PROPAGANDA
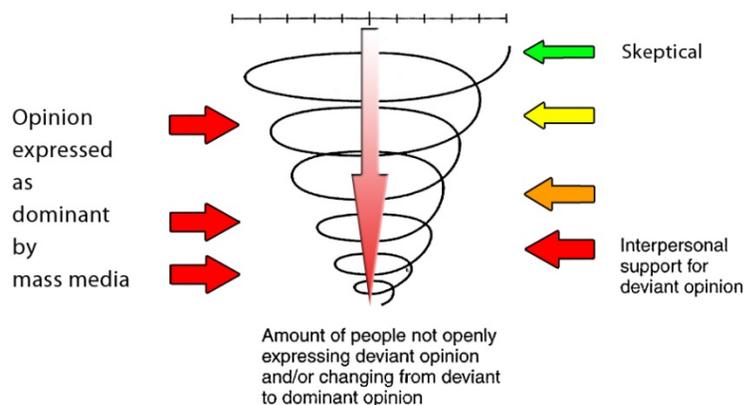## and
The Spiral of Silence

Methods and Effects of Propaganda

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The Spiral of Silence

Opinion expressed as dominant by mass media

Skeptical

Interpersonal support for deviant opinion

Amount of people not openly expressing deviant opinion and/or changing from deviant to dominant opinion

The theory that people holding opinions that they perceive as being in the minority tend not to voice those opinions because of fear of isolation. This withholding then influences others to refrain from expressing their views, creating a spiral.

Although propaganda has existed throughout recorded history, it was refined and became a substantial force in the Twentieth-century. The rise of nationalism, conflicts, and wars between peoples and nations saw propaganda being utilized on an unforeseen scale. Psychologists and sociologists lent their expertise to those that wanted to manipulate people's minds through the mass media communication outlets in new and frightening ways. Persuasion, the not so benign twin brother of propaganda, has insinuated itself into our daily routines and lives all the rest of the time. I propose to examine the diversity of theories, the causal triggers, and how effective they are in influencing opinion and crowd dynamics, internally and externally, in the nations that employ propaganda, which is every one.

After the First World War, the political commentator Walter Lippmann and political scientist Howard Lasswell began to define and develop propaganda theory. In his seminal work, *Propaganda Technique in the World War (1927),* Lasswell defined propaganda as, "It refers solely to the control of opinion by significant symbols, or, to speak more concretely and less accurately, by stories, rumors, reports, pictures, and other forms of social communication (Severin &Tankard, p. 109). As Cull, Culbert and Welch relate:

> between 1914 and 1918 the wholesale use of propaganda as an organized
> weapon of modern warfare transformed it into something more sinister. One of
> the significant lessons to be learned from the experience of World War I was that
> public opinion could no longer be ignored as a determining factor in the
> formulation of government policies (¶. 6).

With these lessons in mind, "Lasswell (1927) also discussed four major objectives of propaganda: 1. To mobilize hatred against an enemy 2. To preserve the friendship of allies 3. To preserve the friendship and, if possible, to procure the cooperation of neutrals 4. To demoralize the enemy" (Severin &Tankard, p. 109).

The techniques were absorbed, refined, and utilized on a mammoth scale by Joseph Goebbels, leader of the Nazi Propaganda ministry in Germany, throughout 1930s and World War II.

"Goebbels once noted; 'This is the secret of propaganda: Those who are to be persuaded by it should be completely immersed in the ideas of the propaganda, without ever noticing that they are being immersed in it,'" notes Pratkanis & Aronson (pp. 86-87) Theory concludes that, "The seven propaganda devices are *name calling, glittering generality, transfer, testimonial, plain folks, card stacking, and bandwagon"* (Severin &Tankard, p. 111). Although these devices are effective on some people and not others, and are based on "faulty arguments," they serve as the agenda for any propagandist (Severin &Tankard, p. 126). As the French sociologist, Jacques Ellul indicates in *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*:

We have just stated again that an opinion cannot form itself in entire societies unless mass media of communication exist. This much is evident: without the mass media there can be no modern propaganda.   They must be subject to centralized control on the one hand, and well diversified with regard to their products on the other (p. 102).

Just such conditions existed in the Nazi controlled state, as Severin &Tankard explain,

"Nazis in Germany had essentially a communication monopoly (Bramsted, 1965). Dissenting views were not permitted, **…** propaganda in Germany was wedded to fear and backed up by force" (p. 124).

The first propaganda device is "Name calling—giving an idea a bad label—is used to make us reject or condemn the idea without examining the evidence" (Severin &Tankard, p. 111). The German Third Reich was adept at such subterfuge, as Pratkanis & Aronson reports:

> Euphemisms were employed to lessen the sting of state-supported pillaging, torture, murder, and genocide. For example, the Gestapo didn't arrest citizens but took them into "protective custody"; they did not steal property, but "secured" it. The Invasion of Poland was a "police action," and the subsequent murder of its citizens was termed "extraordinary pacification action" (p. 320).

No less has this tactic been used by the United States:

> The phrase "death squads" was chosen as the term with which to describe Saddam Hussein's military force. The word "regime" was chosen whenever his government was mentioned. Republican Franz Luntz circulated a memo recommending that GOP politicians avoid the word "preemption" and the phrase "war in Iraq" when talking about the Bush administration's preemptive war in Iraq. Rather than "preemption," he suggested, "Your efforts are about 'principles of prevention and protection' in the greater 'War on Terror.'**…** (Rampton & Stauber, p. 17).

The choice of words adds semantic shading to the message being conveyed, most of them negative or undesirable, or a positive "spin." Modern advertising agencies and "spin doctors" subtlety alter what we read or hear to achieve the desired effect.

"Glittering Generality" is another propaganda ploy, and it is used in political propaganda and commercial advertising, to confuse or attach a certain connotation to the product or action advocated.   "In fact, Lasswell (1937) has stated that 'both advertising and publicity fall within the field of propaganda,'" observes Severin &Tankard (p. 109). This device was noted between World Wars, as Pratkanis & Aronson acknowledges:

> In the late 1930s, the Institute for Propaganda Analysis, a group of leading intellectuals of the day who shared a common goal of lessening the effects of propaganda, identified this tactic as the use of *glittering generalities*. In such cases, the propagandist uses "purr" words—words that have positive connotations but are usually ambiguous in the context in which they are used. Some examples include: "A *kinder, gentler* America"; "Let's make America *strong* again"; "The *best* that money can buy"; "We must support our *valiant freedom fighters*" (p. 73).

Edward Bernays' 1929 advertising campaign, to promote public cigarette smoking for women, used the slogan of "torches of freedom" for Lucky Strike cigarettes. Politicians often use this ruse in public statements to soften or give a "positive spin" to war, as Severin &Tankard suggest (p. 114). In a speech about Iraq to university students, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright remarked that, "We are talking about using military force, but not talking about a war. That is an important distinction" (Severin &Tankard, pp. 115-116). The Korean War, fought between1950-1953, was deemed a "police action," and in Vietnam, by 1962, the United States had supplied the Diem regime with equipment and 12,000 American military "advisers" (Karnow, p. 678).

A third tactic is to use "Transfer," as Severin &Tankard claims, "[which] carries the authority, sanction, and prestige of something respected and revered over to something else in order to make the latter more acceptable" **…**The communicator's goal is to link an idea or product or cause with something that people admire" (p.116). They give an example of a fictional homemaker with prestige, General Mills's Betty Crocker, whose portrait, which adorns their products since 1921, has had six transformations. In the beginning, Crocker was a matronly homemaker and now is portrayed as a younger, more ethnically-diverse woman (Severin &Tankard, p. 117). Another persona has been visible for many years, as Pratkanis & Aronson illustrate:

> Consider something as simple as the Marlboro man, an image we have probably seen hundreds of times but one that we probably have not thought a lot about. What does the cowboy teach us? First, that smoking is for the rugged, self-confident individual (as opposed to being a health hazard). Second, that American men should be macho (as opposed to, say, caring and sensitive). And finally, that you can be rugged and macho simply by smoking Marlboros—it is that easy (p. 182).

Transfer can also be made through music, usually familiar, or with slightly different lyrics, or delivered by a well-known artist. The 1970s Heinz Ketchup television commercial featured Carly Simon singing "Anticipation" to the pictures of thick ketchup flowing slowly out of the bottle. A popular song can connect the listener to the product and enhance its value (Severin &Tankard, p. 116).

One other tool of the propagandist is "Testimonial [which] consists in having some respected or hated person say that a given idea or program or product is a good or bad" (Severin &Tankard, p. 118). Celebrity endorsements abound in the media,

particularly in advertising. The drawback is whether the spokesman for the product is

trustworthy, really uses it, or believes it is worthy of your purchase. George Foreman

Grills, Michael Jordan Nike shoes, Wilford Brimley with Quaker Oats and diabetic

supplies, and sports jocks abound. The danger for the advertiser is if the endorser

becomes a pariah, like Tiger Woods, Michael Vick, O.J. Simpson, or an Ed McMahon

whom endorses anything for profit. Multimillion dollar advertising campaigns can

collapse in an instant, however on the flip side, bad press or notoriety can all of a

sudden make a person a hot property. Bad press does not seem to hurt Lindsay Lohan,

Paris Hilton, Charlie Sheen, Britney Spears, and other celebrities, but enhances their

visibility among those that follow entertainment.

A fourth gambit is "Plain folks," which as Severin &Tankard affirms, "is a method

by which the speaker attempts to convince his audience that he and his ideas are good

because they are 'of the people,' the 'plain folks'" (p.118). The plain folks device was

utilized by Bill Clinton during his first campaign for President in 1991, where he

appeared on the "Arsenio Hall Show" and played the tenor saxophone, while wearing

dark glasses. Further back, President Franklin Roosevelt used "fireside chats" to speak

to the nation on the radio and used simple terms and vernacular, like you were listening

to your neighbor explaining something. In this way, FDR sold the New Deal, Lend-

Lease, and the Second World War to Americans. Recently, President Barack Obama

demonstrated that he was just one of the boys, when he needed twelve stitches in his

lip from a pickup basketball game injury. Presidential hopeful and tea party advocate

Sarah Palin is featured in a television show *Sarah Palin's Alaska,* presented as a

travelogue about the State of Alaska, but perhaps to illustrate that she is just

"plain folks." It may be no accident that the theme song is from "Third Day," a Christian rock band.

"Card stacking [is another gimmick and] involves the selection and use of facts or falsehoods, illustrations or distractions, and logical or illogical statements in order to give the best or worst possible case for an idea, program, person, or product" (Severin &Tankard, p. 119). Discussion is presented that supports a stance, as Severin &Tankard warns, and overlooks those arguments that endorse the opposite conclusion, "[t]he Arguments that are selected can be true or false" (p. 119). The Iraq War presented a good example of this, as Rampton & Stauber finds:

> In testimony before Congress on March 27, 2003, just days after the invasion of
> Iraq began, Deputy secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz said, 'The oil revenues
> of that country could bring between 50 and 100 billion dollars over the course of
> the next two or three years…We are dealing with a country that can really
> finance its own reconstruction and relatively soon.' **…**By August 2003, the
> occupation of Iraq was costing the U.S. $1 billion per week, contributing to the
> largest federal deficit in American history (p. 19).

Another way government administrations have been "card stacking" is to produce their own "promotional material that passes for journalism." Eric Klineberg, in his book *Fighting for Air: The Battle to Control America's Media*, comments:

> [Video News Releases] VNRs are analogous to print releases: they typically
> endorse a policy or a product; they present only one side of an issue; they often
> serve as provocation for independent reporting by the journalists that receive
> them. Yet what sets them apart from ordinary PR releases is that…producers
> have the option of either customizing the content, using their own on-air

personalities to read readymade scripts, or simply broadcasting them as is. Usually VNRs blend into a newscast without the viewer noticing that the segments are canned (pp. 106-107).

Severin &Tankard concurs that usually "quotes [are] taken out of context or utilizing only the positive parts to give a favorable impression (p. 120).

Bandwagon is one of the most persuasive; "Bandwagon has as its theme, 'Everybody--at least all of us—is doing it'; with it, the propagandist attempts to convince us that all members of a group to which we belong are accepting his program and that we must therefore follow our crowd and 'jump on the bandwagon'" (Severin &Tankard, p. 122). Rampton & Stauber discloses that:

During World War II, *Life* Magazine featured a photo of a soldier's burial on the cover of its July 5,1943, edition, and President Roosevelt actually encouraged media coverage of the harsh conditions on the battlefield, in the belief that an understanding of soldiers' suffering would steel Americans to endure hardships at home (p. 176).

In Germany, they presented the opposition view, Pratkanis & Aronson admits, "Nazi slogans expressed an air of confidence: 'Join Our Struggle,' 'Fight with Us,' 'Adolf Hitler Is Victory.' When ever Hitler spoke, he spoke with confidence and certainty of the Nazi purpose and ability of the German people to accomplish this purpose" (p. 321).

The effectiveness of all these devices of mass media have been somewhat measured in laboratory conditions with mixed results. Hypotheses and theories have been developed, the "bullet theory" among them. Although, now considered too simplistic, "The theory suggests that people are extremely vulnerable to mass communications messages, [and]**…** if the message 'hits the target,' it will have the

desired effect" (Severin &Tankard, p.125). They summarize that most studies conclude that, "a mass communication message does not have the same effect on everyone" (p. 125). The result of propaganda is much greater where the government controls the media and does not allow information to flow from foreign sources. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union jammed outside news broadcasts so their citizens only received the "official" version of the news. "Nazis in Germany had essentially a communication monopoly." As Severin &Tankard insist, "Dissenting views were not permitted, **…**[and] propaganda in Germany was wedded to fear and backed up by force" (p.124).

Cull, Culbert, and Welch report that:

> **…**the post-1945 period witnessed the widespread utilization of the lessons drawn from wartime experience within the overall context of the 'communications revolution.' Political scientists and sociologists theorized about the nature of man and modern society—particularly in light of the rise of totalitarian police states. Individuals were viewed as undifferentiated and malleable, while an apocalyptic vision of mass society emphasized the alienation of work, the collapse of religion and family ties, and a general decline of moral values. Culture was reduced to the lowest common denominator for mass consumption, with the masses generally seen as politically apathetic yet prone to ideological fanaticism, vulnerable to manipulation through the media and the increasing sophistication of propagandists (¶, 11).

Jacques Ellul weights in on these ideas, about the public:

> His opinion will ultimately be formed solely on the basis of the facts transmitted to him, and not on the basis of his choice and personal experience. The more the techniques of distributing information develop, the more the individual is shaped

by such information. It is not true that he can choose freely with what is presented to him as truth (p. 87).

As Severin &Tankard explain, "Ellul argues that propaganda is so pervasive in American life that most of us are not even aware of it, yet it is controlling our values. The central one of these values is, of course, the 'American way of life'" (p. 126).

Pratkanis & Aronson summarizes:

As the political scientist Bernard Cohen observed, the mass media: 'may not be successful much of the time in telling people *what to think*, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers *what to think about….* The world will look different to different people, depending…on the map that is drawn for them by writers, editors, and publishers of the papers they read' (p. 87).

Edward Herman and Norm Chomsky, in their book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media,* believe:

The mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate [implant] individuals with values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. In a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfill this role requires systematic propaganda (p. 1).

Therefore, with propaganda all around us, what is to be believed? Caroline Heldman reports, "In Public Opinion (1922), Lippmann concluded that citizens in modern society were bombarded with a sea of information that they could not proficiently negotiate" (¶. 4). Although formulated in the early twentieth-century, some of these ideas are still valid today, as Glynn and Jeong proposes:

As Walter Lippmann stated, people form public opinion based on the pictures of

reality in their heads. That reality is, to some extent, elaborated and shaped by

the mass media. People can expect to encounter three types of reality from the

media. First, mass media offer reality to the mass audience without any

alterations. The media in this case serve as mere conveyors of information.

Second, mass media provide a selected and/or modified reality by using elite or

mass opinions as raw material. Members of the mass media feel free to select

and emphasize those views they believe worthy of being presented to the public.

Third, mass media disseminate the reality they create. In this case, the media

take on the role of 'molder' of public opinion (¶. 4).

In the Digital Age, we have become dependent on mass media for our information and

increasingly everything we know and hear is mediated and filtered to the point of

shaping our reality.   A conclusion may be the need for individuals to question

information and seek the truth. Sources must be tested and their validity verified before

we accept their information.

Another important theory formulated by Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann is "the spiral

of silence." Although criticized in the past as biased, "anti-Semitic and supportive of

Hitler's regime," many of her points appear to be valid (Severin &Tankard, p. 274).

They report that the spiral of silence theory postulates that:

On a controversial issue, people form impressions about the distribution of public

opinion. They try to determine whether they are the majority, and then they try to

determine whether public opinion is changing to agree with them. If they feel that

they are in the minority, they tend to remain silent on the issue. If they think

public opinion is changing away from them, they tend to remain silent on the

issue. The more they remain silent, the more other people feel that the particular point of view is not represented, and the more they remain silent (p. 272).

John Vivian also appraises a companion theory of Noelle-Neumann's , in light of propaganda as a whole:

> Her **cumulative effects theory** notes that nobody can escape either the media, which are ubiquitous, or the media's messages, which are driven home with redundancy…. Noelle-Neumann's cumulative effects theory has some troubling implications. She says that the media, despite surface appearances, work against diverse, robust public consideration of the issues (p. 368).

Cornel Sandvoss in his Public Opinion article, elaborates on the effects of the spiral of silence in our modern world:

> According to Noelle-Neumann the opinion leadership of largely liberal mass media creates a climate in which individuals are reluctant to voice diverging opinions (about, for instance, ethnicity, migration, or the welfare state) breaking a seemingly dominant social consensus. Opinion polls thus account not for the respondents' actual opinions but for those they believe to be socially acceptable. These polls are subsequently misconstrued as evidence of a dominant public opinion as favored by opinion leaders, which in turn further deepens the spiral of silence (¶. 3).

Severin &Tankard explain how mass media contributes to the effects of the spiral of silence:

> The mass media can affect the spiral of silence in three ways: (1) they shape impressions about which opinions are dominant; (2) they shape impressions about which opinions are on the increase; and (3) they shape impressions about

which opinions one can utter in public without becoming isolated (Noelle-Neumann, 1973, p.108) **Cumulation** refers to the buildup of certain themes or messages over time. **Ubiquity** refers to the widespread presence of the mass media. **Consonance** refers to the unified picture of an event or issue that can develop and is often shared by different newspapers, magazines, television networks, and other media. The effect of consonance is to overcome selective exposure, since people cannot select any other message, and to present the impression that most people look at the issue in a way that the mass media are presenting it (p. 273).

To gel this concept down to simpler terms, Moy and Scheufele propose that the "theory places great importance on the linkage between media coverage and perceptions of public opinion, suggesting that mass media have a strong influence on which opinions are perceived to be in the majority and therefore influence individual-level willingness to express these views (¶. 19). In a closed society the effects are more pronounced, but an open society welcomes diverse and sometimes contrary opinions. First Amendment Rights of the U.S. Constitution established Free Speech as a fundamental right of the American people.

In conclusion, propaganda and persuasion are weaved tightly into the fabric of our world and is invisible or only slightly apparent. Nationalism and allegiance to the government of the area a people live in colors public opinion and paints a certain reality for those living there. To be informed, people must evaluate the information they receive, as Harold Lasswell commented on communication, "Who (says) What (to) Whom (in) What Channel (with) What Effect [?]." It is incumbent upon us to form our own opinion, voice them, and participate in our community and nation.

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