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Making Sense of the Nonsensical: An Analysis of Jonestown

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Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

—quotation on placard over Jim Jones's rostrum at Jonestown

Close to one thousand people died at Jonestown. The members of the Peoples Temple settlement in Guyana, under the direction of the Reverend Jim Jones, fed a poison-laced drink to their children, administered the potion to their infants, and drank it themselves. Their bodies were found lying together, arm in arm; more than 900 perished.

How could such a tragedy occur? The image of an entire community destroying itself, of parents killing their own children, appears incredible. The media stories about the event and full-color pictures of the scene documented some of its horror but did little to illuminate the causes or to explain the processes that led to the deaths. Even a year afterward, a CBS Evening News broadcast asserted that "it was widely assumed that time would offer some explanation for the ritualistic suicide/murder of over 900 people. . . . One year later, it does not appear that any lessons have been uncovered" (CBS News, 1979).

The story of the Peoples Temple is not enshrouded in mystery, however. Jim Jones had founded his church more than 20 years before, in Indiana. His preaching stressed the need for racial brotherhood and integration, and his group helped feed the poor and find them jobs. As his congregation grew, Jim Jones gradually increased the discipline and dedication that he required from the members. In 1965, he moved to northern California; about 100 of his faithful relocated with him. The membership began to multiply, new congregations were formed, and the headquarters was established in San Francisco.

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Behind his public image as a beloved leader espousing interracial harmony, "Father," as Jones was called, assumed a messiah-like presence in the Peoples Temple. Increasingly, he became the personal object of the members' devotion, and he used their numbers and obedience to gain political influence and power. Within the Temple, Jones demanded absolute loyalty, enforced a taxing regimen, and delivered sermons forecasting nuclear holocaust and an apocalyptic destruction of the world, promising his followers that they alone would emerge as survivors. Many of his harangues attacked racism and capitalism, but his most vehement anger focused on the "enemies" of the Peoples Temple—its detractors and especially its defectors. In mid-1977, publication of unfavorable magazine articles, coupled with the impending custody battle over a six-year-old Jones claimed as a "son," prompted emigration of the bulk of Temple membership to a jungle outpost in Guyana.

In November, 1978, Congressman Leo Ryan responded to charges that the Peoples Temple was holding people against their will at Jonestown. He organized a trip to the South American settlement; a small party of journalists and "Concerned Relatives" of Peoples Temple members accompanied him on his investigation. They were in Jonestown for one evening and part of the following day. They heard most residents praise the settlement, expressing their joy at being there and indicating their desire to stay. Two families, however, slipped messages to Ryan that they wanted to leave with him. After the visit, as Ryan's party and these defectors tried to board planes to depart, the group was ambushed and fired upon by Temple gunmen—five people, including Ryan, were murdered.

As the shootings were taking place at the jungle airstrip, Jim Jones gathered the community at Jonestown. He informed them that the Congressman's party would be killed and then initiated the final ritual: the "revolutionary suicide" that the membership had rehearsed on prior occasions. The poison was brought out. It was taken.

Jonestown's remoteness caused reports of the event to reach the public in stages. First came bulletins announcing the assassination of Congressman Ryan along with several members of his party. Then came rumors of mass-deaths at Jonestown, then confirmations. The initial estimates put the number of dead near 400, bringing the hope that substantial numbers of people had escaped into the jungle. But as the bodies were counted, many smaller victims were discovered under the corpses of larger ones—virtually none of the inhabitants of Jonestown survived. The public was shocked, then horrified, then incredulous.

Amid the early stories about the tragedy, along with the lurid descriptions and sensational photographs, came some attempts at analysis. Most discussed the charisma of Jim Jones and the power of "cults." Jones was described as "a character Joseph Conrad might have dreamt up" (Krause, 1978), a "self-appointed messiah" whose "lust for dominion" led hundreds of "fanatic" followers to their demise (Special Report: The Cult of Death, *Newsweek,* 1978a).

Although a description in terms of the personality of the perpetrator and the vulnerability of the victims provides some explanation, it relegates the event to the category of being an aberration, a product of unique forces and dispositions. Assuming such a perspective distances us from the phenomenon. This might be comforting,

but I believe that it limits our understanding and is potentially dangerous. My aim in this analysis is not to blunt the emotional impact of a tragedy of this magnitude by subjecting it to academic examination. At the same time, applying social psychological theory and research makes it more conceivable and comprehensible, thus bringing it closer (in kind rather than in degree) to processes each of us encounters. Social psychological concepts can facilitate our understanding: The killings themselves, and many of the occurrences leading up to them, can be viewed in terms of obedience and compliance. The processes that induced people to join and to believe in the Peoples Temple made use of strategies involved in propaganda and persuasion. In grappling with the most perplexing questions—Why didn't more people leave the Temple? How could they actually kill their children and themselves?—the psychology of self-justification provides some insight.

CONFORMITY

> The character of a church . . . can be seen in its attitude toward its detractors.
>
> —Hugh Prather, *Notes to Myself*

At one level, the deaths at Jonestown can be viewed as the product of obedience, of people complying with the orders of a leader and reacting to the threat of force. In the Peoples Temple, whatever Jim Jones commanded, the members did. When he gathered the community at the pavilion and the poison was brought out, the populace was surrounded by armed guards who were trusted lieutenants of Jones. There are reports that some people did not drink voluntarily but had the poison forced down their throats or injected (Winfrey, 1979). Although there were isolated acts of resistance and suggestions of opposition to the suicides, excerpts from a tape, recorded as the final ritual was being enacted, reveal that such dissent was quickly dismissed or shouted down:

> JONES: I've tried my best to give you a good life. In spite of all I've tried, a handful of people, with their lies, have made our life impossible. If we can't live in peace then let's die in peace. (Applause) . . . We have been so terribly betrayed. . . .
>
> What's going to happen here in the matter of a few minutes is that one of the people on that plane is going to shoot the pilot—I know that. I didn't plan it, but I know it's going to happen. . . . So my opinion is that you be kind to children, and be kind to seniors, and take the potion like they used to in ancient Greece, and step over quietly, because we are not committing suicide—it's a revolutionary act. . . . We can't go back. They're now going back to tell more lies. . . .
>
> FIRST WOMEN: I feel like that as long as there's life, there's hope.
>
> JONES: Well, someday everybody dies.
>
> CROWD: That's right, that's right!

> JONES: What those people gone and done, and what they get through will make our lives worse than hell. . . . But to me, death is not a fearful thing. It's living that's cursed. . . . Not worth living like this.
>
> FIRST WOMAN: But I'm afraid to die.
>
> JONES: I don't think you are. I don't think you are.
>
> FIRST WOMAN: I think there were too few who left for 1,200 people to give them their lives for those people who left. . . . I look at all the babies and I think they deserve to live.
>
> JONES: But don't they deserve much more—they deserve peace. The best testimony we can give is to leave this goddam world. (Applause)
>
> FIRST MAN: It's over, sister. . . . We've made a beautiful day. (Applause)
>
> SECOND MAN: If you tell us we have to give our lives now, we're ready. (Applause) [*Baltimore Sun*, 1979.]

Above the cries of babies wailing, the tape continues, with Jones insisting upon the need for suicide and urging the people to complete the act:

> JONES: Please get some medication. Simple. It's simple. There's no convulsions with it. . . . Don't be afraid to die. You'll see people land out here. They'll torture our people. . . .
>
> SECOND WOMAN: There's nothing to worry about. Everybody keep calm and try to keep your children calm. . . . They're not crying from pain; it's just a little bitter tasting . . .
>
> THIRD WOMAN: This is nothing to cry about. This is something we could all rejoice about. (Applause)
>
> JONES: Please, for God's sake, let's get on with it. . . . This is a revolutionary suicide. This is not a self-destructive suicide. (Voices praise "Dad." Applause)
>
> THIRD MAN: Dad has brought us this far. My vote is to go with Dad. . . .
>
> JONES: We must die with dignity. Hurry, hurry, hurry. We must hurry. . . . Stop this hysterics. Death is a million times more perferable to spending more days in this life. . . . If you knew what was ahead, you'd be glad to be stepping over tonight . . .
>
> FOURTH WOMAN: It's been a pleasure walking with all of you in this revolutionary struggle. . . . No other way I would rather go than to give my life for socialism. Communism, and I thank Dad very much.
>
> JONES: Take our life from us. . . . We didn't commit suicide. We committed an act of revolutionary suicide protesting against the conditions of an inhuman world [*Newsweek*, 1978b, 1979].

If you hold a gun at someone's head, you can get that person to do just about anything. As many accounts have attested,[1] by the early 1970s the members of the Peoples Temple lived in constant fear of severe punishment—brutal beatings

[1] The reports of ex-Peoples Temple members who defected create a very consistent picture of the tactics Jim Jones employed in his church. Jeanne Mills (1979) provides the most comprehensive personal account, and there are affidavits about the Peoples Temple sworn to by Deborah Blakey (May 12, 1978 and June 15, 1978) and Yolanda Crawford (April 10, 1978). Media stories about the Peoples Temple, which usually rely on interviews with defectors, and about Jonestown, which are based on interviews with survivors, also corroborate one another. (See especially Kilduff and Tracy [1977], *Newsweek* [1978a], Lifton [1979], and Cahill [1979].)

coupled with public humiliation—for committing trivial or even inadvertent offenses. But the power of an authority need not be so explicitly threatening in order to induce compliance with its demands, as demonstrated by social psychological research. In Milgram's experiments (1963), a surprisingly high proportion of subjects obeyed the instructions of an experimenter to administer what they thought were very strong electric shocks to another person. Nor does the consensus of a group need be so blatantly coercive to induce agreement with its opinion, as Asch's experiments (1955) on conformity to the incorrect judgments of a majority indicate.

Jim Jones utilized the threat of severe punishment to impose the strict discipline and absolute devotion that he demanded, and he also took measures to eliminate those factors that might encourage resistance or rebellion among his followers. Research showed that the presence of a "disobedient" partner greatly reduced the extent to which most subjects in the Milgram situation (1965) obeyed the instructions to shock the person designated the "learner." Similarly, by including just one confederate who expressed an opinion different from the majority's, Asch (1955) showed that the subject would also agree far less, even when the "other dissenter's" judgment was also incorrect and differed from the subject's. In the Peoples Temple, Jones tolerated no dissent, made sure that members had no allegiance more powerful than to himself, and tried to make the alternative of leaving the Temple an unthinkable option.

Jeanne Mills, who spent six years as a high-ranking member before becoming one of the few who left the Peoples Temple, writes: "There was an unwritten but perfectly understood law in the church that was very important: 'No one is to criticize Father, his wife, or his children' " (Mills, 1979). Deborah Blakey, another long-time member who managed to defect, testified

> Any disagreement with [Jim Jones's] dictates came to be regarded as "treason." . . . Although I felt terrible about what was happening, I was afraid to say anything because I knew that anyone with a differing opinion gained the wrath of Jones and other members. [Blakey, June 15, 1978.]

Conditions in the Peoples Temple became so oppressive, the discrepancy between Jim Jones's stated aims and his practices so pronounced, that it is almost inconceivable that members failed to entertain questions about the church. But these doubts went unreinforced. There were no allies to support one's disobedience of the leader's commands and no fellow dissenters to encourage the expression of disagreement with the majority. Public disobedience or dissent was quickly punished. Questioning Jones's word, even in the company of family or friends, was dangerous—informers and "counselors" were quick to report indiscretions, even by relatives.

The use of informers went further than to stifle dissent; it also diminished the solidarity and loyalty that individuals felt toward their families and friends. While Jones preached that a spirit of brotherhood should pervade his church, he made it clear that each member's personal dedication should be directed to "Father." Families were split: First, children were seated away from parents during services; then, many were assigned to another member's care as they grew up; and ultimately, parents were forced to sign documents surrendering custody rights. "Families are part of the enemy system," Jones stated, because they hurt one's total dedication to the "Cause" (Mills, 1979). Thus, a person called before the membership to be punished could expect his or her family to be among the first and most forceful critics (Cahill, 1979).

Besides splitting parent and child, Jones sought to loosen the bonds between wife and husband. He forced spouses into extramarital sexual relations, which were often of a homosexual or humiliating nature, or with Jones himself. Sexual partnerships and activities not under his direction and control were discouraged and publicly ridiculed.

Thus, expressing any doubts or criticism of Jones—even to a friend, child, or partner—became risky for the individual. As a consequence, such thoughts were kept to oneself, and with the resulting impression that nobody else shared them. In addition to limiting one's access to information, this "fallacy of uniqueness" precluded the sharing of support. It is interesting that among the few who successfully defected from the Peoples Temple were couples such as Jeanne and Al Mills, who kept together, shared their doubts, and gave each other support.

Why didn't more people leave? Once inside the Peoples Temple, getting out was discouraged; defectors were hated. Nothing upset Jim Jones so much; people who left became the targets of his most vitriolic attacks and were blamed for any problems that occurred. One member recalled that after several teen-aged members left the Temple, "We hated those eight with such a passion because we knew any day they were going to try bombing us. I mean Jim Jones had us totally convinced of this" (Winfrey, 1979).

Defectors were threatened: Immediately after she left, Grace Stoen headed for the beach at Lake Tahoe, where she found herself looking over her shoulder, checking to make sure that she hadn't been tracked down (Kilduff and Tracy, 1977). Jeanne Mills reports that she and her family were followed by men in cars, their home was burglarized, and they were threatened with the use of confessions they had signed while still members. When a friend from the Temple paid a visit, she quickly examined Mills's ears—Jim Jones had vowed to have one of them cut off (Mills, 1979). He had made ominous predictions concerning other defectors as well: Indeed, several ex-members suffered puzzling deaths or committed very questionable "suicides" shortly after leaving the Peoples Temple (Reiterman, 1977; Tracy, 1978).

Defecting became quite a risky enterprise, and, for most members, the potential benefits were very uncertain. They had little to hope for outside of the Peoples Temple; what they had, they had committed to the church. Jim Jones had vilified previous defectors as "the enemy" and had instilled the fear that, once outside of the Peoples Temple, members' stories would not be believed by the "racist, fascist" society, and they would be subjected to torture, concentration camps, and execution. Finally, in Guyana, Jonestown was surrounded by dense jungle, the few trails

patrolled by armed security guards (Cahill, 1979). Escape was not a viable option. Resistance was too costly. With no other alternatives apparent, compliance became the most reasonable course of action.

The power that Jim Jones wielded kept the membership of the Peoples Temple in line, and the difficulty of defecting helped to keep them in. But what attracted them to join Jones's church in the first place?

PERSUASION

Nothing is so unbelievable that oratory cannot make it acceptable.

—Cicero

Jim Jones was a charismatic figure, adept at oratory. He sought people for his church who would be receptive to his messages and vulnerable to his promises, and he carefully honed his presentation to appeal to each specific audience.

The bulk of the Peoples Temple membership was comprised of society's needy and neglected: the urban poor, the black, the elderly, and a sprinkling of ex-addicts and ex-convicts (Winfrey, 1979). To attract new members, Jones held public services in various cities. Leaflets would be distributed:

> PASTOR JIM JONES . . . Incredible! . . . Miraculous! . . . Amazing! . . . The Most Unique Prophetic Healing Service You've Ever Witnessed! Behold the Word Made Incarnate In Your Midst!
>
> God works as tumorous masses are passed in every service. . . . Before your eyes, the crippled walk, the blind see! [Kilduff and Javers, 1978.]

Potential members first confronted an almost idyllic scene of blacks and whites living, working, and worshipping together. Guests were greeted and treated most warmly and were invited to share in the group's meal. As advertised, Jim Jones also gave them miracles. A number of members would recount how Jones had cured them of cancer or other dread diseases; during the service Jones or one of his nurses would reach into the member's throat and emerge with a vile mass of tissue—the "cancer" that had been passed as the person gagged. Sometimes Jim Jones would make predictions that would occur with uncanny frequency. He also received revelations about members or visitors that nobody but those individuals could know—what they had eaten for dinner the night before, for instance, or news about a far-off relative. Occasionally, he performed miracles similar to more well-established religious figures:

> There were more people than usual at the Sunday service, and for some reason the church members hadn't brought enough food to feed everyone. It became apparent that the last fifty people in line weren't going to get any meat. Jim announced, "Even though there isn't enough food to feed this multitude, I am blessing the food that we have and multiplying it—just as Jesus did in biblical times."

> Sure enough, a few minutes after he made this startling announcement, Eva Pugh came out of the kitchen beaming, carrying two platters filled with fried chicken. A big cheer came from the people assembled in the room, especially from the people who were at the end of the line.
>
> The "blessed chicken" was extraordinarily delicious, and several of the people mentioned that Jim had produced the best-tasting chicken they had ever eaten. [Mills, 1979.]

These demonstrations were dramatic and impressive; most members were convinced of their authenticity and believed in Jones's "powers." They didn't know that the "cancers" were actually rancid chicken gizzards, that the occurrences Jones "forecast" were staged, or that sending people to sift through a person's garbage could reveal packages of certain foods or letters of out-of-town relatives to serve as grist for Jones' "revelations" (Kilduff and Tracy, 1977; Mills, 1979). Members were motivated to believe in Jones; they appreciated the racial harmony, sense of purpose, and relief from feelings of worthlessness that the Peoples Temple provided them (Winfrey, 1979; Lifton, 1979). Even when suspecting that something was wrong, they learned that it was unwise to voice their doubts:

> One of the men, Chuck Beikman . . . jokingly mentioned to a few people standing near him that he had seen Eva drive up a few moments earlier with buckets from the Kentucky Fried Chicken stand. He smiled as he said, "The person that blessed this chicken was Colonel Sanders."
>
> During the evening meeting Jim mentioned the fact that Chuck had made fun of his gift. "He lied to some of the members here, telling them that the chicken had come from a local shop," Jim stormed. "But the Spirit of Justice has prevailed. Because of his lie Chuck is in the men's room right now, wishing that he was dead. He is vomiting and has diarrhea so bad he can't talk!"
>
> An hour later a pale and shaken Chuck Beikman walked out of the men's room and up to the front, being supported by one of the guards. Jim asked him, "Do you have anything you'd like to say?"
>
> Chuck looked up weakly and answered, "Jim, I apologize for what I said. Please forgive me."
>
> As we looked at Chuck, we vowed in our hearts that we would never question any of Jim's "miracles"—at least not out loud. Years later, we learned that Jim had put a mild poison in a piece of cake and given it to Chuck. [Mills, 1979.]

Although most members responded to presentations that were emotional, one-sided, and almost sensational in tone, those who eventually assumed positions of responsibility in the upper echelons of the Peoples Temple were attracted by different considerations. Most of these people were white and came from upper-middle-class backgrounds—they included lawyers, a medical student, nurses, and people representing other occupations that demanded education and reflected a strong social consciousness. Jones lured these members by stressing the social and political aspects of the church, its potential as an idealistic experiment with integration and socialism. Tim Stoen, who was the Temple's lawyer, stated later, "I wanted utopia so damn bad I could die" (Winfrey, 1979). These members had the information and intelligence to see through many of Jones's ploys, but, as Jeanne Mills explains repeatedly in her book, they dismissed their qualms and dismissed Jones's deception

as being necessary to achieve a more important aim—furthering the Cause: "For the thousandth time, I rationalized my doubts. 'If Jim feels it's necessary for the Cause, who am I to question his wisdom?' " (Mills, 1979).

It turned out to be remarkably easy to overcome their hesitancy and calm their doubts. Mills recalls that she and her husband initially were skeptical about Jones and the Peoples Temple. After attending their first meeting, they remained unimpressed by the many members who proclaimed that Jones had healed their cancers or cured their drug habits. They were annoyed by Jones' arrogance, and they were bored by most of the long service. But in the weeks following their visit, they received numerous letters containing testimonials and gifts from the Peoples Temple, they had dreams about Jones, and they were attracted by the friendship and love they had felt from both the black and the white members. When they went back for their second visit, they took their children with them. After the long drive, the Mills family was greeted warmly by many members and by Jones himself. "This time . . . my mind was open to hear his message because my own beliefs had become very shaky" (Mills, 1979). As they were driving home afterward, the children begged their parents to join the church:

> We had to admit that we enjoyed the service more this time and we told the children that we'd think it over. Somehow, though, we knew that it was only a matter of time before we were going to become members of the Peoples Temple. [Mills, 1979.]

Jim Jones skillfully manipulated the impression that his church would convey to newcomers. He carefully managed its public image. He used the letter-writing and political clout of hundreds of members to praise and impress the politicians and press that supported the Peoples Temple, as well as to criticize and intimidate its opponents (Kasindorf, 1978). Most important, Jones severely restricted the information that was available to the members. In addition to indoctrinating members into his own belief system through extensive sermons and lectures, he inculcated a distrust of any contradictory messages, labelling them the product of enemies. By destroying the credibility of their sources, he inoculated the membership against being persuaded by outside criticism. Similarly, any contradictory thoughts that might arise within each member were to be discredited. Instead of seeing them as having any basis in reality, members interpreted them as indications of their own shortcomings or lack of faith. Members learned to attribute the apparent discrepancies between Jones's lofty pronouncements and the rigors of life in the Peoples Temple to their personal inadequacies rather than blaming them on any fault of Jones. As ex-member Neva Sly was quoted: "We always blamed ourselves for things that didn't seem right" (Winfrey, 1979). A unique and distorting language developed within the church, in which "the Cause" became anything that Jim Jones said (Mills, 1979). It was spoken at Jonestown, where a guard tower was called the "playground" (Cahill, 1979). Ultimately, through the clever use of oratory, deception, and language, Jones could speak of death as "stepping over," thereby camouflaging a hopeless act of self-destruction as a noble and brave act of "revolutionary suicide," and the members accepted his words.

SELF-JUSTIFICATION

> Both salvation and punishment for man lie in the fact that if he lives wrongly he can befog himself so as not to see the misery of his position.
>
> —Tolstoy, "The Kreutzer Sonata"

Analyzing Jonestown in terms of obedience and the power of the situation can help to explain why the people *acted* as they did. Once the Peoples Temple had moved to Jonestown, there was little the members could do other than follow Jim Jones's dictates. They were comforted by an authority of absolute power. They were left with few options, being surrounded by armed guards and by the jungle, having given their passports and various documents and confessions to Jones, and believing that conditions in the outside world were even more threatening. The members' poor diet, heavy workload, lack of sleep, and constant exposure to Jones's diatribes exacerbated the coerciveness of their predicament; tremendous pressures encouraged them to obey.

By the time of the final ritual, opposition or escape had become almost impossible for most of the members. Yet even then, it is doubtful that many *wanted* to resist or to leave. Most had come to believe in Jones—one woman's body was found with a message scribbled on her arm during the final hours: "Jim Jones is the only one" (Cahill, 1979). They seemed to have accepted the necessity, and even the beauty, of dying—just before the ritual began, a guard approached Charles Garry, one of the Temple's hired attorneys, and exclaimed, "It's a great moment . . . we all die" (Lifton, 1979). A survivor of Jonestown, who happened to be away at the dentist, was interviewed a year following the deaths:

> If I had been there, I would have been the first one to stand in that line and take that poison and I would have been proud to take it. The thing I'm sad about is this; that I missed the ending. [Gallagher, 1979.]

It is this aspect of Jonestown that is perhaps the most troubling. To the end, and even beyond, the vast majority of the Peoples Temple members *believed* in Jim Jones. External forces, in the form of power or persuasion, can exact compliance. But one must examine a different set of processes to account for the members' internalizing those beliefs.

Although Jones's statements were often inconsistent and his methods cruel, most members maintained their faith in his leadership. Once they were isolated at Jonestown, there was little opportunity or motivation to think otherwise—resistance or escape was out of the question. In such a situation, the individual is motivated to rationalize his or her predicament; a person confronted with the inevitable tends to regard it more positively. For example, social psychological research has shown that when children believe that they will be served more of a vegetable they dislike, they will convince themselves that it is not so noxious (Brehm, 1959), and

when a person thinks that she will be interacting with someone, she tends to judge a description of that individual more favorably (Darley and Berscheid, 1967).

A member's involvement in the Temple did not begin at Jonestown—it started much earlier, closer to home, and less dramatically. At first, the potential member would attend meetings voluntarily and might put in a few hours each week working for the church. Though the established members would urge the recruit to join, he or she felt free to choose whether to stay or to leave. Upon deciding to join, a member expended more effort and became more committed to the Peoples Temple. In small increments, Jones increased the demands made on the member, and only after a long sequence did he escalate the oppressiveness of his rule and the desperation of his message. Little by little, the individual's alternatives became more limited. Step by step, the person was motivated to rationalize his or her commitment and to justify his or her behavior.

Jeanne Mills, who managed to defect two years before the Temple relocated in Guyana, begins her account, *Six Years With God* (1979), by writing "Every time I tell someone about the six years we spent as members of the Peoples Temple, I am faced with an unanswerable question: 'If the church was so bad, why did you and your family stay in for so long?'" Several classic studies from social psychological research investigating processes of self-justification and the theory of cognitive dissonance (see Aronson, 1980, chapter 4; Aronson, 1969) can point to explanations for such seemingly irrational behavior.

According to dissonance theory, when a person commits an act or holds a cognition that is psychologically inconsistent with his or her self-concept, the inconsistency arouses an unpleasant state of tension. The individual tries to reduce this "dissonance," usually by altering his or her attitudes to bring them more into line with the previously discrepant action or belief. A number of occurrences in the Peoples Temple can be illuminated by viewing them in light of this process. The horrifying events of Jonestown were not due merely to the threat of force, nor did they erupt instantaneously. That is, it was *not* the case that something "snapped" in people's minds, suddenly causing them to behave in bizarre ways. Rather, as the theory of cognitive dissonance spells out, people seek to *justify* their choices and commitments.

Just as a towering waterfall can begin as a trickle, so too can the impetus for doing extreme or calamitous actions be provided by the consequences of agreeing to do seemingly trivial ones. In the Peoples Temple, the process started with the effects of undergoing a severe initiation to join the church, was reinforced by the tendency to justify one's commitments, and was strengthened by the need to rationalize one's behavior.

Consider the prospective member's initial visit to the Peoples Temple, for example. When a person undergoes a severe initiation to gain entrance into a group, he or she is apt to judge that group as being more attractive, in order to justify expending the effort or enduring the pain. Aronson and Mills (1959) demonstrated that students who suffered greater embarrassment as a prerequisite for being allowed to participate in a discussion group rated its conversation (which actually was quite boring) to be significantly more interesting than did those students who

experienced little or no embarrassment in order to be admitted. Not only is there a tendency to justify undergoing the experience by raising one's estimation of the goal—in some circumstances, choosing to experience a hardship can go so far as to affect a person's perception of the discomfort or pain he or she felt. Zimbardo (1969) and his colleagues showed that when subjects volunteered for a procedure that involves their being given electric shocks, those thinking that they had more choice in the matter reported feeling less pain from the shocks. More specifically, those who experienced greater dissonance, having little external justification to account for their choosing to endure the pain, described it as being less intense. This extended beyond their impressions and verbal reports; their performance on a task was hindered less, and they even recorded somewhat lower readings on a physiological instrument measuring galvanic skin responses. Thus, the dissonance-reducing process can be double-edged: Under proper guidance, a person who voluntarily experiences a severe initiation not only comes to regard its ends more positively, but may also begin to see the means as less aversive: "We begin to appreciate the long meetings, because we were told that spiritual growth comes from self-sacrifice" (Mills, 1979).

Once involved, a member found ever-increasing portions of his or her time and energy devoted to the Peoples Temple. The services and meetings occupied weekends and several evenings each week. Working on Temple projects and writing the required letters to politicians and the press took much of one's "spare" time. Expected monetary contributions changed from "voluntary" donations (though they were recorded) to the required contribution of a quarter of one's income. Eventually, a member was supposed to sign over all personal property, savings, social security checks, and the like to the Peoples Temple. Before entering the meeting room for each service, a member stopped at a table and wrote self-incriminating letters or signed blank documents that were turned over to the church. If anyone objected, the refusal was interpreted as denoting a "lack of faith" in Jones. Finally, members were asked to live at Temple facilities to save money and to be able to work more efficiently, and many of their children were raised under the care of other families. Acceding to each new demand had two repercussions: In practical terms, it enmeshed the person further into the Peoples Temple web and made leaving more difficult; on an attitudinal level, it set the aforementioned processes of self-justification into motion. As Mills (1979) describes:

> We had to face painful reality. Our life savings were gone. Jim had demanded that we sell the life insurance policy and turn the equity over to the church, so that was gone. Our property had all been taken from us. Our dream of going to an overseas mission was gone. We thought that we had alienated our parents when we told them we were leaving the country. Even the children whom we had left in the care of Carol and Bill were openly hostile toward us. Jim had accomplished all this in such a short time! All we had left now was Jim and the Cause, so we decided to buckle under and give our energies to these two.

Ultimately, Jim Jones and the Cause would require the members to give their lives.

What could cause people to kill their children and themselves? From a detached perspective, the image seems unbelievable. In fact, at first glance, so does the idea of so many individuals committing so much of their time, giving all of their money, and even sacrificing the control of their children to the Peoples Temple. Jones took advantage of rationalization processes that allow people to justify their commitments by raising their estimations of the goal and minimizing its costs. Much as he gradually increased his demands, Jones carefully orchestrated the members' exposure to the concept of a "final ritual." He utilized the leverage provided by their previous commitments to push them closer and closer to its enactment. Gaining a "foot in the door" by getting a person to agree to a moderate request makes it more probable that he or she will agree to do a much larger deed later, as social psychologists—and salespeople—have found (Freedman and Fraser, 1966). Doing the initial task causes something that might have seemed unreasonable at first appear less extreme in comparison, and it also motivates a person to make his or her behavior appear more consistent by consenting to the larger request as well.

After indoctrinating the members with the workings of the Peoples Temple itself, Jones began to focus on broader and more basic attitudes. He started by undermining the members' belief that death was to be fought and feared and set the stage by introducing the possibility of a cataclysmic ending for the church. As several accounts corroborate (see Mills, 1979; Lifton, 1979; Cahill, 1979), Jones directed several "fake" suicide drills, first with the elite Planning Commission of the Peoples Temple and later with the general membership. He would give them wine and then announce that it had been poisoned and that they would soon die. These became tests of faith, of the members' willingness to follow Jones even to death. Jones would ask people if they were ready to die and on occasion would have the membership "decide" its own fate by voting whether to carry out his wishes. An ex-member recounted that one time, after a while

> Jones smiled and said, "Well, it was a good lesson. I see you're not dead." He made it sound like we needed the 30 minutes to do very strong, introspective type of thinking. We all felt strongly dedicated, proud of ourselves. . . . [Jones] taught that it was a privilege to die for what you believed in, which is exactly what I would have been doing. [Winfrey, 1979.]

After the Temple moved to Jonestown, the "White Nights," as the suicide drills were called, occurred repeatedly. An exercise that appears crazy to the observer was a regular, justifiable occurrence for the Peoples Temple participant. The reader might ask whether this caused the members to think that the actual suicides were merely another practice, but there were many indications that they knew that the poison was truly deadly on that final occasion. The Ryan visit had been climactic, there were several new defectors, the cooks—who had been excused from the prior drills to prepare the upcoming meal—were included, Jones had been growing increasingly angry, desperate, and unpredictable, and, finally, everyone could see the first babies die. The membership was manipulated, but they were not unaware that this time the ritual was for real.

A dramatic example of the impact of self-justification concerns the physical punishment that was meted out in the Peoples Temple. As discussed earlier, the threat of being beaten or humiliated forced the member to comply with Jones's orders: A person will obey as long as he or she is being threatened and supervised. To affect a person's *attitudes,* however, a mild threat has been demonstrated to be more effective than a severe threat (Aronson and Carlsmith, 1963) and its influence has been shown to be far longer lasting (Freedman, 1965). Under a mild threat, the individual has more difficulty attributing his or her behavior to such a minor external restraint, forcing the person to alter his or her attitudes to justify the action. Severe threats elicit compliance, but, imposed from the outside, they usually fail to cause the behavior to be internalized. Quite a different dynamic ensues when it is not so clear that the action is being imposed upon the person. When an individual feels that he or she played an active role in carrying out an action that hurts someone, there comes a motivation to justify one's part in the cruelty by rationalizing it as necessary or by derogating the victim by thinking that the punishment was deserved (Davis and Jones, 1960).

Let's step back for a moment. The processes going on at Jonestown obviously were not as simple as those in a well-controlled laboratory experiment; several themes were going on simultaneously. For example, Jim Jones had the power to impose any punishments that he wished in the Peoples Temple, and, especially toward the end, brutality and terror at Jonestown were rampant. But Jones carefully controlled how the punishments were carried out. He often called upon the members themselves to agree to the imposition of beatings. They were instructed to testify against fellow members, bigger members told to beat up smaller ones, wives or lovers forced to sexually humiliate their partners, and parents asked to consent to and assist in the beatings of their children (Mills, 1979; Kilduff and Javers, 1978). The punishments grew more and more sadistic, the beatings so severe as to knock the victim unconscious and cause bruises that lasted for weeks. As Donald Lunde, a psychiatrist who has investigated acts of extreme violence, explains:

> Once you've done something that major, it's very hard to admit even to yourself that you've made a mistake, and subconsciously you will go to great lengths to rationalize what you did. It's very tricky defense mechanism exploited to the hilt by the charismatic leader. [*Newsweek,* 1978a.]

A more personal account of the impact of this process is provided by Jeanne Mills. At one meeting, she and her husband were forced to consent to the beating of their daughter as punishment for a very minor transgression. She relates the effect this had on her daughter, the victim, as well as on herself, one of the perpetrators:

> As we drove home, everyone in the car was silent. We were all afraid that our words would be considered treasonous. The only sounds came from Linda, sobbing quietly in the back seat. When we got into our house, Al and I sat down to talk with Linda. She was in too much pain to sit. She stood quietly while we talked with her. "How do you feel about what happened tonight?" Al asked her.

"Father was right to have me whipped," Linda answered. "I've been so rebellious lately, and I've done a lot of things that were wrong. . . . I'm sure Father knew about those things, and that's why he had me hit so many times."

As we kissed our daughter goodnight, our heads were spinning. It was hard to think clearly when things were so confusing. Linda had been the victim, and yet we were the only people angry about it. She should have been hostile and angry. Instead, she said that Jim had actually helped her. We knew Jim had done a cruel thing, and yet everyone acted as if he were doing a loving thing in whipping our disobedient child. Unlike a cruel person hurting a child, Jim had seemed calm, almost loving, as he observed the beating and counted off the whacks. Our minds were not able to comprehend the atrocity of the situation because none of the feedback we were receiving was accurate. [Mills, 1979.]

The feedback one received from the outside was limited, and the feedback from inside the Temple member was distorted. By justifying the previous actions and commitments, the groundwork for accepting the ultimate commitment was established.

CONCLUSION

Only months after we defected from Temple did we realize the full extent of the cocoon in which we'd lived. And only then did we understand the fraud, sadism, and emotional blackmail of the master manipulator.

—Jeanne Mills, *Six Years with God*

Immediately following the Jonestown tragedy, there came a proliferation of articles about "cults" and calls for their investigation and control. From Synanon to Transcendental Meditation, groups and practices were examined by the press, which had a difficult time determining what constituted a "cult" or differentiating between those that might be safe and beneficial and those that could be dangerous. The Peoples Temple and the events at Jonestown make such a definition all the more problematic. A few hours before his murder, Congressman Ryan addressed the membership: "I can tell you right now that by the few conversations I've had with some of the folks . . . there are some people who believe this is the best thing that ever happened in their whole lives" (Krause, 1978). The acquiescence of so many and the letters they left behind indicate that this feeling was widely shared—or at least expressed—by the members.

Many "untraditional"—to mainstream American culture—groups or practices, such as Eastern religions or meditation techniques, have proven valuable for the people who experience them but may be seen as very strange and frightening to others. How can people determine whether they are being exposed to a potentially useful alternative way of living their lives or if they are being drawn to a dangerous one?

The distinction is a difficult one. Three questions suggested by the previous analysis, however, can provide important clues: Are alternatives being provided or taken away? Is one's access to new and different information being broadened or denied? Finally, does the individual assume personal responsibility and control or is it usurped by the group or by its leader?

The Peoples Temple attracted many of its members because it provided them an alternative way of viewing their lives; it gave many people who were downtrodden a sense of purpose, and even transcendence. But it did so at a cost, forcing them to disown their former friendships and beliefs and teaching them to fear anything outside of the Temple as "the enemy." Following Jones became the *only* alternative.

Indeed, most of the members grew increasingly unaware of the possibility of any other course. Within the Peoples Temple, and especially at Jonestown, Jim Jones controlled the information to which members would be exposed. He effectively stifled any dissent that might arise within the church and instilled a distrust in each member for contradictory messages from outside. After all, what credibility could be carried by information supplied by "the enemy" that was out to destroy the Peoples Temple with "lies"?

Seeing no alternatives and having no information, a member's capacity for dissent or resistance was minimized. Moreover, for most members, part of the Temple's attraction resulted from their willingness to relinquish much of the responsibility and control over their lives. These were primarily the poor, the minorities, the elderly, and the unsuccessful—they were happy to exchange personal autonomy (with its implicit assumption of personal responsibility for their plights) for security, brotherhood, the illusion of miracles, and the promise of salvation. Stanley Cath, a psychiatrist who has studied the conversion techniques used by cults, generalizes: "Converts have to believe only what they are told. They don't have to think, and this relieves tremendous tensions" (*Newsweek*, 1978a). Even Jeanne Mills, one of the better-educated Temple members, commented:

> I was amazed at how little disagreement there was between the members of this church. Before we joined the church, Al and I couldn't even agree on whom to vote for in the presidential election. Now that we all belonged to a group, family arguments were becoming a thing of the past. There was never a question of who was right, because Jim was always right. When our large household met to discuss family problems, we didn't ask for opinions. Instead, we put the question to the children, "What would Jim do?" It took the difficulty out of life. There was a type of "manifest destiny" which said the Cause was right and would succeed. Jim was right and those who agreed with him were right. If you disagreed with Jim, you were wrong. It was as simple as that. [Mills, 1979.]

Though it is unlikely that he had any formal exposure to the social psychological literature, Jim Jones utilized several very powerful and effective techniques for controlling people's behavior and altering their attitudes. Some analyses have compared his tactics to those involved in "brainwashing," for both include the control of communication, the manipulation of guilt, and dispensing power over people's existence (Lifton, 1979), as well as isolation, an exacting regimen, physical pressure,

and the use of confessions (Cahill, 1979). But using the term brainwashing makes the process sound too esoteric and unusual. There *were* some unique and scary elements in Jones' personality—paranoia, delusions of grandeur, sadism, and a preoccupation with suicide. Whatever his personal motivation, however, having formulated his plans and fantasies, he took advantage of well-established social psychological tactics to carry them out. The decision to have a community destroy itself was crazy, but those who performed the deed were "normal" people who were subjected to a tremendously influential situation, the victims of powerful internal forces as well as external pressures.

POSTSCRIPT

Within a few weeks of the deaths at Jonestown, the bodies had been transported back to the United States, the remnants of the Peoples Temple membership were said to have disbanded, and the spate of stories and books about the suicide/murders had begun to lose the public's attention. Three months afterward, Michael Prokes, who had escaped from Jonestown because he was assigned to carry away a box of Peoples Temple funds, called a press conference in a California motel room. After claiming that Jones had been misunderstood and demanding the release of a tape recording of the final minutes [quoted earlier], he stepped into the bathroom and shot himself in the head. He left behind a note, saying that if his death inspired another book about Jonestown, it was worthwhile (*Newsweek,* 1979).

POSTSCRIPT

Jeanne and Al Mills were among the most vocal of the Peoples Temple critics following their defection, and they topped an alleged "death list" of its enemies. Even after Jonestown, the Millses had repeatedly expressed fear for their lives. More than a year after the Peoples Temple deaths, they and their daughter were murdered in their Berkeley home. Their teen-aged son, himself an ex-Peoples Temple member, has testified that he was in another part of the large house at the time. At this writing, no suspect has been charged. There are indications that the Millses knew their killer—there were no signs of forced entry, and they were shot at close range. Jeanne Mills had been quoted as saying, "It's going to happen. If not today, then tomorrow." On the final tape of Jonestown, Jim Jones had blamed Jeanne Mills by name, and had promised that his followers in San Francisco "will not take our death in vain" (*Newsweek,* 1980).

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8

Effects of Varying the Recommendations in a Fear-Arousing Communication

James M. Dabbs Jr. and Howard Leventhal

It has been suggested that divergent effects of fear arousal on attitude change can be caused by variations in the recommendations in a persuasive communication. In a three-way factorial design Ss were presented with communications manipulating fear of tetanus and the perceived effectiveness and painfulness of inoculation against tetanus. Inoculation was recommended for all Ss. It was expected that more Ss would take shots described as highly effective and not painful, and that this tendency would change as level of fear was increased. The manipulations of effectiveness and painfulness were perceived as intended, but they did not affect intentions to take shots or shot-taking behavior. The fear manipulation influenced both intentions and behavior, with higher fear producing greater compliance with the recommendations.

A number of studies have investigated the effects of fear arousal on persuasion. Although the majority report that fear increases persuasion, the picture is not completely clear. Facilitating effects of fear on persuasion have been reported in studies of dental hygiene practices (Haefner, 1965; Leventhal and Singer, 1966; Singer, 1965), tetanus inoculations (Leventhal, Jones, and Trembly, 1966; Leventhal, Singer, and Jones, 1965), safe driving practices (Berkowitz and Cottingham, 1960; Leventhal and Niles, 1965), and cigarette smoking (Insko, Arkoff, and Insko, 1965; Leventhal and Watts, 1966; Niles, 1964). However, under increasing levels of fear Janis and Feshbach (1953) observed no increase in acceptance of beliefs about the

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proper type of toothbrush to use, and Leventhal and Niles (1964) observed some decrease in acceptance of a recommendation to stop smoking. All these results are based on verbal measures of *attitude* change.

The picture is even less clear when one considers actual *behavior* change. The study on tetanus by Leventhal et al. (1965) reports that some minimal amount of fear is necessary for behavior change, but that further increases in fear do not affect change. The later study by Leventhal et al. (1966) reports a slight tendency for increases in fear to increase behavior change. In the studies of dental hygiene practices, Janis and Feshbach (1953) reported decreased behavior change under high fear, while Singer (1965) found no main effect of fear. In the study on smoking by Leventhal and Watts (1966) high fear simultaneously increased compliance with a recommendation to cut down on smoking and decreased compliance with a recommendation to take an X-ray.

The present study attempted to account for some of these divergent findings. It is reasonable to expect that the behavior being recommended by a persuasive communication is of critical importance (Leventhal, 1965). Recommendations that are seen as effective in controlling danger may be accepted more readily as fear is increased, while ineffective recommendations may be rejected rationally or may produce reactions of denial (Janis and Feshbach, 1953) or aggression (Janis and Terwilliger, 1962). Additionally, rejection of a recommended behavior may occur if subjects have become afraid of the behavior itself (Leventhal and Watts, 1966).

Recommendations presented as part of fear-arousing communications vary in their effectiveness in controlling danger and in the unpleasantness associated with them. For example, brushing the teeth offers no guarantee of preventing decay, while taking a chest X-ray can lead to the unpleasant discovery of lung cancer. An audience might well reject recommendations which are ineffective in warding off danger or which are difficult, painful, or apt to bring unpleasant consequences. Recommendation factors have been invoked post hoc to explain research findings, but have not been manipulated and studied directly.

In the present study fear was manipulated by presenting differing discussions of the danger of tetanus. Inoculations and booster shots were recommended for protection against tetanus. Under high and low levels of fear, inoculation was portrayed so that it would be seen as more or less *effective* in preventing tetanus and more or less *painful* to take (these manipulations were orthogonal). Subjects' intentions to take shots and their actual shot-taking behavior were used to measure compliance with the recommendations.

It was expected that compliance would be greater when shots were highly effective or not painful. These factors might produce simple main effects or they might interact with level of fear. It seemed more likely that the latter would be the case—that increased fear would make subjects either more or less sensitive to differences in the recommendations.

METHOD

Subjects and Design

Letters were sent to all Yale College seniors asking them to participate in a study to be conducted jointly by the John Slade Ely Center, a local research organization, and the Department of University Health. The study was presented as a survey of student health practices at Yale and an evaluation of some health-education materials. An attempt was then made to contact all seniors by telephone for scheduling.

Of approximately 1000 students who received letters, 274 were scheduled and run in the experiment. Seventy-seven of these were excluded because they had been inoculated since the preceding academic year, and 15 were excluded because of suspicion, involvement in compulsory inoculation programs, allergic reactions to inoculation, or religious convictions against inoculation. The final usable N was 182.

Each subject received a communication which was intended to manipulate perceived effectiveness and painfulness of inoculation. Three levels of fear (including a no-fear control level), two levels of effectiveness, and two levels of pain were combined in a $3 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial design. The n's for the resulting 12 conditions ranged from 11 to 20, with smaller n's in the no-fear control conditions.

Procedure

Experimental sessions were conducted in a classroom with groups ranging in size from 1 to 12. Subjects within each session were randomly assigned to conditions. Control (no-fear) conditions were run separately because of the brevity of the control communications.

Questionnaires containing medical items and personality premeasures were administered at the beginning of the session. Subjects then read a communication on tetanus and gave their reactions to it in a second questionnaire. They were assured that all their responses would be kept confidential.

Communications

Communications were 10-page pamphlets which discussed the danger of tetanus and the effectiveness and painfulness of inoculation.[1] All pamphlets gave specific

[1] Communications have been deposited with the American Documentation Institute. Order Document No. 9011 from ADI Auxiliary Publications Project, Photoduplication Service, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540. Remit in advance $2.00 for microfilm or $3.75 for photocopies and make checks payable to: Chief, Photoduplication Service, Library of Congress.

instructions on how to become inoculated and were similar in style and content to those used by Leventhal et al. (1965) and Leventhal et al. (1966).

Fear. Low-fear material described the very low incidence of tetanus and indicated that bleeding from a wound usually flushes the poison-producing bacilli out of the body. A case history was included which reported recovery from tetanus following mild medication and throat-suction procedures. High-fear material indicated that tetanus can be contracted through seemingly trivial means and that if contracted the chances of death are high. A high-fear case history was included that reported death from tetanus despite heavy medication and surgery to relieve throat congestion. Black-and-white photographs were included in the low-fear material and color photographs in the high-fear material. The discussion of tetanus and case history were omitted entirely from control (no-fear) communications.

Effectiveness. The effectiveness manipulation stressed either the imperfections or the unusual effectiveness of inoculation. Low-effectiveness material stated that inoculation is generally effective and about as adequate as the measures available to deal with other kinds of danger. It pointed out, however, that no protection is perfect and that there is a possibility that even an inoculated person will contract tetanus. High-effectiveness material described inoculation as almost perfect and as far superior to methods available to deal with other kinds of danger. It emphasized that inoculation reduces the chances of contracting tetanus, for all practical purposes, to zero. All communications reported that a new type of inoculation was available at the Department of University Health which would provide protection against tetanus for a period of 10 years.

Pain. To produce fear of the recommended behavior, it was pointed out that inoculation against tetanus has always been painful. Subjects were told that the new inoculation requires a deep intramuscular injection of tetanus toxoid and alum precipitate, making the injection even more painful than before and the local reaction longer lasting. The discussion of pain was presented to subjects as a forewarning so that the discomfort would not take them by surprise. This discussion was omitted from pamphlets in the no-pain conditions.

Specific instructions on how to get a shot and a map showing the location of the Department of University Health were included in all pamphlets. Subjects were encouraged to get a shot or at least to check on whether they needed one.

Measures

Most questions on the pre- and postcommunication questionnaires were answered on 7-point rating scales. The precommunication questionnaire contained

medical questions and four personality measures (susceptibility, coping, anxiety, and self-esteem). The susceptibility measure was made up of three items which asked subjects how susceptible they felt toward common illnesses, toward unusual diseases, and toward illness and disease in general. Three items used to measure coping asked subjects whether they tended to tackle problems actively or to postpone dealing with them. The problems concerned subjects' health habits, their everyday lives as students, and their decisions regarding summer activities. The anxiety scale was made up of 10 true-false items from the Taylor (1953) Manifest Anxiety scale.

The self-esteem measure was similar to that used by Dabbs (1964). Subjects rated themselves on 20 adjectives and descriptive phrases and then rated each of the 20 items as to its desirability. Eight items were classified as desirable and 12 as undesirable on the basis of mean ratings from the entire sample of subjects. Using this group criterion of desirability, each subject's self-esteem score was defined as the sum of his ratings on the desirable items. (It was subsequently discovered that 12 subjects in the present study had participated in the earlier study by Dabbs, and the correlation between their self-esteem scores in the two studies was .62, $p < .01$. This correlation, despite a lapse of 3 years and changes in the measuring instrument, suggests this type of measure is reasonably stable.)

The postcommunication questionnaire included checks on each of the experimental manipulations, a 10-item mood adjective check list, and questions on intentions to take shots, the importance of shots, and the likelihood of contracting tetanus. The subject's evaluation of the pamphlet and the date and place of his last tetanus shot were obtained on this questionnaire.

A measure of behavioral compliance with the recommendations was obtained from shot records of the Department of University Health. Subjects were counted as complying if they took tetanus shots between the experimental sessions and the end of the semester, about one month later. When contacted by letter and phone, no subjects reported receiving shots at places other than the Department of University Health. A few reported that they had tried to take shots and had been told they did not need any. These subjects were counted as having taken shots but their data are presented separately in footnote 2 on the next page.

RESULTS

Main Effects of the Manipulations

Compliance with the recommendations was unaffected by the manipulations of effectiveness and pain. The manipulation of fear, however, influenced both

TABLE 8.1
Compliance with recommendations

	Control (no fear)	Low fear	High fear
Mean intentions to take shots	4.12	4.73	5.17
Proportion of Ss taking shots	.06	.13	.22
N	48	62	72

intentions to take shots ($F_{2,179} = 4.85$, $p < .01$) and actual shot-taking behavior[2] ($F = 3.39$, $p < .05$). The effects were linear (Table 8.1), with compliance being greatest under high fear. The consistency of subjects' responses is indicated by high biserial correlations between intention and behavior measures within high-fear ($r_b = .62$, $p < .01$) and low-fear ($r_b = .68$, $p < .01$) conditions; no correlation was computed for the control conditions since only three control subjects took shots.

Table 8.2 shows that the fear manipulation increased feelings of fear, as it was intended to do. It also increased feelings of interest and nausea, belief in the severity of tetanus and the importance of taking shots, and desire to have additional information. None of these measures were affected by the manipulations of effectiveness or pain.

Both effectiveness and pain were successfully manipulated. Check questions showed that subjects in the high-effectiveness conditions felt inoculation was more effective than did those in the low-effectiveness conditions ($\bar{X}_{high} = 6.7$, $\bar{X}_{low} = 5.8$, $F_{1,170} = 105.85$, $p < .01$). Subjects in the pain conditions felt shots would be more painful ($\bar{X}_{pain} = 4.1$, $\bar{X}_{no\ pain} = 2.3$, $F_{1,170} = 74.56$, $p < .01$) and reported more "mixed feelings" about taking shots ($F_{1,170} = 7.20$, $p < .01$) than did subjects in the no-pain conditions. But the clear perception of differences in effectiveness did not affect subjects' intentions to take shots, nor did increasing the anticipated painfulness of shots decrease intentions to take them. In fact, there was a slight tendency for painfulness to strengthen intentions to be inoculated ($F_{1,170} = 2.72$, $p = .10$).

[2]"Shot-taking behavior" combines 20 subjects who took shots and 7 who reported trying to take shots. These two categories are distributed similarly across the fear treatment conditions: 2, 6, and 12 subjects took shots and 1, 2, and 4 subjects tried to do so.

An arc sine transformation of the proportions in Table 8.1 was used (Winer, 1962). This made it possible to test the significance of the differences between groups against the *baseline variance* of the transformation (see Gilson and Abelson, 1965). Baseline variance has a theoretical value which does not depend on computations from observed data. In the present case this value is given by the reciprocal of the harmonic mean number of cases on which each proportion is based, or 1/59 = .0169.

TABLE 8.2
Other reactions to fear manipulation

	Control	Low fear	High fear	F^a
Fear[b]	7.74	9.25	12.19	21.50**
Feelings of nausea	1.27	1.24	1.90	7.95**
Feelings of interest	4.48	4.70	5.39	6.12**
Evaluation of the severity of tetanus	4.64	4.83	5.34	3.86*
Feelings of susceptibility to tetanus	3.46	3.99	4.25	3.31*
Evaluation of the importance of shots	5.85	6.16	6.52	6.44**
Desire for more information about tetanus	3.08	2.68	3.57	3.90*

[a]*F* ratios are computed from three-way analyses of variance. In each analysis $df = 2/170$ (approximately).
[b]"Fear" represents the sum of three items: feelings of fear, fear of contracting tetanus, and fear produced by the pamphlet.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.

Correlations Among Responses

Only within the high-fear condition did reported fear correlate with intentions to take shots ($r = .23$, $p < .01$). A scatterplot of scores revealed that the high-fear condition increased the range of reported fear and that the positive correlation could be attributed to subjects in the extended portion of the range (those scoring higher than 13 on a 19-point composite scale). These extreme subjects all showed strong intentions to take shots, while other subjects in the high-fear condition sometimes did and sometimes did not intend to take shots. This pattern suggests that fear and acceptance of a recommendation are more closely associated when fear is relatively high, though acceptance may occur at any level of reported fear.

Unlike fear, anger was negatively associated with intent to take shots. The overall within-class correlation between anger and intentions was −.18 ($p < .05$). This correlation remained essentially the same within different levels of the fear treatment, but became increasingly negative as the recommendation was portrayed as less effective and more painful (Table 8.3). Both the row and column differences in

TABLE 8.3
Correlations between anger and intentions to take shots under varying portrayal of recommendations

	Effectiveness	
	Low	High
Pain		
Low	−.29	.15
High	−.52	−.18

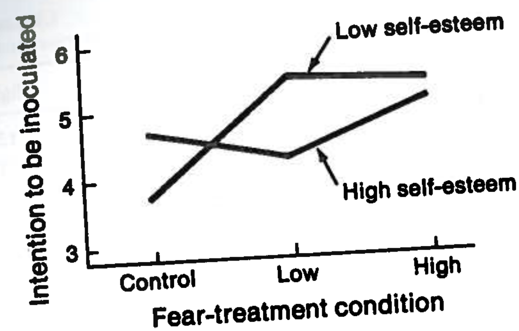

FIGURE 8.1
Self-esteem differences in reactions to the communications on tetanus.

Table 8.3 are significant[3] (for rows, $CR = 2.02$, $p < .05$; for columns, $CR = 2.81$, $p < .01$). It should be emphasized that these are correlational differences only. Low effectiveness and high pain did not increase the mean level of anger or decrease intentions (or decrease actual shot taking). The ranges of anger and intention scores also did not differ among the four conditions.

Personality Differences

None of the premeasures on personality (susceptibility, coping, anxiety, self-esteem) were significantly correlated with intentions to take shots, nor did the correlations vary systematically across the 12 experimental conditions. However, differences were observed when subjects were split at the median into groups high and low on self-esteem subjects. Figure 8.1 shows intentions to take shots among high– and low–self-esteem subjects. The only significant effect within this data (other than the main effect of fear) is the interaction between self-esteem and fear level ($F_{2,166} = 4.74$, $p < .01$). Subjects low in self-esteem increased their intentions to take shots from control to low-fear conditions, then showed no further increase under high fear. Subjects high in self-esteem, on the other hand, showed increased intentions only from low- to high-fear conditions.

DISCUSSION

A positive relationship between fear arousal and persuasion was observed. Increases in the intensity of the fear manipulation were associated with increases in

[3]Significance of these differences was tested after applying Fisher's z' transformation to the correlation coefficients.

attitude and behavior change, with high correlations between intentions to take shots and actual shot taking. These findings are similar to those of Leventhal et al. (1966), who reported a slight tendency for shot taking to increase as fear was raised from low to high levels.

Subjects' beliefs about the effectiveness of inoculation did not affect their compliance; they responded equally well to recommendations portrayed as low and high in effectiveness. This may be because even the low-effective recommendation was rated relatively high in effectiveness (5.8 on a 7-point scale). However, the manipulation was sufficient for subjects to perceive significant differences between low and high effectiveness, and the failure of this variable to influence compliance suggests caution in using it to reconcile divergent results of studies on fear arousal and persuasion (Janis and Leventhal, 1967; Leventhal, 1965; Leventhal and Singer, 1966).

The description of pain produced mixed feelings about shots, but did not prevent subjects from taking them. Perhaps this is because the discomfort of inoculation is negligible in comparison with the pain of tetanus itself. A stronger manipulation of anticipated "painfulness" was unintentionally introduced in the study by Leventhal and Watts (1966), who created fear of smoking by showing a film in which a chest X-ray led to the discovery of cancer and to surgical removal of a lung. The authors suggested that decreased X-ray taking in this condition was more likely caused by fear of the consequences of an X-ray than by defensive reactions to the fear-arousing material on cancer. The present findings do not invalidate their conclusion, but they limit the range of situations to which such an explanation might apply. Subjects apparently do not respond to small variations in the effectiveness or unpleasantness of a recommended course of action. Unless a compelling deterrent exists, people who anticipate danger prefer to do something rather than nothing.

This last statement is qualified by differences in the behavior of high– and low–self-esteem subjects. Low–self-esteem subjects showed high compliance with the recommendations in both high- and low-fear conditions, while high–self-esteem subjects showed high compliance only in the high-fear condition. In addition, personality measures of self-esteem and coping were significantly correlated ($r = .49$, $p < .01$) in the present study, as they were in the study reported by Dabbs (1964). One might conclude that high–self-esteem subjects are more active and aggressive in dealing with their environment and have developed more skill in meeting dangers with appropriate protective actions. Thus, they may recognize inoculation to be more appropriate when the danger of tetanus is greater, while low–self-esteem subjects may accept the position of the communication that inoculation is appropriate regardless of the magnitude of danger. An alternative possibility is that some differences characteristically associated with self-esteem simply disappear when there is an urgent need to combat danger (as there was with the high-fear communication).

In the conditions where inoculation was depicted as ineffective or painful, anger was negatively associated with intentions to be inoculated. It is possible that

increased anger in these conditions would have lowered compliance. But since anger and compliance did not covary as the fear treatment was increased, there appears to be no causal relationship between them. It seems more likely that anger does not decrease compliance, but that under certain conditions it provides the justification for noncompliance. Under other conditions—as when recommended behaviors are highly effective, not painful, and not a reasonable target for anger—noncompliance may have to be justified in some other manner.

All the present findings could have been influenced by several factors that were not varied. For example, all subjects received the manipulations of perceived danger, effectiveness, and pain in the same order. Learning about the dangers of tetanus first may have caused some subjects to ignore differences in the effectiveness and painfulness of inoculation. In addition, all subjects were asked after reading the communications whether they intended to be inoculated. One might expect that stating an intention to be inoculated would commit the subject to following this course of behavior later on. However, the findings of Leventhal et al. (1965) and Leventhal et al. (1966) indicate that specific instructions must be present before intentions will be translated into behavior. Since all subjects in the present study did receive specific instructions, the high correlations between intentions and behavior may be due to this factor.

Finally, while fear and persuasions were associated, the evidence of any causal relationship between them is tenuous. As in most studies of fear arousal and attitude change, the communications used were complex ones. They discussed the damage tetanus can cause and the likelihood of contracting it. They differed in fearfulness, interest, and feelings of nausea evoked. They also differed in length, type of language used, and amount of information about tetanus. With such confounding it is impossible to attribute increases in attitude change solely to increases in fear. This is an inherent difficulty when fear is manipulated by the use of differing descriptions of danger. Another approach should be developed by anyone wishing to manipulate fear independently of other aspects of a persuasive communication.

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