

## The Persuasive Effect of the AIDS NAMES Quilt on Behavioral Intentions

Robert Lemieux  
Western Maryland College

M. Rachel Tighe  
Clinch Valley College of the  
University of Virginia

Margaret J. Daniels  
Trident Technological College

Kathryn Greene  
East Carolina University

John E. Hocking  
University of Georgia

Adrian B. Cairns  
University of Georgia

Jerold L. Hale  
University of Georgia

*The present study attempted to test the persuasive impact of the AIDS NAMES Quilt on behavioral intentions. Specifically, the Quilt, and knowing or not knowing a homosexual or Person Living with AIDS (PLWA), was predicted to be influential in determining one's intentions to behave supportively towards PLWA.*

**Robert Lemieux** (Ph.D., University of Georgia, 1996) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication, Western Maryland College, Westminster, MD 21157. **M. Rachel Tighe** (Ph.D., University of Georgia, 1997) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication, Clinch Valley College of the University of Virginia, Wise, VA 24293. **Margaret J. Daniels** (MA, University of Georgia, 1997) is an Instructor, Trident Technological College, Charleston, SC 29423. **Kathryn Greene** (Ph.D., University of Georgia, 1992) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC 27858. **John E. Hocking**, (Ph.D., Michigan State University, 1976) is an Associate Professor, in the Department of Speech Communication, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602. **Adrian B. Cairns** (MA, University of Georgia, 1993) is a doctoral student, and **Jerold L. Hale** (Ph.D., Michigan State University, 1984) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Speech Communication, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602.

The authors appreciate the assistance of John Hickey and Ilene Laflamme.

COMMUNICATION RESEARCH REPORTS, Volume 15, Number 1, pages 113-120

*Results indicated that for individuals who know a homosexual or PLWA, viewing the quilt had no effect. For individuals who did not know a homosexual or PLWA, the quilt had a significant effect on their behavioral intentions e.g., they were more willing to engage in supportive behaviors. Additionally, females were more willing to engage in supportive behaviors than males. Implications and directions for future research are discussed.*

Of the many social issues that vie for attention, one that has received considerable attention in both popular and academic presses over the last decade is Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Much has been written about the political (Albert, 1986; Sheehan, Lennon, & McDevitt, 1989; Shilts, 1987), emotional (Bouten et al., 1989; Herek & Glunt, 1988), cognitive (Burnette, Redmon & Poling, 1990; Triplet & Sugarman, 1987), and attitudinal (Witt, 1989; Connors & Heaven, 1990; McDevitt et al., 1990) aspects of the disease.

With the increase in the number of Persons Living with AIDS (PLWA) it becomes desirable to increase the general population's knowledge about AIDS. Increased knowledge about AIDS can reduce risk related behaviors and increase supportive behaviors toward PLWA. Virtually all AIDS researchers and educators believe that increasing knowledge about AIDS depends on developing more positive attitudes and intentions about PLWA. In an attempt to address AIDS related attitudes, the present study focused on the behavioral intentions associated with an individual's attitudes.

Justification for this approach is based on Kim and Hunter's (1993) meta-analysis of 92 studies, which found strong positive attitude-intention and intention-behavior correlations. Thus, the current study's focus on AIDS related intentions is appropriate since intentions reflect attitudes, and predict subsequent behaviors.

There were two purposes for conducting the present study. One was to determine whether intentions toward engaging in supportive behaviors toward PLWA would be affected by viewing the AIDS Quilt. The other purpose for the research was to determine whether intentions toward PLWA would be influenced by directness of experience with homosexuals or PLWA.

#### *AIDS Related Attitudes and the AIDS NAMES Quilt*

*AIDS Related Attitudes.* One of the primary determinants of an individual's attitudes toward PLWA specifically, and homosexuals in general, is his/her predisposition toward AIDS related issues (Larsen, Serra & Long, 1990; Witt, 1989). Because AIDS was initially linked to homosexual males, much of the American public tended to view the disease as a homosexual disease. Consequently, the prevailing negative attitudes about homosexuals became associated with AIDS and PLWA (Walker et al., 1990; McDevitt et al., 1990; Triplet & Sugarman, 1987). As Larsen et al. (1990) noted, the AIDS epidemic served as a justification for negative attitudes and violence toward, and victimization of, PLWA. Although portions of the general public seem to be relatively well informed about AIDS, other individuals hold "attitudes (e.g., AIDS is God's punishment for immorality) that might be correlated with prejudicial treatment of AIDS victims" (Burnette et al., 1990, p. 38).

Negative attitudes and behaviors toward PLWA are commonplace. In a review of 53 opinion surveys which addressed AIDS related issues, Blendon and Donelan (1988)

observed that many Americans: 1) would refuse to work alongside someone with AIDS, 2) would remove their child from a school with an AIDS infected classmate, 3) believe that individuals with AIDS should not live in their neighborhood. In a study which asked participants to assess various vignettes describing an ill person, St. Lawrence et al. (1990) found highly negative attitudes towards the AIDS related vignettes. Negative attitudes toward PLWA are also evident among the nation's health care professionals (Pleck et al., 1988; Wallack, 1989). These negative attitudes manifest themselves behaviorally. Lester (1989) found that individuals with negative attitudes toward PLWA were less likely to shake hands, form a friendship, or sit on a toilet seat used by an AIDS infected person.

*The AIDS NAMES Quilt.* The AIDS NAMES Quilt project began in 1987 with the expressed purpose of creating a memorial for those who had died of AIDS, and helping others understand the devastating impact of the disease. In 1997, the Quilt included more than 41,000 panels, each commemorating a person who died of AIDS (NAMES Project Foundation, 1997). The Quilt is intended to have a persuasive impact. While most victims of AIDS in the United States have been homosexual men, the disease has claimed the lives of men, women, and children without reference to sexual preference. The Quilt is intended to reflect the diversity of the victims of AIDS, including panels in memory of homosexuals and heterosexuals, males and females, adults and children, celebrities and less known individuals. As Jensen (1988) stated, "the visitor to the NAMES Quilt is shaken from preconceived and generalized perceptions of the AIDS crisis -- as contact is made with the tragedies of individual deaths" (p. 10). As of 1997 more than nine million people had seen the AIDS NAMES Quilt, and visitors to Quilt exhibitions had donated more than \$1.7 million for distribution to AIDS related charities. Given that one aim of the Quilt is to influence responses toward PLWA, the present research investigates the persuasive impact of exposure to the Quilt.

#### *Personal Contact with PLWA*

An individual's attitudes and behavior toward PLWA might also be influenced by whether the individual knows a homosexual or PLWA (Gerbert et al., 1991). Prior contact should lead to a more positive, less stereotype-based attitude toward AIDS and PLWA. Support for this assumption is evident within social influence research findings which indicate stronger attitude-behavior correlations when an individual has direct experience with the attitude object (Fazio & Zanna, 1981). As it relates to this study, prior research would suggest that directness of experience with a homosexual or PLWA would produce more positive feelings, and more positive feelings would produce consistent behavioral intentions. As a result, we expect participants who know a homosexual or PLWA will have more supportive behavioral intentions toward PLWA than participants without that direct experience.

The above discussion leads to the following formal hypotheses:

- H1: Individuals who know a homosexual or PLWA will have more positive overall behavioral intentions toward engaging in supportive behaviors than individuals who do not know a homosexual or PLWA.
- H2: Individuals exposed to the AIDS NAMES Quilt will have more positive overall behavioral intentions toward engaging in supportive behaviors than individ-

uals who are not exposed to the Quilt.

- H3: Exposure to the AIDS NAMES Quilt will result in a greater degree of positive change in behavioral intentions for individuals who do not know a homosexual or PLWA than for individuals who do know a homosexual or PLWA.

## METHOD

### *Participants and Materials*

Subjects were 107 undergraduate students (42 male, 65 female) from speech communication courses at a large southeastern university who received extra credit for their participation. Ninety-three percent of the participants were Caucasian, with an average age of 21.9.

Materials in the study included a section of the AIDS NAMES Quilt, which was on display for one week at the University's student center as part of a national tour. The display consisted of four large panels, that consisted of approximately 36 smaller personalized panels.

### *Measures*

Two instruments were used during the study. The first instrument was an eleven item behavioral intentions questionnaire ( $\alpha = .89$ ). These items were randomly placed within an AIDS social attitude survey, which focused on general AIDS related issues. The behavioral items and the general AIDS items were adapted from a variety of reliable AIDS questionnaires (e.g., St. Lawrence et al., 1990; Pleck et al., 1988; Lester, 1988; Burnette et al., 1990; Larsen et al., 1990) or created by the researchers. Each of the items used a 5-point Likert type response. The general AIDS items served to hide the behavioral intention items

#### FIGURE 1

#### *Behavioral Intention Items*

---

I would be willing to donate \$10 to a fund for AIDS research.  
I would be willing to have a person with AIDS eat dinner in my home.  
If my roommate had AIDS, I would move out.  
If someone in my class had AIDS, I would not sit near them.  
I would not want to eat food prepared by someone with AIDS.  
I would volunteer to work at the NAMES Quilt Project for AIDS.  
I would write a letter to my congressional representative to support more funding for AIDS research.  
I would be willing to volunteer to read to AIDS patients in the hospital.  
The thought of being around someone with AIDS does not bother me.  
I would not want to be in the same room with someone that I knew had AIDS.  
I would be willing to go on a casual date with someone with AIDS.

---

Note: Cronbach's reliability alpha for the Behavioral Intention Scale was .89.

and were not part of the analysis. Figure 1 provides a list of the eleven behavioral intention items.

Determining whether a participant was acquainted with a homosexual, PLWA, or

both, was operationalized via two yes/no questions which asked subjects whether they knew a homosexual and whether they knew a PLWA. The survey concluded with demographic questions.

The second instrument was a NAMES Quilt project questionnaire, which consisted of demographic information and open ended questions about a subject's feelings toward their favorite panel, most artistic panel, and most emotional panel. The questionnaire asked them to describe the three panels they had chosen and why. This instrument was used solely to support the cover story and was not part of the analysis.

#### *Procedures*

The study was conducted in a conference type building which housed the NAMES Quilt and the two experiment rooms. Upon arrival, subjects were randomly assigned to one of the two rooms. In the control group, subjects completed consent forms and the AIDS social attitude survey and were then allowed to freely view the Quilt.

In the experimental group the subjects were told they would be involved in two separate studies. The "first study" pertained to the NAMES Quilt and doubled as the cover story and the manipulation. The researchers indicated that they were interested in determining which quilt panels the subjects considered to be their personal favorites, most artistically creative, and most emotional. Additionally, the researchers indicated that several museums were considering displaying quilt panels and were also interested in this information. Following completion of consent forms, subjects were told to view the NAMES Quilt for approximately 20 minutes, return to the room, and complete the NAMES quilt questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, the two researchers exited and two different researchers entered.

The new researchers verbally reinforced that their study was separate and requested the completion of new consent forms. Subjects were told that the second study was an AIDS social attitude survey. Subjects then completed the same AIDS social attitude survey as the control group. None of the subjects in either the control or experimental groups encountered each other during the experiment. Both groups finished at the same time and were debriefed together with a full explanation regarding the deception. None of the participants were aware of the experimental manipulation.

### RESULTS

To assess the three hypotheses in the study, a 2 (No Quilt, Quilt) by 2 (Don't Know, Know) unweighted means analysis of variance was conducted. Since the interaction effect specified by hypothesis three is not a crossover interaction, an effect-coding procedure was used (Keppel, 1992). Effect-coding analysis extracts three types of variance: 1) variance attributed to the predicted pattern of means (i.e., the effect-coded model), 2) the residual explained variance, which is variance due to the two main effects and the two-way interaction less the variance attributed to the effect coded model, and 3) error variance. Additionally, effect-coding analysis is an appropriate statistic for experimental conditions with a limited number of participants. The means, standard deviations, number of participants, and effect codes are presented in Figure 2. The pattern of means is as predicted.

The analysis revealed a significant main effect for knowing a homosexual or PLWA,  $F(1,102)=10.60, p<.01$ . This would lend support for the first hypothesis and indicate that

**FIGURE 2**  
Means, Standard Deviation, Cell Sies, and Effect codes for Each Experimental Condition

	Don't Know Homosexual or PLWA	Know Homosexual or PLWA
Not exposed to AIDES NAMES Quilt	M = 2.75 s = .65 n = 15 ec = -3	M = 3.35 s = .65 n = 38 ec = 1
Exposed to AIDES NAMES Quilt	M = 3.12 s = .52 n = 20 ec = 1	M = 3.33 s = .65 n = 33 ec = 1

individuals who knew a homosexual or PLWA had significantly more positive intentions toward engaging in the behaviors than individuals who did not know such an individual.

An analysis of the Quilt main effect revealed no significant findings. Results indicated that the Quilt had no overall effect on behavioral intentions,  $F(1,102)=2.15$ ,  $p>.05$ . This would result in rejection of hypothesis two.

Analysis of hypothesis three revealed a statistically significant interaction for the effect coded model,  $F(1,102)=13.25$ ,  $p<.01$ . Additionally, the residual explained variance was not significant,  $F(2,102)=1.10$ ,  $p>.05$ . This would indicate that the effect coded model fits the data and lends support for hypothesis three. In short, exposure to the AIDS NAMES Quilt had a significant impact upon the behavioral intentions of individuals who do not know a homosexual or PLWA.

An additional analysis was conducted which addressed potential gender differences. Previous research indicates that females exhibit more positive attitudes toward homosexuals and PLWA. To address this issue, a t-test was conducted which compared the gender means on the behavior scale. Results indicated that females ( $M=3.42$ ) were significantly more willing to engage in the supportive behaviors than males ( $M=3.18$ ),  $t(104) = 2.00$ ,  $p<.05$ .

## DISCUSSION

The present study attempted to test the persuasive impact of the AIDS NAMES Quilt on behavioral intentions. Specifically, the Quilt was expected to serve as a stimulus for increasing one's intentions to behave supportively towards PLWA.

Results indicated that individuals who knew a homosexual or PLWA were more likely to engage in the supportive behaviors. Exposure to the Quilt did not increase the likelihood of their engaging in supportive behaviors. Thus, the effect of the quilt was equal to or less than knowing a homosexual or PLWA. If *greater* attitude change is to occur for these individuals, it is evident that they require a stimulus more powerful than that of knowing a homosexual, a PLWA, or observing the quilt.

For those individuals who did not know a homosexual or PLWA, exposure to the Quilt had a significant effect on intentions toward engaging in supportive behaviors. The mean differences for this group indicated there was a significant change in behavioral intentions

after viewing the Quilt. Thus, for this group, the Quilt served as a significant stimulus when assessing their intentions to behave supportively toward PLWA. In light of ongoing efforts by various health agencies and awareness groups to instill empathy toward PLWA, this is an important result. In short, the NAMES Quilt appears to have the potential for dramatic effects on the viewer, particularly if the viewer has no prior reference point.

A common question in persuasion research is whether the persuasive effect is short term or long term. The current data do not address this issue. However, conventional wisdom in the persuasion literature implies that one exposure to a persuasive stimulus is rarely sufficient to create measurable attitude change. The fact that a 20 minute exposure did significantly impact the Don't Know group is suggestive of the Quilt's persuasive potential. Further, the nature and difficulty of the persuasive task differed from most persuasion research. For many individuals, attitudes about homosexuality and AIDS are associated with firm beliefs. Thus, this study affected a firmer set of beliefs than the beliefs addressed in other types of persuasion research (e.g., beliefs about comprehensive exams, beliefs about source credibility).

The type of participants involved in the study should also be noted. As with most research using college undergraduates, it is conceivable their attitudes and behavioral intentions differ from a random sample of the general population. Although this concern, as well as the study's modest number of participants, may be limitations, the implications of this research are evident. In an attempt to create more positive attitudes toward PLWA, it is necessary that individuals have access to applicable reference points. Previous research in persuasion and within AIDS related areas validates this assumption. As this study indicated, the AIDS NAMES Quilt is one potential reference point. Access to the Quilt can help in the formulation of positive attitudes and their corresponding behaviors (e.g., the Quilt as a foot-in-the-door strategy).

In terms of future research, the following points are worth noting. First, if an individual's preexisting attitudes are based on direct access to the target (e.g., a homosexual or PLWA), what type of stimulus is required to induce an increase in positive attitude change and behavioral intentions? As the current study indicated, the AIDS NAMES Quilt was not a sufficient stimulus. Therefore, future research should focus on the types of stimuli required to bring about this change.

Second, for individuals whose attitudes have no target reference point, the AIDS NAMES Quilt was a sufficient enough stimulus to induce a positive change in behavioral intentions. Thus, the question should now focus on how the presentation of this stimulus might be made more effective and more available for those individuals with less positive attitudes.

#### REFERENCES

- Albert, E. (1986). Illness and deviance: The response of the press to AIDS. In D. Feldman & T. Johnson (Eds.), *The social dimension of AIDS: Method and theory* (pp. 163-178). New York: Praeger.
- Blendon R. & Donelan, K. (1988). Discrimination against people with AIDS. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 319, 1022-1025.
- Bouton, R., Gallaher, P., Garlinghouse, P., Leal, T., Rosentein, L. & Young, R. (1987). Demographic variables associated with fear of AIDS and homophobia. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 19, 885-901.

- Burnett, M., Redmon, W. & Poling, A. (1990). Knowledge, attitudes and behavior of college undergraduates regarding acquired immune deficiency syndrome. *College Student Journal*, 24, 27-38.
- Connors, J. & Heaven, P. (1989). Belief in a just world and attitudes toward AIDS sufferers. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 130, 559-560.
- Fazio, R. & Zanna, M. (1981) Direct experience and attitude-behavior consistency. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.) *Advances in experimental social psychology*, (Vol. 14, pp.161-202). San Diego: Academic Press
- Geibert, B., Sumser, J., & Maguire, B. (1991). The impact of where you live and who you know on opinions about AIDS and health care. *Social Science Medicine*, 32, 677-681.
- Herek, G. & Glunt, E. (1988). An epidemic of stigma. *American Psychologist*, 43, 886-891.
- Jensen, M. (1988, November). *Making contact: The NAMES project in comparison to the Vietnam memorial*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Keppel, G. (1982). *Design and analysis: A researcher's handbook*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Kim, M. & Hunter, J. (1993). Attitude-behavior relations: A meta-analysis of attitudinal relevance and topic. *Journal of Communication*, 43, 101-142.
- Larsen, K., Serra, M. & Long, E. (1990). AIDS victims and heterosexual attitudes. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 19, 103-116.
- McDevitt, T., Sheehan, E., Lennon, R., & Ambrosio, A. (1990). Correlates of attitudes toward AIDS. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 130, 699-701.
- NAMES Project Foundation (1997). Internet site, <http://www.aidsquilt.org>.
- Pleck, J., O'Donnell, L., O'Donnell, C. & Snarey, J. (1988). AIDS-phobia, contact with AIDS-related job stress in hospital workers. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 15, 41-54.
- Sheehan, E., Lennon, R., & McDevitt, T. (1989). Reactions to AIDS and other illnesses: Reported interactions in the workplace. *Journal of Psychology*, 123, 525-536.
- Shilts, R. (1987). *And the band played on: Politics, people, and the AIDS epidemic*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- St. Lawrence, J., Husfeldt, B., Kelly, J., Hood, H. & Smith, S. (1990). The stigma of AIDS: Fear of disease and prejudice toward gay men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 19, 85-101.
- The NAMES Project Foundation Staff (1994). The NAMES project AIDS memorial quilt.
- Triplet, R. & Sugarman, D. (1987). Reactions to AIDS victims: Ambiguity breeds contempt. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 13, 265-274.
- Walker, F., Taylor, A. & Green, D. (1990). Attitudes to AIDS: A comparative analysis of a new and negative stereotype. *Social Science Medicine*, 30, 549-552.
- Wallack, J. (1989). AIDS anxiety among health care professionals. *Hospital and Community Psychiatry*, 40, 507-510.
- Witt, L. (1989). Factors affecting attitudes toward persons with AIDS. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 130, 127-129.