



**ANTI-VACCINE
TACTICS & TROPES
WITHIN A POSTMODERN
CULTURAL CONTEXT**

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The Role of the Internet

- 80% of adults online search for health information *(Wolfe, Sharp & Lipsky, 2002)*
 - ▣ >50% believe “most” of what they find is credible
- Vaccine exemptors more likely to have obtained information online *(Salmon et al. 2005)*



Common Anti-vaccination Themes

- Evidence of authority
 - ▣ implying official status
 - ▣ claiming to be non-partisan
- Emotive pleas
 - ▣ “us vs. them” mentality
 - ▣ stories of harmed children



Common Anti-vaccination Themes


- **Conspiracies**
 - a search for the “truth”
 - cover-ups

- **Safety and effectiveness**
 - temporary immunity, harming the immune system
 - causing idiopathic illnesses
 - autism, SIDS, diabetes, ADHD, eczema, etc.



Common Anti-vaccination Themes

- Individual liberties
 - ▣ parental rights
 - ▣ distrust of government

**JUST SAY NO TO
VACCINES** 
Defend Your Health Freedom
www.VaccineTruth.com www.naturalnews.com Peace Resource Project 888 822 7075 www.peaceproject.com (#MS148)

Common Anti-vaccination Themes

Flu Vaccine Alternatives

- Alternative medicine
 - ▣ natural methods of immunity
 - ▣ criticizing germ theory



Common Tactics

- Shifting hypotheses: Continually proposing new theories for vaccines causing harm; moving targets when evidence fails to support ideas.
 - “Green Our Vaccines”
 - “Too Many, Too Soon”



Common Tactics

- Skewing the science: Denigrating science that fails to support anti-vaccine positions; misinterpreting findings.
- Censorship: Suppressing dissenting opinions; shutting down critics.

Common Tactics

- Attacking the opposition: personal insults, filing legal actions.

Pass the Maalox: An AoA Thanksgiving Nightmare

Our resident photoshop queen (and contributor) Adriana Gamondes created this nightmare on Elm Street for us. We decided to hold off running it until you'd digested your yummy Thanksgiving dinner. Yes, it's Alison Singer, Dr. Tom Insel, Trine Tsouderos, Dr. Steven Novella, Amy Wallace and Dr. Paul Offit sitting down to a babylicious dinner. Gosh, we hope they don't ingest too much mercury from that baby! (Click photo to enlarge.)

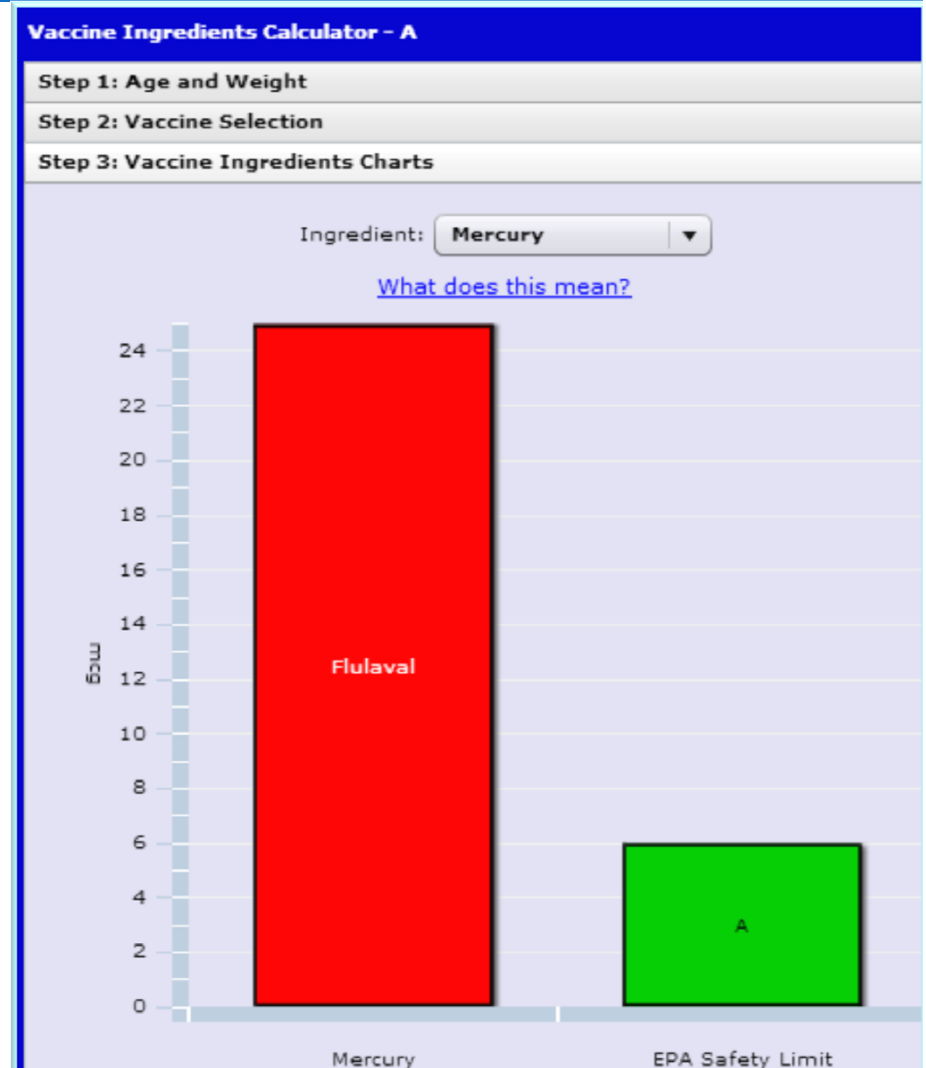


Common Tropes

- “I’m not anti-vaccine, I’m pro-safe vaccine”: Denying one opposes vaccination; claiming they are for safer vaccines and further research.
- “Vaccines should be 100% safe”: Because absolute safety cannot be promised, vaccination is therefore dangerous.

Common Tropes

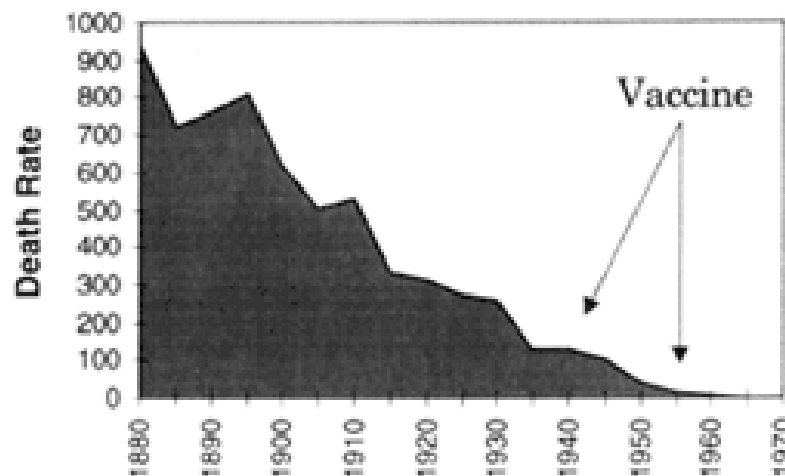
- “Vaccines are toxic!”
a.k.a. the “toxin gambit”: Listing potentially toxic vaccine ingredients; disingenuous explanations of their dangers.



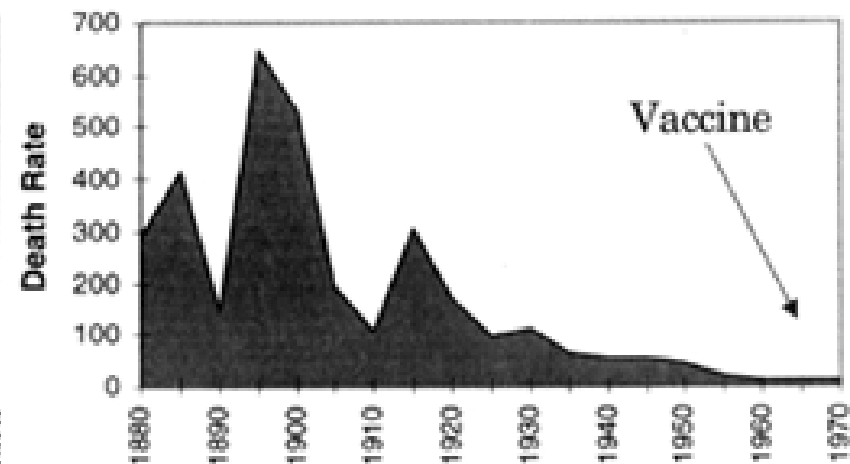
Common Tropes

- “Vaccines didn’t save us”: Attributing health improvements over recent decades to factors other than vaccines.

Whooping Cough



Measles



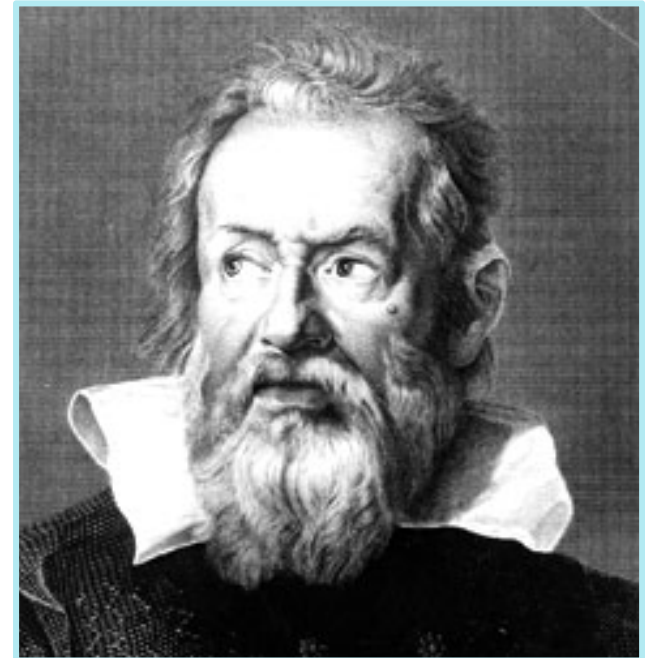
Common Tropes

- “Vaccines are unnatural”, a.k.a “the naturalistic fallacy”: Something “natural” is the better option (e.g. naturally acquiring immunity from diseases rather than from vaccination).



Common Tropes

- “Galileo was persecuted too”
a.k.a. the “Galileo gambit”:
Invoking those persecuted by
scientific orthodoxy, implying
ideas will eventually gain
acceptance.



Galileo Galilei

Common Tropes

- “Science was wrong before”: Citing prior instances of scientific errors to imply evidence supporting vaccination is also in error.



Common Tropes

- “You’re in the pocket of Big Pharma” a.k.a. the “pharma shill gambit”: Claiming those defending vaccines are hired by pharmaceutical companies.



Common Tropes

- “I don’t believe in coincidences”:

Rejecting that health problems can occur coincidentally after vaccination.

- “I’m the expert on my own child”:

Parents are the experts on their own children; medical authorities discounted.

A Postmodern Environment

- Postmodernism is conducive to the spread of ant-vaccine messages
- What is postmodernism?
 - ▣ Rejection of objective truth and authority
 - ▣ No one “Truth”

Postmodern Discourses

- Postmodernism in healthcare:
 - ▣ Concerns about values
 - ▣ Prioritizing risk over benefit
 - ▣ Promoting the well-informed patient

- These characteristics influence 3 major anti-vaccine discourses
 - ▣ Frameworks supporting vaccine decisions

Alternative Models of Health

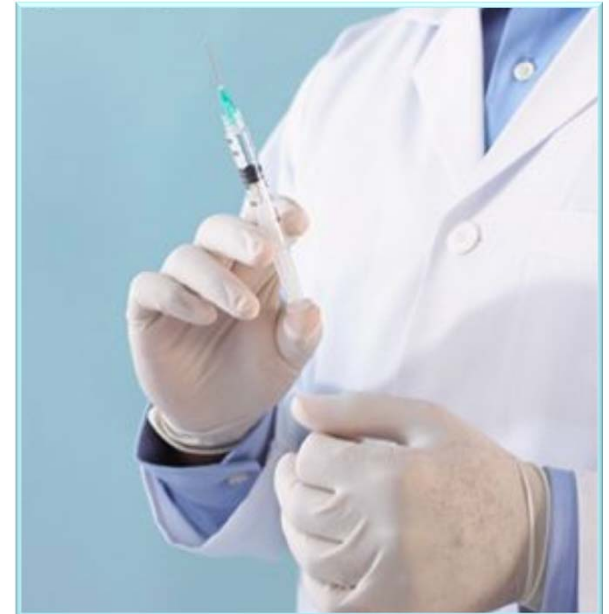
- Biomedical model → health as freedom from disease
 - ▣ Spiritual, personalized aspects?
- Emphasis on patient experiences
 - ▣ Importance of beliefs and values over evidence

Parental Autonomy & Responsibility

- Paradigm of shared decision-making
 - ▣ Critical, informed, empowered consumers

- Research → empowerment

- Individual responsibility
 - ▣ Focusing on one's own child
 - ▣ Risk over benefit



Trust & Expertise

- Questioning the legitimacy of science and authority
 - ▣ Less confidence in experts
- What is expertise?
 - ▣ Continually re-established
- Health authorities have lost the monopoly on truth/facts



POST-MODERNISM

You may have two degrees, but I read an article once on Wikipedia.

In Conclusion...

- Information reframed as “another way of knowing” rather than “wrong”
- Facts as just another “opinion”
- Challenging errors is necessary for truly informed choices

