Effects of guilt-arousal communications on volunteering to the civil guard: A field experiment

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Three intensities of guilt about not volunteering to the civil guard were aroused by distributing appropriate leaflets among three groups (30 students per group) of 12th graders. A fourth group of 30 12th graders served as a control and did not receive any leaflet. All four groups could choose to devote different amounts of their time for serving in the civil guard or to refuse to volunteer at all. It was found that the moderate guilt-arousing leaflet was more effective than the low and high guilt-arousing leaflets in motivating the students to volunteer for the civil guard. The results were interpreted as supporting Janis's model, which predicted a curvilinear relationship between the intensity of guilt and the amount of change in attitude or behavior.

Several years ago, Janis (1967) developed a model attempting to integrate the chaotic findings in the area of fear-arousal communications. In essence, his model predicts a curvilinear relationship between the intensity of fear aroused and the amount of attitude change, in the direction recommended by the communication. The relationship is explained by the defensive-avoidance hypothesis, which essentially claims that, when there is an increased emotional arousal, a mobilization of resistances is involved, which leads to a decrease in the acceptance of the communicator's recommendations.

In 1970 Leventhal came out with an opposing model, predicting a positive linear relationship between the level of fear and amount of attitude change. His basic contention is that emotional arousal is not a necessary antecedent of adaptation to danger. Thus, "more serious threats elicit stronger coping responses and stronger emotional reactions" (Leventhal, 1970, p. 125). No attempt was made by Leventhal to apply his model to guilt-arousing messages.

Janis (1967), however, cites two unpublished studies applying his explanation to guilt-arousing appeals. Haeffner's (1956) purpose was to promote favorable attitudes concerning an international agreement to ban H-bomb tests. He found that his high-guilt appeal produced more resistance and less attitude change than the low-guilt appeal. Zemach (1966) used three intensities of guilt-arousing pamphlets in order to recruit students as volunteers for a civil rights organization. She found that the version that used a medium level of guilt-arousing material and did not personalize the blame was more effective in inducing students to sign up for civil rights activities and in modifying general attitudes than either the high-guilt version or the low-guilt version.

Haeffner studied only high and low guilt-arousal conditions, and therefore could not test Janis's curvilinear model. The data collected by Zemach, although coming from three levels of guilt arousal, did not enable her to

use a parametric analysis. She could only count the *number* of students who signed up for civil rights activities under the different guilt-arousing appeals. Thus, her results could not be regarded as directly supporting the curvilinear model.

The present study emerged from the practical need to increase the amount of volunteering to the civil guard in Israel. The civil guard was established in Israel after the Arab terrorists were successful in killings of citizens and in causing damage to people and property, not only in border settlements, but also in towns and cities in the center of the country. The civil guard is a voluntary organization supported by the government. All citizens who are above 17 years of age are requested to volunteer as armed guards of their neighborhood at night. The amount of time each volunteer has to spend guarding depends on the number of volunteers in his neighborhood. Thus, the people who do not volunteer without any acceptable reason can be easily brought to feel guilty, because of their egoistic behavior.

The insufficient number of volunteers led the people in charge of the recruiting campaign to cooperate with social psychologists, letting them conduct a field experiment as part of the process. The result was a combination of the practical need of the people in the field and the theoretical curiosity of the social psychologists to see whether the relationship between the intensity of the guilt-arousal and the amount of volunteering to the civil guard would be *linear or curvilinear.*

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 120 12th-grade high school students, 17-18 years of age, of both sexes.

Design

Three leaflets were written in order to arouse three intensities of guilt feelings among the readers about the fact that they had not yet volunteered to the civil guard of their town. The low-guilt leaflet described the seriousness of the security situation in general and stressed the importance of volunteering to the civil

Table 1
Mean Ratings of Degree of Guilt* Aroused by the Three Leaflets

Low Guilt	Moderate Guilt	High Guilt
1.64	2.36	4.57

The higher the number, the more guilt is aroused.

guard. At the conclusion, it said: "The civil guard needs any possible addition of manpower. Therefore, all those who until now have not shared this burden should join the civil guard."

The moderate-guilt leaflet said in addition: "Everyone should devote a little of his time to read this message, for the sake of quietening his conscience and the security of both himself and his family. Every citizen should ask himself what he has done for the sake of security. Has he made an attempt to prevent new terrorists' actions? His alertness, quickness, and boldness are required even here at the center of the country, and he has not yet reported in. He is called to guard his neighborhood and home today, before it is too late!"

In the high-guilt leaflet the text appealed directly to the reader, using the second person singular, accused him of not helping to prevent terrorists' acts, and called him to volunteer instantly to the civil guard, before it would be too late and innocent people would be killed because he had not stood up to defend them. The general formulation of the message was very similar to the moderate-guilt version.

These three leaflets were pretested on a sample of 14 12th graders who did not know the purpose of the experiment. They were asked to rate the degree of guilt aroused by the three leaflets on 5-point scales. T tests for correlated observations were performed on the means of these ratings. The difference between the low- and moderate-guilt leaflets only approached statistical significance, $t(13) = 2.00$, $p < .07$. The difference between the moderate- and the high-guilt leaflets was found to be significant, $t(13) = 6.9$, $p < .001$. Similarly, it was found that the difference between the low- and high-guilt leaflets was significant, $t(13) = 9.04$, $p < .001$.

It was decided to terminate the pretests process, in spite of the fact that the difference between the low- and moderate-guilt leaflets was only a borderline case of statistical significance. The reason was the difficulty to find a formulation which would distinguish clearly between these two levels. This decision was facilitated by the assumption that, even in the control group which was deprived of any experimental treatment, there existed a minimal level of guilt, and thus we would have at least three groups anyhow.

Procedure

The subjects were divided randomly into four equal groups (N = 30). Three groups received the guilt-arousing leaflets. Each group was seated in a separate class at school and read a leaflet of the same intensity of guilt arousal. (low, moderate, or high). They were told that this was part of a campaign conducted by the authorities to involve them in civil defense. After reading the leaflet, they received a typewritten page in which six alternatives for amount of volunteering to the civil guard were presented. They could choose being on guard 4 hours once a week in the evening and distributing leaflets in a neighborhood, calling for volunteers, one evening per month, through volunteering for 4 h

Table 2
Means* and Standard Deviations of Amount of Volunteering
To Civil Guard According to the Experimental Conditions

	No Guilt	Low Guilt	Moderate Guilt	High Guilt
Mean	4.7	4.2	2.4	3.2
SD	1.3	1.6	1.1	1.4

The higher the number, the less is the volunteering.

once in 3 weeks, down to stating their refusal to volunteer. The fourth group (control) was given the page with the volunteering alternatives only. It should be mentioned that these six alternatives were determined after consulting with the people who were in charge of the civil guard, and were based on their experience with high-school students in the area. It was verified that the subjects were not exposed earlier to any recruiting attempts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The six alternatives indicating gradual increases of the amount of volunteering, presented to the subjects, were scored from 6 = refusal to volunteer to 1 = 4 h week plus one evening per month for distributing propaganda leaflets for the civil guard. The means and standard deviations of these scores for the four groups are presented in Table 2.

A one-way analysis of variance, performed on this set of means were found to be significant, $F(3,119) = 17.04$, $p < .001$.

The quadratic component of these means was also found to be significant, $F(1,116) = 6.2$, $p < .025$. A Scheffe test comparing the means of the different groups showed that, while there was no difference between the control and the low-guilt groups, the comparisons of low- vs. moderate-, moderate- vs. high-, and low- vs. high-guilt groups were all significant at the .05 level or less.

The results can be considered as supporting Janis's prediction about the curvilinear relationship between the intensity of guilt and behavioral change. The immediate implication of these findings is that, in order to achieve maximal effectiveness, a guilt-arousing message should not be too extreme (e.g., personalize the guilt) or too mild (e.g., general description of the situation).

The major problem is that we do not have a ready made version of a moderate guilt-arousing message which will be effective for any topic or any population.

Besides the general principle stating that the blame should not be too personal and severe, the exact formulation of the message should be determined by trial and error and designed especially for the given situation in which it is going to be utilized.

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