Media Manipulation of the Masses: How the Media Psychologically Manipulates

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Even though I have worked in academia for years and have enjoyed the benefits of helping learning minds to expand their horizons, I have had one gnawing concern. Learning institutions typically help students, at best, to make a living but they fail miserably at teaching how to live life. These areas pertain to the realm of accumulated wisdom. Of course, wisdom presupposes knowledge, that is, the correct and consistent application of knowledge as truth. As a behavioral professional and an academic, I wish institutions would teach practical things such as how media, government, religion, and even academia itself, can indoctrinate the masses. For the purpose of this article I will focus on the media (and a little on academia).

I can very much remember talking to journalism students and perusing their text books. I noticed the emphasis on “objective and balanced reporting.” I always laugh. Having been a student who used “qualitative methods of research” I knew very well how every bit of research made by any human being is always tainted at some level with some bias. I know some will have a cow at this but even quantum physicists tell us the same. In the media, even a well-intentioned journalist is affecting his message in some form.

I would like to focus on how the media can manipulate the masses through their message. You still see journalists reacting, “How dare you question me!” as if they belonged to some privileged priesthood directly connected to a Divine stream of ultimate truth.

I have endeavored to share just some of the tactics of psychological manipulation of mass thinking. Most reading this will easily recognize these. I don’t claim to provide an exhaustive list.

Guilt by Association

All that is necessary to destroy a person’s character publicly is to take that person and overtly or covertly associate them to something the masses will reject. Never mind if it is true or not, simply to question it or make the association is sufficient.

One example that comes to mind is a very clever twist I saw used by a famous newspaper. At the time, a political leader, greatly disliked by the editors of a newspaper, was portrayed in a very interesting way. They put an article and his photo strategically in very close proximity to a picture of a circus clown that was part of some other story. I thought to myself, “Now that tactic wins the prize!” It was very subtle and very subconscious in approach. The ultimate message was, “This person is a clown, therefore laugh at him and consider him non-credible like you would with a clown.”
Another very typical way of using this same tactic is to connect, even if it is through intricate stratagem, the person to some law-breaking, shady, person, organization, or action. Even if it is not true, it will leave a dark cloud of doubt in the mind of the person receiving the information. That is why slander is so effective in destroying enemies. The media will never come out and admit that they do this. They are accountable to no one, much like some sort of immaculate and narcissistic god.

**Just a Little Poison**

The next way the media tries to manipulate minds is through, what is called, the verisimilitude. Now that is a real mouthful. It means that something is “very similar” to something else. In this case, it is mixing a little poison or a lie with the truth. It is possible to ingest into your body gallons of healthy food. If you simply mix a small amount of extremely powerful poison with it, you would be dead soon. If we graduate the amount of poison into smaller dosages we can do the same over time, at a much slower rate but getting the same results… your demise.

All the media has to do, in order to destroy a person, is to slowly administer lies (poison) about a person mixed in with good things. Eventually, they destroy their enemy and they come out looking like choir boys; clean and glistening.

**Make it Funny**

I’ve already mentioned how a political leader was made to look like a clown. I remember an influential leader characterized by the media as a bafoon, idiot, and dumb person. I can still see the political cartoons drawn of him making him look like some human monkey creature. Typically, monkeys are funny and into mischief. That message stuck.

Along these lines, photos that show the bad side of a person, and everyone has them, are used to portray enemies as stupid and/or psychotic fools. You can sometimes see this approach when a publication deliberately uses a photo of a person looking cross-eyed or bizarre. The editors choose photos that make the person look their worst. In contrast, when their favorite persons are put on the same page, they are shown in a hero’s stance, making them look their best. Coincidental? Absolutely not!

**Making Sandwiches**

A great technique to help build self-esteem in people, while correcting them, is called the “sandwich technique.” This approach is amazing because it uses positive reinforcement of the individual before and after you have shared a difficult area they need to change in. This assures to them that you still like them and that you respect them. It makes your message easy to accept with them.

When you take the same technique and switch it around, placing something positive in-between two negative pieces of information, it becomes quite destructive. In the media, you can come out looking objective and with a “pass” if you use this technique while still destroying your enemy. It is one of the most commonly used approaches by the media, in article after article pertaining to persons they dislike. Notice this… All you really need to hurt your opponent is to do a news piece on them. You start and close the report with negativity and doubt. This leaves a black
cloud over their character. You get a free pass and you still got to be very nasty. This is like a school bully brat that gets away with murder and yet looks good.

Stacking the Experts
Have you ever noticed on TV a panel of intellectuals, journalists, etc. are chosen carefully where it is in disproportion but still looks balanced? Sometimes it is outrageously blatant and sometimes it is covert. Let’s say we dislike a position but we cannot say so for fear of looking bigoted. We can handpick the majority of our experts that will agree with us. Then we bring only one person that represents the side we dislike. We unload the pit-bull dogs on that person, all the while we look “balanced.”

Ridicule and labeling
I am often amused at the interesting adjectives used by a proponent of one side against the other. We hear words like “racist,” “Nazi,” “?-phobe,” “pin-head,” “antiquated,” “irrelevant,” “killer,” and more. By applying these labels on that person, what happens is that you freeze, isolate, and polarize that person. You make them out to look like they are part of a dangerous, scary, and insane fringe. This process is otherwise known in history as “character assassination.” In this case, it happens in the public forum on full display. Have you ever noticed that if the same is applied to the media, it is considered blasphemy? Who makes the media accountable? No one. They are free to destroy anyone they choose. That is why they secretly fear the internet. The tables can be turned on them by some little guy behind a screen.

Repetition Makes True
Incessant repetition of a lie registers as truth in the mind of the masses. Mass hysteria can be created by repeatedly reporting the dangers of some microbe infesting humans and taking over the world in tones of panic. Some of the most successful tyrants in history used great emotion and repetition to their advantage. Joseph Goebbels, Adolf Hitler’s propaganda minister said that if “You repeat a lie often enough, it becomes the truth.” This brings us to my next point.

Make the Devil Look Like God and God Like the Devil
Hitler himself said, “By the skillful and sustained use of propaganda, one can make a people see even heaven as hell or an extremely wretched life as paradise.” In this technique, the attacker makes himself look like a benefactor and savior. He twists the sides. Have you ever wondered why the media narcissistically loves to see themselves as the protectors and keepers of truth? It almost has religious indoctrination undertones, doesn’t it? In classical religious literature we are told that the Devil deceives and disguises himself as an angel of light. I call this, characteristically, the reversing of the poles by making black look like white and vice-versa.

Conclusion
I don’t claim to have covered all aspects of the art of deceit as used in the media. These are as old as man himself. I simply attempted to provide some of the more obvious typical forms of deceit used to psychologically manipulate the masses. What can we learn from this? Perhaps the biggest lesson could be that we must not be naïve.

We must discriminately keep awake and aware. We must be hungry for truth wherever we find it. We must protect it and defend it. We need to be careful to avoid coming to hasty conclusions.
just because the “experts” say it. It is, very much, an individual journey. It is a great quest but filled with minefields. Be careful and beware.