

# 2018 *Symposium*

## “Don't Tell Me What to Do”: Exploring the Role of Psychological Reactance and How It Impacts Our Communications

Jay Otto, M.S.

June 20, 2018 | 3:30 PM – 4:20 PM



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**Center for Health & Safety Culture**

# Psychological Reactance

## Overview

- What is psychological reactance
- Why it is important to our efforts
- Ways to reduce psychological reactance
- Future opportunities



# Psychological Reactance

“Reactance – the motivation to regain a freedom after it has been lost or threatened – leads people to resist the social influence of others.”

Steindl, C., Jonas, E., Sittenthaler, S., Traut-Mattausch, E., & Greenberg, J. (2015). Understanding Psychological Reactance. *Zeitschrift Fur Psychologie*, 223(4), p 210.



“The day they passed a primary seat belt law was the last day I wore my seat belt.”

*- A participant at one our traffic safety workshops*

# Trait vs. State

Research seems to indicate a little of both.

- Physiological Responses
- Cognitive Responses

Steindl, C., Jonas, E., Sittenthaler, S., Traut-Mattausch, E., & Greenberg, J. (2015). Understanding Psychological Reactance. *Zeitschrift Fur Psychologie*, 223(4), 205–214. <https://doi.org/10.1027/2151-2604/a000222>



# Reactance in Individualistic vs. Collective Cultures



[http://media.phillyvoice.com/media/images/Cooper\\_Scrubs.2e16d0ba.fill-1200x630-c0.jpg](http://media.phillyvoice.com/media/images/Cooper_Scrubs.2e16d0ba.fill-1200x630-c0.jpg)



<https://www.nursingtimes.net/new-uniforms-for-senior-nurses-rolled-out-in-exeter/5069998.article>

Individualistic

“Them vs. me”

Collective

“Them vs. us”

Steindl, C., Jonas, E., Sittenthaler, S., Traut-Mattausch, E., & Greenberg, J. (2015). Understanding Psychological Reactance. *Zeitschrift Fur Psychologie*, 223(4), 205–214. <https://doi.org/10.1027/2151-2604/a000222>



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# Eliciting Reactance

1. Source
2. Message
3. Tone



# Eliciting Reactance: Source



**YOU WILL GET A TICKET FOR NOT WEARING YOUR SAFETY BELT.**

Safety belt enforcement is being stepped up everywhere. It doesn't matter where you drive, they'll be looking for you. Simply, law enforcement writes tickets to save lives. So buckle up or you will get a ticket. No exceptions.



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# Eliciting Reactance: Message

“As any sensible person can see, there is really no choice when it comes to flossing.”

Dillard, J. P., & Shen, L. (2005). On the Nature of Reactance and its Role in Persuasive Health Communication. *Communication Monographs*, 72(2), 144–168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637750500111815>

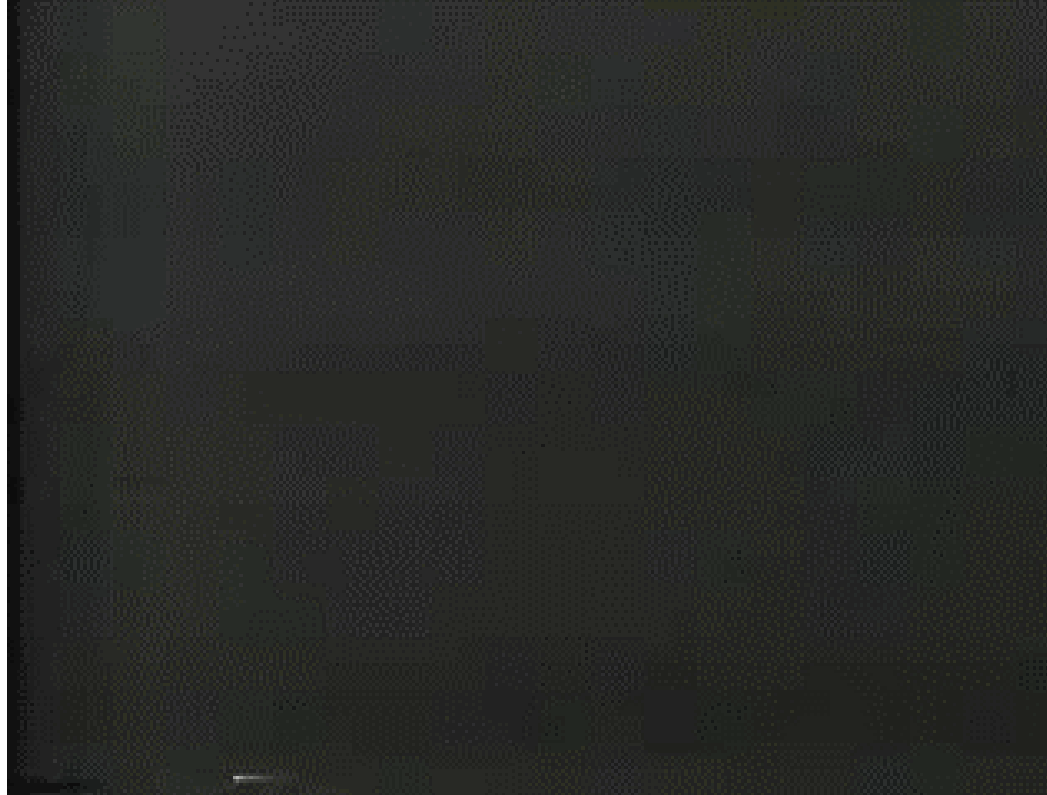


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# Eliciting Reactance: Tone



Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, <https://drugfree.org/>



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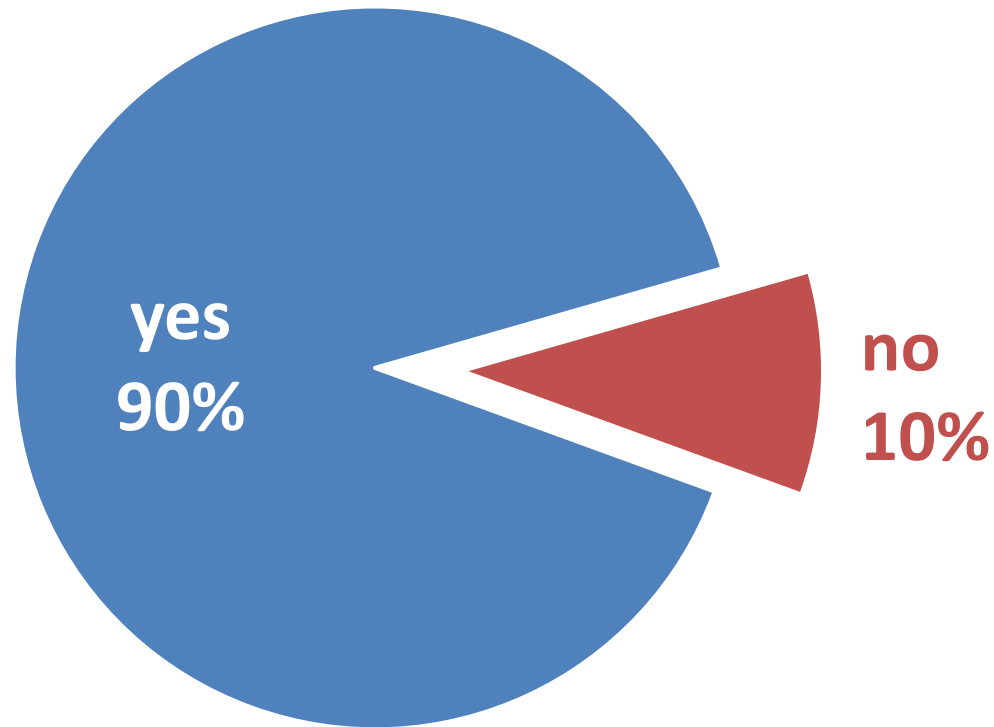
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# Prevalence of Risky Behaviors: Seat Belt Use in U.S.



Li, R., & Pickrell, T. M. (2018, April, revised). Seat belt use in 2017—Overall results. (Traffic Safety Facts Research Note. Report No. DOT HS 812 465). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

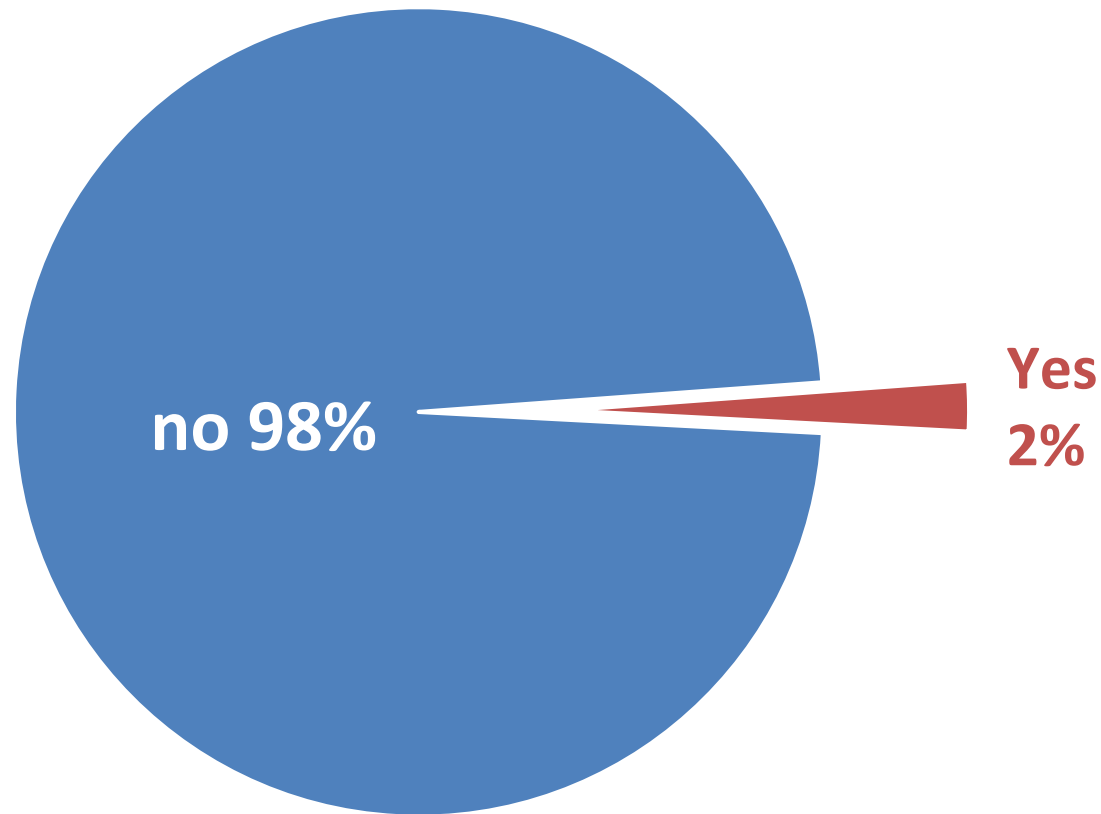


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# Prevalence of Risky Behaviors: Alcohol Impaired Driving



Jewett, A., Shults, R., Banerjee, T., & Bergen, G. (2015). Alcohol-Impaired Driving Among Adults — United States, 2012. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Surveillance Summaries (Washington, D.C.: 2002)*, 64(30), 814–817.

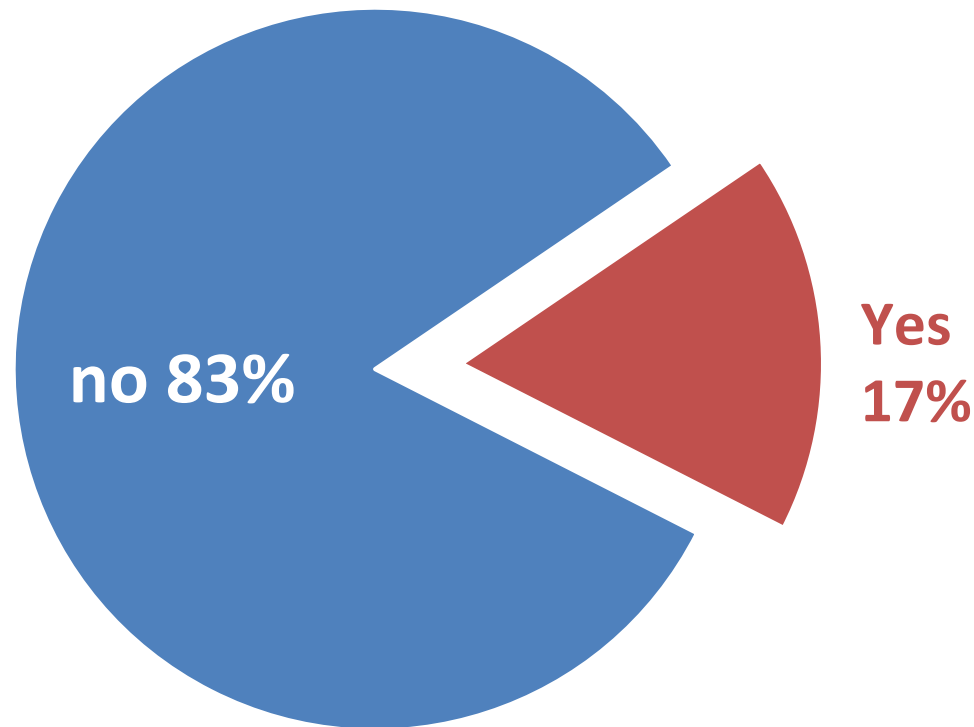


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# Prevalence of Risky Behaviors: High-Risk Drinking (i.e., binge drinking)



Jewett, A., Shults, R., Banerjee, T., & Bergen, G. (2015). Alcohol-Impaired Driving Among Adults — United States, 2012. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Surveillance Summaries (Washington, D.C.: 2002)*, 64(30), 814–817.



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# Preventing Risky Behaviors

As we see smaller and smaller populations engaging in risky behaviors, we need to be more attentive to the role psychological reactance may play.



# Consequences of Reactance

- Adopt a position opposite to what is desired
- Make the risky behavior more attractive
- Reject the source of messages

Rains, S. A. (2013). The Nature of Psychological Reactance Revisited: a Meta-Analytic Review. *Human Communication Research*, 39(1), 47–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2012.01443.x>





# Psychological Reactance

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# Reducing Psychological Reactance

Avoiding “forceful” language:

“should,” “ought,” “must,” “need”

Instead, try:

“consider,” “can,” “could,” “may”

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# Reducing Psychological Reactance

## Choosing “Gain” vs. “Loss” language

Gain:

“When you use sun protection, you will gain benefits.”

Loss:

“When you do not use sunscreen, you will pay costs.”

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# Reducing Psychological Reactance

## Pilot Testing



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*Explore*

How Positive Culture  
Improves Health and Safety

# Dialogue



1. What was intriguing about this session and what do you want to know more about?
2. From your perspective, what tools or resources would you like on this topic?





# 2018 Symposium

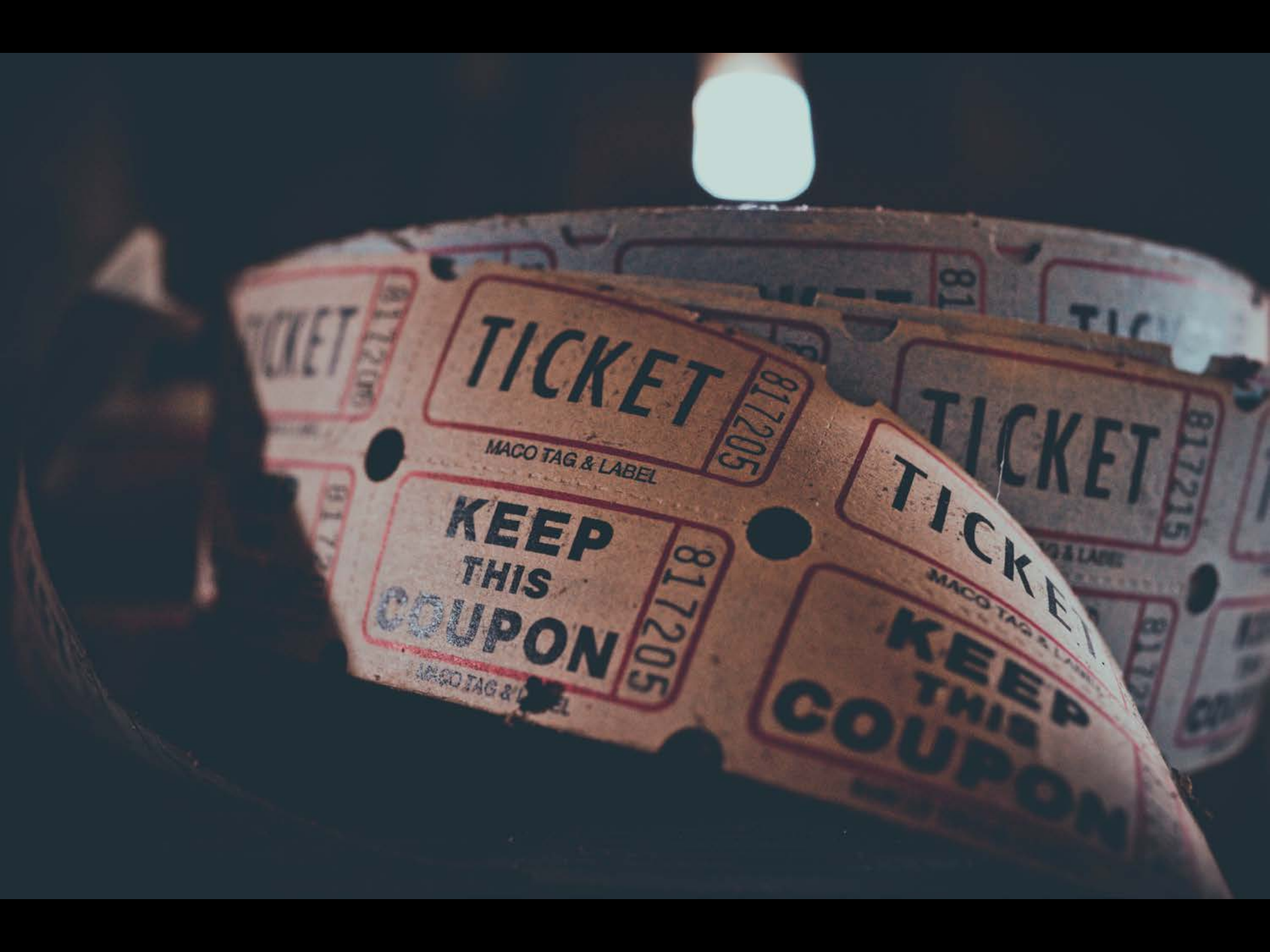
## June 21, 2018

8:30 AM – 9:00 AM	Networking
9:00 AM – 9:10 AM	Welcome
9:10 AM – 10:00 AM	Moving Beyond Bystander Engagement: Growing Safety Citizenship to Improve Health and Safety
10:00 AM – 10:15 AM	Morning Break
10:15 AM – 11:10 AM	Moving Beyond Bystander Engagement: Growing Safety Citizenship to Improve Health and Safety
11:10 AM – 12:00 PM	"Don't Just Look for Your Lost Keys Under the Street Light": Engaging Workplaces to Improve Health and Safety
12:00 PM – 1:15 PM	Lunch Provided
1:15 PM – 3:00 PM	The Importance of Social and Emotional Skills to Improve Health and Safety
3:00 PM – 3:15 PM	Afternoon Break
3:15 PM – 4:15 PM	"Shhh ... Let's Not Talk About That Now": Stigma - A Barrier to Progress
4:15 PM – 4:30 PM	Conclusion









**TICKET**

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