attitudinal, affective and behavioral changes in the audience. While it is widely assumed that communicator behaviors vary, no major attempt has been made to specify how they vary or why. The present studies were conducted to examine ex-

perimentally the effect of audience characteristics on communication strategies.

A review of previous empirical research and theory suggests that a communicator, aware that his audience can ignore the message, reject its conclusions, or derogate the communicator himself, will "slant" the message so as to: a) make the position argued seem minimally discrepant from the audience's and b) make his behavior appear acceptable. Goffman's theoretical work on social approval suggests that the communicator will attempt to satisfy the expectations of his audience and will employ various "facework" strategies so as to avoid appearing too discrepant from them, or too much in violation of their norms.<sup>4</sup> Byrne's theory of similarity and interpersonal attraction, supported by many empirical demonstrations of a positive relationship between the two, predicts that communicators will attempt to appear as similar to their audience—in attitude, as well as personality—as possible.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Manis, Cornell and Moore have demonstrated that neutral messages transmitted to audiences on each side of an issue are judged by others to be relatively congruent with the audiences' opinions.<sup>6</sup> This research has led us to begin

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<sup>1</sup> Lane Cooper, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1932), pp. 16-17, 91-181.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1950), pp. 19-46.

<sup>3</sup> Wayne Brockriede and Robert Scott, "Stokely Carmichael: Two Speeches on Black Power," in *The Rhetoric of Black Power*, ed. Robert Scott and Wayne Brockriede (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 115.

<sup>4</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959), pp. 1-16.

<sup>5</sup> Donn Byrne, *The Attraction Paradigm* (New York: Academic Press, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> Melvin Manis, S. Douglas Cornell, and Jeffrey Moore, "Transmission of Attitude-Relevant Information Through a Communica-

with the assumption that the audience's initial opposition to the communicator's position will be an important factor in determining his strategy.

There is, however, little empirical evidence indicating exactly how messages are slanted in order to avoid rejection or derogation. Research on the "MUM effect" by Abraham Tesser and his colleagues, showing that people avoid bearing bad news to others, suggests that communicators may omit very discrepant statements when facing an opposed audience.<sup>7</sup> (In fact, Zimmerman and Bauer, and Schramm and Danielson found that the communicator tends not to recall those statements most incongruent with his anticipated audience's beliefs.)<sup>8</sup> But many other strategies can be envisioned. Making the message less specific, taking a less extreme position or using weaker language, and spending relatively more time on issues and problems (rather than solutions) are possible strategies aimed at reducing the opposed audience's awareness of the communicator's position.

A communicator may also have other concerns when he faces an opposed audience. He may believe that greater discrepancy results in more counterarguing, which may be precluded either by decreasing explicitness, by "distracting" the audience or by presenting counterarguments. He may assume that audiences who are in major disagreement will be very difficult to persuade. In that

case the communicator might marshal as many arguments as he can to support his position. Or he may concentrate on problem-centered arguments, hoping to increase the audience's perception of the need for change and to prepare them for acceptance of his solutions and conclusions.

The first experiment reported here represents an attempt to discover whether audience opposition would systematically affect the communicator's strategy. A procedure was used which allowed communicators arguing on one side of an issue to choose more or fewer arguments varying in their strength, specificity, and focus. Audience opposition was independently manipulated.

## EXPERIMENT I

### *Method*

Eighty volunteers were recruited from college debate and public speaking classes, and from a high school summer debate camp, for a study on the construction of persuasive speeches. Each subject was handed a page of written instructions, a set of 28 3x5 printed cards, an answer sheet, and a page of questions to answer later. The instructions stated: "We would like you to develop the most effective speech you can with the information we give you. Your job is to construct a 5-10 minute speech on the topic: THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD CONTROL POPULATION GROWTH. You have been given a set of cards to use in making up your speech. Please use the answer sheet to list the cards you will use in your speech, and list them in the order they will be used. You cannot use all the cards because that would make the speech longer than 10 minutes."

Following these statements was one of four descriptions of the hypothetical audience. Three of these statements

tion Chain," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 30 (1974), 81-94.

<sup>7</sup>For example, Abraham Tesser and Sidney Rosen, "Similarity of Objective Fate as a Determinant of the Reluctance to Transmit Unpleasant Information: The MUM Effect," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 23 (1972), 46-53.

<sup>8</sup>Claire Zimmerman, and Raymond Bauer, "The Effect of an Audience on What is Remembered," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 20 (1956), 238-248; Wilbur Schramm and Wayne Danielson, "Anticipated Audiences as Determinants of Recall," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 56 (1958), 282-283.

varied the opposition of the audience to Federal control of population growth. In the Very Opposed condition, the statement read: "Assume that your audience is a group of women who are *very opposed* to Federal governmental control over population growth. Design your speech so that it is the most persuasive speech for this audience." In other conditions "*moderately opposed*" or "*moderately in favor*" was inserted. There was also a No Opposition, comparison condition. The instructions to the subjects assigned to this condition never mentioned persuasion. The task was depicted as one requiring the construction of "effective speeches, as in debate tournament," where the audience would be "a group of experienced debate judges who will judge your speech on the basis of its logic, your analysis, and clarity." Random assignment to one of the four audience conditions was employed.

*Experimental materials and measures.* On each 3" x 5" card was printed one argument which might be used in a speech favoring Federal involvement in population control. All arguments were culled from previous public speeches and articles. Their content concentrated on five areas: education, legal issues, taxes, birth control and abortion. Eight of the cards were designed to be used if the subject wanted to arouse concern about the problem of population growth, show how serious the problem was, or give evidence that Federal intervention was necessary, e.g., "Unwanted children are born partly because parents have not known about birth control methods. . . ." These cards differed from another set of 15 cards which presented solutions to the population growth problem by stating how the government might intervene, e.g., "Massive programs of media education on population growth, coupled with sex education programs in our

schools, and distribution of birth control pamphlets . . . could provide a mechanism for informing the public." Of five remaining cards, one stated the conclusion and four could be used as counterarguments against leaving population growth uncontrolled, or to the influence of private groups, or to state control.

On the answer sheet were 28 blank spaces. The subject simply listed the identifying number of each argument he would use (in order) to construct his speech. He was reminded not to use all 28 because of the 10 minute limit. Scoring was accomplished by counting the total number of arguments listed, the number of problem and solution focused arguments, the number of counterarguments, and whether conclusions were employed. In addition, the strength (extremity) and the specificity of each list of arguments was scored. First, a separate class of 40 undergraduates rated each argument according to how strong and how specific or general it was so that each argument could be assigned a strength score and a specificity score based upon the average ratings. Then the average of the strength scores and specificity scores for each subject could be computed.

When the subject had completed his list (about 20 minutes), he turned to the next page and answered three questions. The first asked how effective his speech would be; the second, how he personally felt about the issue (pre-testing had established that most students were in favor of Federal intervention); and finally there was a check list of goals he might have had in mind when constructing his speech (e.g., to be persuasive, to offer arguments which built on previously held attitudes).

Upon completion of the questionnaire, the subject was informed fully of the experimenter's purpose and procedures.

## Results

The subjects apparently responded to the instructions as intended, using from 6 to 21 cards. Approximately 75% of the subjects in each condition stated that one of their goals was to persuade, and most intended to present a well organized and analyzed speech. There were no significant differences among conditions in perceived effectiveness of the planned speech and in the subjects' attitudes.

One-way analyses of variance were used to assess the total number of arguments, the strength of arguments, the specificity of arguments, and the use of conclusions and counterarguments. However, the dependent measure of most interest was the use of problem centered arguments vs. solution centered arguments. This measure was tested using a 2 x 4 approximate analysis of variance for profile data with one between factor (audience opposition) and one within factor (type of argument). This analysis tests for the significance of the difference of the relative use of each strategy by subjects.<sup>9</sup> The interaction was highly significant ( $F = 12.62$ ,  $df = 3/76$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The greater the opposition of the audience, the fewer solution arguments and the more problem arguments were used. Means are presented in Table 1.

<sup>9</sup> Profile analysis is an approximate form of analysis of variance which is a combination of the randomized factorial design and the treatment by subjects design. Such a mixed design (or factorial designs with repeated measures) is discussed in Donald F. Morrison, *Multivariate Statistical Methods* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967) pp. 221-258; Seymour Geisser and Samuel Greenhouse, "An Extension of Box's Results on the Use of the F Distribution in Multivariate Analysis," *Annals of Mathematical Statistics*, 29 (1958), 885-891; Samuel Greenhouse and Seymour Geisser, "On Methods in the Analysis of Profile Data," *Psychometrika*, 24 (1959-112).

Such a form of analysis involves a between subjects factor and a within subject factor. This design leads to three questions: a) are the population mean profiles similar or parallel? b) if they are parallel are they on the same level? and c) assuming parallelism, are

TABLE 1  
AVERAGE FREQUENCY OF PROBLEM CENTERED ARGUMENTS AND SOLUTION CENTERED ARGUMENTS PLANNED FOR USE WITH AUDIENCES VARYING IN INITIAL OPPOSITION TO THE COMMUNICATOR'S POSITION

Audience	Type of Argument Used	
	Problem Centered (8 possible)	Solution Centered (15 possible)
Very Opposed N = 20	5.50	5.75
Mod. Opposed N = 20	4.85	6.95
Mod. in Favor N = 20	4.70	7.15
No Opposition N = 20	4.80	8.20

Note: The higher the mean, the more frequently subjects in that experimental condition chose to use the type of argument indicated.

There were no other significant (or near significant) differences in strategy among conditions.

the means different? The first question deals with the interaction effect, the second question with the main effects for factorial treatments and the third question with effects for repeated measures. Tests for the second question can follow traditional analysis of variance with its exact assumptions, but the first and third questions do not meet the assumptions of equal variance and mutual independence or equal correlations. Thus an appropriate F-distribution has been developed for such problems from the work of Box (*Annals of Mathematical Statistics*, 25 (1954), 290-302, 484-498) by Geisser and Greenhouse. This work has also led to a conservative adjustment of degrees of freedom by Greenhouse and Geisser.

The summary table for the mixed analysis of variance in Experiment 1 is presented below:

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE				
Source	df	ms	F	P
Between subjects	79			
Audience conditions	3	5.41		
Subject within groups	76	5.56		
Within subjects	80			
Solution/Problem Arguments	1	168.10	121.81	.001
Audience x Arguments	3	17.42	12.62	.001
Arguments x Subjects within Groups	76	1.38		
Total	159	197.87		

Note: The large main effect for use of arguments is trivial because there were almost twice as many solution centered cards available.

As noted above, most subjects checked as a goal of their speech that they intended to be persuasive, and to present a well organized speech. There were no differences among conditions in the checking of these goals, or of most of the others listed. Two goals, however, were differentially selected, and these were consistent with the different strategies depicted in Table 1. That is, subjects in the more opposed conditions were more likely to say (in retrospect) that they had intended to select problem centered arguments, and also to offer "arguments appearing to emotion."

### *Discussion*

Given that the subjects could have varied proposed speeches in a number of ways, the systematic preference for problem centered arguments by those anticipating more opposed audiences is of interest. But there are several reasons why they should have done so. As we discussed earlier, they may have assumed that by avoiding explicit solutions and focusing on problems the opposed audience would be less aware of the communicator's actually discrepant position, and presumably would be less likely to reject his message or derogate him. We call this the "avoidance of rejection" hypothesis. Or, in accord with a "need to arouse" hypothesis, they may have been assuming that audiences opposed to control of population growth are particularly difficult to persuade. Problem centered arguments may have been used for the purpose of arousing concern with the issue of population growth and thereby preparing the audience to accept new solutions sometime in the future. Finally, the use of problem centered arguments may have reflected a lack of motivation among communicators asked to persuade opposed audiences (the "giving up" hypothesis). If they perceived that no real attitude change

could occur, they may have resigned themselves simply to increasing interest in the issue. The questionnaire data (e.g., equal persuasive goals) make this possibility doubtful, however.

### EXPERIMENT II

The second experiment was designed for the purpose of replicating the previous results, and distinguishing among the possible causes of differences in strategy. In addition, the procedure was altered somewhat so as to increase "external validity." The design was a 2 x 3 factorial, with audience opposition and a new factor, anticipated audience feedback, varied orthogonally.

### *Method*

As before, subjects were asked to plan a persuasive speech favoring Federal involvement in population control. They expected that their target audience, another person, would actually read their chosen arguments shortly afterward. The audience was to be either opposed to their position, or somewhat in favor of it. The potential impact of the audience was increased by specifying exactly how discrepant the audience's position was and by making reference to the difficulty (or ease) of changing the audience. It was expected that an audience main effect but no interaction with feedback would support the "need to arouse" hypothesis, i.e., that problem centered arguments are used with opposed audiences to arouse and prepare them for later acceptance of new solutions.

The feedback manipulation was employed principally to distinguish between the "need to arouse" hypothesis and the "avoiding rejection" hypothesis. It was assumed that if avoiding rejection of their message is of some importance, communicators should be even more concerned about rejection when the

audience's assessment of their message must be faced. Some previous research demonstrates this increased concern when feedback is expected. For example, Brown and Garland found that face saving attempts increased when amateur singers expected to interact with their audience later.<sup>10</sup> In the present study, it was predicted that if problem centered arguments are employed in order to conceal discrepancy, and prevent rejection, they would be chosen more often when feedback was anticipated than when it was not. We would expect either a Feedback main effect, or an interaction such that problem centered arguments are chosen most often when feedback is anticipated from a very opposed audience.

Two different feedback manipulations were employed in order to distinguish between the effects of simply anticipating feedback and anticipating that the audience will personally deliver their feedback. Concern with rejection might be highest when future interaction with the audience is expected, as well as their feedback.

*Subjects.* The subjects were college students recruited through an ad in the University of Kansas student newspaper for a study of "attitudes toward current issues," which would pay \$2.00 for participation. All of the students who called during the specified hours were allowed to participate, but only those who indicated on the pretest that they favored Federal support of population control, a total of 94, were included in the major analyses. The subjects were assembled in groups of four to eight in a central experimental room, surrounded by individual cubicles.

*Procedure.* When all subjects had arrived, the experimenter asked them to

complete a survey of their attitudes toward some current issues. The survey consisted of ten statements with which the subjects were to indicate their agreement or disagreement. One of the statements, used as the pretest of attitude, was "The Federal government should support population control measures." The experimenter scored the surveys while the subjects waited. When he finished, he remarked that the variation among their attitudes was not unusual and went on to explain the major purpose of the study: to investigate attitudes about population control. Then, he requested that they each enter an individual cubicle where they were given a written set of instructions.

In both feedback conditions the instructions said, "We are interested in what kinds of arguments people use when they are talking about population control. Half of the participants in this group will be assigned the job of persuading someone else in the group that the Federal government should support population control measures." The Feedback subjects were informed that the experimenter would select those most in favor of Federal support for population control to be the persuaders. Each of those asked to be a "persuader" was to plan a message which would be presented to one of those persons in the group who was not in favor of Federal intervention. Actually, all subjects were assigned the persuader role.

Those in the Feedback conditions were then further subdivided. Half of the subjects expected only that their audience would evaluate their arguments in private and send to them a written evaluation. Half expected that in addition to receiving the written evaluation, they would meet with their audience so that "the other person could give . . . some personal feedback, too."

In the No Feedback condition, the

<sup>10</sup> Bert R. Brown and Howard Garland, "The Effects of Incompetency, Audience Acquaintance, and Anticipated Evaluative Feedback on Face-Saving Behavior," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 7 (1971), 490-502.

subjects were not told that they would have to persuade a specific person in the group, but just that they would have to construct a persuasive speech in favor of Federal support for population control.

Audience opposition was manipulated by varying the instructions page also. In the No Feedback condition the audience was described as either "someone who is very opposed to population control measures (usually someone who is very opposed is very hard to persuade because people like this tend to have considered all of the alternatives)," or "someone who is moderately in favor . . . (usually very easy to persuade because people like this tend not to have considered all of the arguments)."

Audience opposition in the Feedback condition had to be manipulated in a slightly different manner because the audience was a particular other person. The manipulation was accomplished by showing the subject his own score on the attitude survey and the supposed score of his audience. The latter score was bogus—very opposed (5), or moderately in favor (25) of population control measures. At the same time, the experimenter made the same remarks about the audience as in the No Feedback condition.

The speech construction task was essentially the same as in Experiment I. In explaining how to plan their speech, all of the subjects were told that a set of cards with arguments printed on each would be used so as to establish "experimental control." There were 25 cards used in this experiment. Ten of the arguments were problem centered, ten were solution centered, three were counterarguments, and two were conclusions (problem, solution centered). Half of the problem centered and solution centered cards presented a general argument, and half added to the general argument some de-

tailed examples or proposals. One argument in each of the resulting four categories dealt with each of the following topics: legal issues, tax incentives, abortion, birth control, and education. The strength and specificity of each argument was rated by two undergraduate classes so as to provide a mean score for each.

The subjects were asked to choose only 10 arguments in constructing their persuasive messages. (In the Feedback conditions these would be given to the audience for evaluation.) They were also asked to estimate how long they would spend to present their arguments. After 30 minutes, the subjects completed a postquestionnaire, to measure the effectiveness of the manipulation, attitude change, and perceptions of the experimental situation. Afterwards, the entire experiment was explained, and the subjects were dismissed.

### *Results*

*Effectiveness of the Manipulations.* Postquestionnaire items measured the extent to which the feedback and audience opposition manipulations were effective. These were assessed by means of 2 x 3 analyses of variance for each item. With respect to the audience's position, the subjects in the Opposed condition perceived their audience to be much more against Federal intervention than did subjects in the Favorable condition ( $F = 210.9$ ,  $df = 1/88$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The difference, however, was greater in the two feedback conditions (interaction  $F = 10.23$ ,  $df = 2/88$ ,  $p < .01$ ). We attribute this effect to greater salience of the audience's position being effected when the subject was actually shown his and the other's pretest score.

Despite the mention of persuasion difficulty in the Opposed condition, subjects did not differ in answer to the question, "How difficult was it to persuade your audience?" However, the

subjects in the Opposed conditions felt that they had been less effective in persuading their audience than did the subjects in the Favorable conditions ( $F = 4.77$ ,  $df = 1/88$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

The question, "How likely is it that you will receive feedback about your arguments?" produced no differences among conditions. We suspect that the failure of this question to discriminate was due to subjects knowing that all experiments must include a debriefing. The measure of the subjects' perceptions that they would receive personal feedback did produce differences, such that those in the Personal Feedback condition rated the probability of personal feedback greater than in the other conditions ( $F = 12.45$ ,  $df = 2/88$ ,  $p < .01$ ). There were no differences among conditions for subjects ratings of their own attempt to persuade or for attitude change.

*Strategy differences.* To assess the effect of the experimental conditions on persuasive strategies, both repeated measures and individual-item analyses of variance on the various measures were employed. Results were very similar, but are difficult to discuss with the repeated measures analyses because there were two independent variables and several measures of strategy. Therefore the results of the separate  $2 \times 3$  analyses for each dependent measure are presented below. As in the first experiment, there were no significant differences in the pre-rated strength or specificity of the arguments used among conditions. Neither were there differences among conditions in planned time to give the completed speech. Again, the only consistent difference in strategy was in the type of argument chosen. Table 2 indicates the frequency of problem centered and solution

TABLE 2  
AVERAGE FREQUENCY OF PROBLEM CENTERED ARGUMENTS  
AND SOLUTION CENTERED ARGUMENTS IN EXPERIMENT II.

1Type of Argument	Audience Position	Experimental Conditions		
		Expected Feedback		
		No Feedback	Impersonal Feedback	Personal Feedback
Detailed Problem Centered	Favorable	1.83	2.78	2.11
	Opposed	2.00	2.31	2.54
General Problem Centered	Favorable	1.28	1.28	1.05
	Opposed	1.00	.69	1.54
2Total Problem Centered	Favorable	4.00	4.89	4.05
	Opposed	4.00	4.00	4.92
Detailed Solution Centered	Favorable	2.61	2.28	3.00
	Opposed	2.85	2.62	2.62
General Solution Centered	Favorable	2.06	1.56	1.74
	Opposed	2.15	1.62	1.62
2Total Solution Centered	Favorable	5.28	4.33	5.11
	Opposed	5.23	4.92	4.46

<sup>1</sup> Does not include counterarguments for which there were no differences in usage among conditions.

<sup>2</sup> Includes detailed and general arguments, plus statement of conclusion.

centered arguments, as well as those containing only a general statement and those including detailed examples or proposals.

The data in Table 2 show that subjects who were led to expect feedback used more detailed, problem centered arguments than those who did not expect feedback ( $F = 3.16$ ,  $df = 2/88$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Those in the Feedback conditions also used fewer general, solution centered arguments ( $F = 2.90$ ,  $df = 2/88$ ,  $p < .07$ ). There was no main effect for audience opposition, but problem centered arguments, overall, were chosen most by those subjects in the Personal Feedback condition who expected an opposed audience. Subjects in the Impersonal Feedback condition expecting an opposed audience did not choose problem centered arguments highly (interaction  $F = 3.56$ ,  $df = 2/88$ ,  $p < .05$ ). While not significant, the pattern was reversed for solution centered arguments.

### *Discussion*

In Experiment II, anticipated audience feedback had somewhat similar effects to audience opposition in the first experiment: when feedback was expected, the subjects were more likely to design persuasive communications that focused upon issues and problems than upon solutions. These data support our hypothesis that the latter strategy may be chosen in order to avoid audience rejection. That the highest use of problem centered arguments was in the Personal Feedback-Audience Opposed condition also supports the hypothesis.

Somewhat confusing the interpretation is the relatively low use of problem centered arguments by those in the Impersonal Feedback condition who expected an opposed audience. These subjects used fewest total arguments of either type (8.92 vs. an average of 9.25 in the other conditions), while at the

same time using more counterarguments. We conclude that these subjects were trying another strategy which our relatively open-ended measurement procedure failed to pinpoint. Their pattern is not entirely inconsistent with the "avoidance of rejection" hypothesis, however, since using counterarguments might be an alternative procedure for preventing rejection.

### EXPERIMENT III

This experiment was designed for the purpose of again assessing the effect of feedback on persuasive strategy; the effects of audience opposition and persuasion difficulty were tested separately. The same procedural paradigm was used as in the previous experiments (choosing arguments to construct a speech), but the setting and design was somewhat different.

### *Method*

The design might be most succinctly described as two overlapping factorial experiments. There were three levels of audience feedback as in Experiment II (No Feedback, Impersonal Feedback, Personal Feedback) crossed with two levels of persuasion difficulty (Easy to Persuade vs. Difficult to Persuade). Both audiences in the latter condition were described as opposed to the communicator's position. Forming a design "leg" were four other conditions where the subjects also expected no feedback. These were designed to assess the effect of audience tractability when the audience was described as moderately in favor of the communicator's position, and to assess the effect of telling the communicator to simply inform, but not persuade, the audience. Because the total design, depicted in Figure 1, was unbalanced, strategy differences were assessed using two types of analyses: an-

Analyses of variance of the effect of feedback, with two levels of audience difficulty, and analyses of variance over all No Feedback conditions of the effect of difficulty, and audience opposition and communicator intent.

*Subjects.* Students enrolled in 16 sections of the introductory interpersonal communication course at the University of Kansas participated in the experiment as part of a class exercise. One month prior to the experiment, a pre-test of attitudes toward Federal support of population control was administered as part of a general test of student attitudes unassociated with the research. Only students whose scores indicated attitudes in favor of Federal intervention were included in the analyses of the experimental data. After students with negative attitudes, students who were not present at one of the sessions, and those failing to complete the instruments were excluded, 206 subjects were left. The subjects were randomly assigned to experimental condition within each section.

*Procedure.* In each section an experimenter explained that the class exercise was also part of a research project on population control. Written instructions (which also included all the manipulations), a set of 25 3" x 5" cards, an answer sheet, and a postquestionnaire

were distributed to each subject. On the cards were printed the same arguments favoring Federal support of population control as in Experiment II. The speech construction task was identical to that described in Experiment II except that the total number of arguments was not restricted.

The subjects read that part of the research program involved preparing television speeches concerning population control. All but the subjects in the Inform conditions were told that the speeches would persuade the public that the Federal government should support Population control. In the Inform conditions, all mentions of persuasion were deleted (the intent of the speeches was to inform the public about Federal support of population control). The subjects in the Persuade conditions were asked to help construct speeches for possible television use. To enhance the credibility of this request the subjects were also asked to sign a "release form" permitting use of their speech outlines in TV messages. It was then explained to all of the subjects that television messages are often directed at specific sub-audiences. The speeches in the present case were described as being constructed for the subgroup of women who were either very opposed to Fed-

EXPERIMENTAL CONDITIONS

Communicator Instructed To:	Audience Position	Difficulty of Changing Audience	Expected Audience Feedback		
			None	Impersonal	Personal
Persuade	Opposed	Easy			
		Difficult			
Persuade	Favorable	Easy		XX	XX
		Difficult		XX	XX
Inform	Opposed	Easy		XX	XX
		Difficult		XX	XX

Figure 1. Experimental design of Experiment III.

eral intervention or moderately in favor of intervention. To manipulate persuasion (informing) difficulty, the audience in either case was described, just as in Experiment II, as difficult or easy to persuade (inform).

Feedback was manipulated in the following manner. In the No Feedback condition the subjects were told about a second step of the research program in which panels of local women (opposed or favorable to Federal intervention as in the TV audience) would evaluate the speech outlines they had composed. Further they were told, "Since these outlines are submitted anonymously, you will not receive feedback. However, the women will write down their reactions to the various outlines and turn over their results to the research staff. On the basis of these results, television messages will then be completed using the best outlines." In the feedback conditions the subjects were told that the outlines would not be anonymous and that the women would write their evaluations of the speech outlines on two forms, one of which would be returned to the student. In the Personal Feedback condition, the subjects were informed that 5 of the women would visit their class to meet and discuss their speech outlines with them. The subjects were debriefed in the final week of classes.

### Results

*Effectiveness of the Manipulations.* For purpose of brevity, the  $3 \times 2$  analyses of feedback and persuasion difficulty (for separate measures) will be described as the "Feedback" analysis, whereas the analyses within all No Feedback conditions will be referred to as "No Feedback" analyses. The Feedback analyses revealed a significant effect of the feedback manipulation upon the subjects' perception of receiving feed-

back in the direction expected ( $F = 3.19$ ,  $df = 2/118$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and in addition, in the Personal Feedback condition subjects were more likely to expect personal interaction with a segment of their audience ( $F = 13.04$ ,  $df = 2/111$ ,  $p < .01$ ). No such differences were found within the No Feedback conditions.

The perceived degree of difficulty of persuading the audience was significantly different in the predicted direction also. The Feedback analysis produced a significant effect at the .01 level ( $F = 51.00$ ,  $df = 1/118$ ), as did the No Feedback analysis ( $F = 30.59$ ,  $df = 1/114$ ). A No Feedback analysis of perceived audience opposition indicated that the manipulation was successful ( $F = 49.21$ ,  $df = 2/114$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, there was also a tendency, as seen in the Feedback analysis for audiences described as difficult to persuade to also be perceived as more opposed to the communicator's position ( $F = 5.92$ ,  $df = 1/118$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

In contrast to the other manipulations, the persuade/inform manipulation was not very successful. Subjects in the inform conditions were less likely to expect persuasion in their audience, but not significantly so. There were no differences in pretest attitudes, attitude change, or perceived effectiveness of speech among conditions.

*Effect of Persuasive Intent and Audience Opposition.* There were few effects on strategy of the Persuade/Inform manipulation, as would be expected from the measured weakness of that manipulation. However, in general the subjects in the Inform-Opposed conditions acted much like those in the Persuade-Favorable conditions. That is, the subjects in these conditions reacted to audience difficulty in a manner opposite to the subjects in all other conditions. Instead of apparently "trying harder" when the audience was depicted as difficult to persuade, they tried less hard,

and vice versa for easy to persuade audiences. This statement is reflected in several interactions found in No Feedback analyses: Subjects in the Inform-Opposed condition and in the Persuade-Favorable condition, (as opposed to the Persuade-Opposed condition), estimated that with a difficult audience they would spend less time on their speech ( $F = 6.36$ ,  $df = 2/114$ ,  $p < .01$ ), were less likely to use a solution centered conclusion ( $F = 3.20$ ,  $df = 2/114$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and chose weaker specific problem centered arguments ( $F = 2.27$ ,  $df = 2/114$ ,  $p < .12$ ).

*Effect of Persuasion Difficulty.* The subjects who expected a difficult to persuade audience, except those in the Inform and Audience Favorable conditions described above, tended to choose a strategy which appears as if they were trying harder than subjects expecting an easy to persuade audience. Thus, the No Feedback analysis of strength scores indicated that subjects in the difficult conditions used significantly stronger arguments than did those in the Easy conditions ( $F = 4.99$ ,  $df = 1/115$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In general, the same effect occurred across the feedback conditions, but was mostly reflected in the strength of solution centered arguments ( $F = 5.85$ ,  $df = 1/121$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Feedback analysis of expected time to give the speech also showed a non-significant tendency for those expecting a difficult to persuade audience to spend more time. Comparing these data to those from Experiment II is somewhat difficult since audience opposition was purposely confounded with persuasion difficulty in the experiment, and accidentally confounded in the present experiment. However the subjects did not perceive differences in persuasion difficulty in Experiment II, and there were no main effects for audience opposition, whereas in the present experiment, where

perceived differences in audience difficulty were great, there were some effects. Our tentative conclusion is that "trying harder" results from a perception that the audience is difficult to persuade, rather than from perceived opposition, per se.

*Effect of Audience Feedback.* In contrast to the previous study, the effect of feedback was quite weak. However, the trends were in precisely the same direction as in Experiment II. There was an interaction of feedback with audience difficulty, similar to the feedback-opposition interaction in Experiment II. That is those in the Personal Feedback condition expecting to confront a difficult to persuade audience planned less time for their speech than those expecting an easy to persuade audience, whereas the reverse occurred in the No Feedback and Impersonal Feedback conditions ( $F = 4.10$ ,  $df = 2/121$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

### Discussion

The experiments described in this paper differ from most other experiments published in the communication literature in that the subjects, instead of being restricted to a single range of responses, could have responded in many ways to the manipulations. For example, in most attitude change studies, the subjects can change their measured attitudes but alternative ways of reacting, such as derogation of the communicator, leaving the situation, changing the behavior of the communicator, or misperceiving the communication, are closed. In our attempt to measure strategies of persuasion, however, we made it possible for the subjects to alter their behavior in many ways. It is clear that subjects did choose various ways of constructing speeches, and it is this variability that probably accounts for the difficulty in testing the hypotheses. Upon reflection, it appears that in order to test the

“avoidance of rejection,” “need to arouse” or “trying” hypotheses more fully, it might be preferable to arbitrarily choose one message dimension at a time along which subjects might differ.

Still, some effects occurred with regularity despite the high variability. The data from all three experiments are quite consistent with the hypothesis that message strategies are planned with possible audience rejection in mind, particularly if that rejection may have to be received by personal feedback (“avoiding rejection” hypothesis). Avoidance of stating particular solutions while instead discussing problems and issues was highest under conditions where an opposed audience was most likely to personally deliver negative feedback (or when the subjects role played such a possibility, as in Experiment I). We would predict that under conditions where only one strategic variation is possible, communicators facing an audience which may reject them will choose the option least offensive to that audience.

There were no data to support the hypotheses that problems and issues are focused on in order to arouse or prepare an opposed audience (“need to

arouse” hypothesis). Neither were there data consistent with the hypothesis that communicators “give up” when faced with an opposed audience (“trying” hypothesis). Instead, the third experiment produced some data which point to the opposite conclusion, i.e., that a difficult audience causes the communicator to try even harder. These data pose an interesting predictive problem. If communicators trying to persuade an audience are both afraid of rejection and motivated to change their audience, how will they resolve the apparent conflict? The ideal technique might be to use the strongest possible arguments within the audience’s “range of acceptance” as described by Sherif and Hovland.<sup>11</sup> Another technique would be to maximize the communicator’s credibility by, for example, listing his credentials. We would predict the latter to occur with greater frequency, the greater the perceived probability of rejection by the audience. These speculations, of course, are testable in future research.

<sup>11</sup> Muzafer Sherif and Carl I. Hovland, *Social Judgment: Assimilation and Contrast Effects in Communication and Attitude Change* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 127-145.