

# Researchers Study Crafting Messages for Vaccine Compliance

Analysis by [Dr. Joseph Mercola](#)

✓ Fact Checked

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › In a study sponsored by Yale University – and started before COVID-19 shots were rolled out – researchers tested different messages of how to best persuade people to get injected
- › Messages designed to induce guilt, embarrassment, anger and “not bravery” were included
- › Psychological messages that involve community interest, reciprocity and embarrassment worked best, leading to a 30% increase in intention to get injected, a 24% increase in willingness to tell a friend to get injected and a 38% increase in negative opinions of those who decline to get the shot
- › The messages not only impact people on an individual level but are intended to further divide society, by encouraging people to pass negative judgment onto those who don’t get the shot and pressure others to comply with “social norms”

In a study sponsored by Yale University – and started before COVID-19 shots were rolled out – researchers tested different messages of how to best persuade people to get injected.

Officially titled, “Persuasive Messages for COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake,”<sup>1</sup> the researchers must have had some forethought that people would be wary of an experimental gene

therapy, and set to work to decipher the best propaganda campaign to ensure their widespread uptake.

The study's abstract starts out with questionable statements from the start, parroting the myth that "Widespread vaccination remains the best option for controlling the spread of COVID-19 and ending the pandemic."<sup>2</sup> The authors do not, however, expand on how this is so, considering that just three months after the shot those who are injected are just as likely to pass COVID-19 to their close contacts as those who do not get the shot.<sup>3,4</sup>

The reasons why people may be reluctant to get COVID-19 shots – such as safety and efficacy concerns – are also ignored by the study,<sup>5</sup> which is only concerned with how to best use psychological tactics to get people on board with being injected.

## **Guilt, Anger, Embarrassment or Cowardice – What Works Best?**

The full study, which was published in the December 3, 2021, issue of *Vaccine*,<sup>6</sup> involved two experiments. The first tested "treatment messages" designed to affect people's intentions about whether or not to get the shot. For the control group, subjects were exposed to a message about bird feeding, while others read the baseline vaccine message, as follows:

*"To end the COVID-19 outbreak, it is important for people to get vaccinated against COVID-19 whenever a vaccine becomes available. Getting the COVID-19 vaccine means you are much less likely to get COVID-19 or spread it to others. Vaccines are safe and widely used to prevent diseases and vaccines are estimated to save millions of lives every year."*

For the experiment, the following messages were added to the baseline message:<sup>7</sup>

Personal freedom message	Economic freedom message
Self-interest message	Community interest message

Economic benefit message	Guilt message
Embarrassment message	Anger message
Trust in science message	Not bravery message

For example, the guilt message, which is designed to work by social pressure, reads:<sup>8</sup>

*“The message is about the danger that COVID-19 presents to the health of one's family and community. The best way to protect them is by getting vaccinated and society must work together to get enough people vaccinated. Then it asks the participant to imagine the guilt they will feel if they don't get vaccinated and spread the disease.”*

Never mind that this statement is false, since they can still spread the disease if they're injected. Similarly misleading messages designed to demean, guilt and shame people into getting the shot include:<sup>9</sup>

- “If one doesn't get vaccinated that means that one doesn't understand how infections are spread or who ignores science.”
- “Those who choose not to get vaccinated against COVID-19 are not brave.”
- “[I]t asks the participant to imagine the embarrassment they will feel if they don't get vaccinated and spread the disease.”
- “[I]t asks the participant to imagine the anger they will feel if they don't get vaccinated and spread the disease.”

The researchers explained it this way:<sup>10</sup>

*“One subgroup of messages draws on the idea that mass vaccination is a collective action problem and highlighting the prosocial benefit of vaccination or the reputational costs that one might incur if one chooses not to vaccinate. Another subgroup of messages built on contemporary concerns about the pandemic, like issues of restricting personal freedom or economic security.*

*We find that persuasive messaging that invokes prosocial vaccination and social image concerns is effective at increasing intended uptake and also the willingness to persuade others and judgments of non-vaccinators.”*

## **Propaganda Messages Created With No Scientific Support**

It's ironic that the study includes a “trust in science” message, since the messages used in the study were created in early or mid-2020, before science was available to support them. Yet, as noted by a Children's Health Defense (CHD) article, “The messages tested by the researchers have been woven into mainstream media narratives and public health campaigns throughout the world.”<sup>11</sup>

In the second part of the study, the most effective messages from part one were tested on a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults. This included the baseline message along with community interest, community interest + embarrassment, not bravery, trust in science and personal freedom messages.

They found that, compared to the control group, psychological messages that involve community interest, reciprocity and embarrassment worked best, leading to a 30% increase in intention to get injected, along with a 24% increase in willingness to tell a friend to get injected and a 38% increase in negative opinions of those who decline to get the shot.<sup>12</sup>

The messages are designed to not only impact people on an individual level, but also further divide society by encouraging people to pass negative judgment onto others and pressure others to comply with “social norms.” According to the researchers:

*“Viewing vaccination through the lens of a collective action problem suggests that in addition to increasing individuals' intentions to receive a vaccine, effective public health messages would also increase people's willingness to encourage those close to them to vaccinate and to hold negative judgments of those who do not vaccinate.*

*By encouraging those close to them to vaccinate, people are both promoting compliance with social norms and increasing their own level of protection against the disease. Also, by judging those who do not vaccinate more negatively, they apply social pressure to others to promote cooperative behavior.”*

## **Shots as a ‘Morally Right Choice’**

Since the pandemic began, conforming to confusing and questionable public health mandates has been made an issue of moral superiority – to the point that those who questioned mask mandates were labeled as “grandma killers.”<sup>13</sup>

In an article published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in 2020, it’s further noted that “vaccination is a social contract in which cooperation is the morally right choice.”<sup>14</sup> It further suggests that, under this social contract, people should change their behaviors toward those who choose not to get injected, and, indeed, people who are “especially compliant,” i.e., vaccinated, were less generous to those who were not.<sup>15</sup> Further:<sup>16</sup>

*“If so, vaccinated individuals should reciprocate by being more generous to a vaccinated other. On the contrary, if the other doesn’t vaccinate and violates the social contract, generosity should decline.”*

## **Propaganda Aimed at Making People Feel ‘Disgusting’**

CHD pointed out that one of the authors of the Yale study, Saad Omer, “has an extensive interest in public health messaging” and was behind the “Building Vaccine Confidence Through Tailored Messaging Campaigns” in 2020, which used social media to convince people to get COVID-19 and other shots.<sup>17</sup>

Working with the World Health Organization’s Strategic Advisory Group of Experts Working Group on COVID-19 Vaccines, Omer detailed what worked in the past to increase the uptake of the HPV vaccine, and suggested it could work for COVID-19

shots. The solution, he said, involved appealing to values and stooping so low as to make a person feel disgusting while presenting vaccines as a form of purity. CHD quoted Omer, who said:<sup>18</sup>

*“We wanted to test out, can we have a purity-based message? So we showed them pictures of genital warts and described a vignette, a narrative, a story, talking about how someone got genital warts and how disgusting they were and how pure vaccines are that sort of restore the sanctity of the body.*

*So we just analyzed these data. This was a randomized control trial with apriori outcomes. We found approximately 20 percentage point effect on people’s likelihood of getting an HPV vaccine in the next 6 months ... We are trying out liberty-based messages or liberty-mediated messaging around this behavior related to COVID-19 outbreak.*

*That wearing a mask or taking precautions eventually make you free, regain your autonomy. Because if the disease rates are low, your activities can resume.”*

This is similar propaganda to what’s being used to promote vaccine passports, with many willingly giving up freedoms that, once gone, may be difficult, if not impossible, to get back. By showing proof that you’ve received a COVID-19 shot, via a digital certificate or app on your phone, the hope is that you can once again travel freely, attend a concert or enjoy a meal in your favorite restaurant, just like you used to.

Except, being required to present your “papers” in order to live your life isn’t actually freedom at all – it’s a loss of freedom that you once had, one that disappeared right before your eyes and one that’s setting the stage for increased surveillance and control, and erosion of your privacy.

## **Propaganda Is the Real Misinformation**

Carefully crafted messages that play on your emotions and moral compass are just one part of the campaign to ensure public compliance with the mainstream narrative. Fact

checking is another tool being used in order to control virtually everything you see and hear online, in order to serve a greater agenda.<sup>19</sup>

Take the term “conspiracy theory,” which is now used to dismiss narratives that go against the grain. According to investigative journalist Sharyl Attkisson, this is intentional, as the term itself was devised by the CIA as a response to theories about the assassination of JFK.

Debunked, quackery and antivaccine are all terms that are similarly being used as propaganda tools. “There’s a whole cast of propaganda phrases that I’ve outlined that are cues. When you hear them, they should make you think, ‘I need to find out more about it,’” Attkisson says.<sup>20</sup>

Likewise, CHD explained, “The efforts to eliminate ‘misinformation’ resulted in unprecedented censorship of virtually anything that steps outside of state-sanctioned consensus and the creation of a captive audience primed to accept a singular narrative.”<sup>21</sup>

It’s important to remain aware that messages are being carefully crafted to mold human behavior to comply with COVID-19 shots and other public health measures – and to recognize that the use of propaganda is perfectly legal, even in the U.S.

As CHD continued, “And thanks to a multibillion-dollar budget from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, we are under the influence of the best messages money can buy – whether or not those messages are true.”<sup>22</sup>

## Sources and References

---

- <sup>1, 7, 8, 9</sup> [ClinicalTrials.gov, July 7, 2020, COVID-19 Vaccine Messaging, Part I](#)
- <sup>2, 6, 10</sup> [Vaccine December 3, 2021, Volume 39, Issue 49, Pages 7158-7165](#)
- <sup>3</sup> [medRxiv October 15, 2021](#)
- <sup>4</sup> [Nature October 5, 2021](#)
- <sup>5, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18, 21, 22</sup> [Children’s Health Defense February 4, 2022](#)
- <sup>13</sup> [Steve Kirsch Newsletter November 7, 2021](#)
- <sup>14, 16</sup> [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 2020, 117\(26\) 14890-14899](#)

- <sup>19</sup> [The Epoch Times, American Thought Leaders video, January 20, 2022, 2:43](#)
- <sup>20</sup> [The Epoch Times, American Thought Leaders video, January 20, 2022, 22:26](#)