Soc/Psy 530 (Freese): Exercise 5
Persuasion in Direct-Mail Marketing

In this exercise, you are asked to analyze the persuasive tactics employed in direct-mail marketing (so called “junk” mail—credit card solicitations, efforts to get you to buy magazines or join cheese-of-the-month clubs, etc.) or direct-mail charitable fundraising. Using the information from Age of Propaganda and Chapter 8 of your textbook, consider the tactics and appeals employed to persuade people to consider and accept the offer being made.

Select a piece of junk mail that you or someone you know has received. If you are really desperate, take a look in any campus mixed-paper recycling bin. (If your own mailboxes have not yet started overflowing with them, don’t worry. It is only a matter of time.) If possible, turn in the junk mail with your essay.

Your 2-3 page essay should include the following:
1. A brief (no longer than one paragraph) description of the direct-mail marketing (what is being offered)
2. The results of your analysis of the offer. Namely, a discussion of the persuasive techniques and appeals employed by the solicitors. What are tactics they use to try to get you to send them your money? MAKE SURE THAT YOU APPLY INFORMATION FROM THE ASSIGNED READING AND LECTURE MATERIAL WHENEVER POSSIBLE.

REMEMBER: with junk mail, one of the biggest hurdles for the source is getting the target to open the envelope, so you will want to consider the character of the envelope as well as its contents!

You may also want to discuss:

- The extent to which a particular demographic (e.g. gender, age group, social class) appears to be the target of the solicitation.
- How the offer makes appeals to common desires (e.g. to be healthy, to become rich)
- How effectively the offer persuades you and what might have made the offer more persuasive.

This exercise will be due on Wednesday, December 11. As always, your essay should have an introduction, a central thesis, and a conclusion.