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The Mind Magicians

Psychologists—Powerful Puppeteers in Politics

This is the last of five articles on the growing influence of "applied psychology" on the American way of life. The author is a veteran medical reporter who specializes in psychology.

BY RUTH WINTER

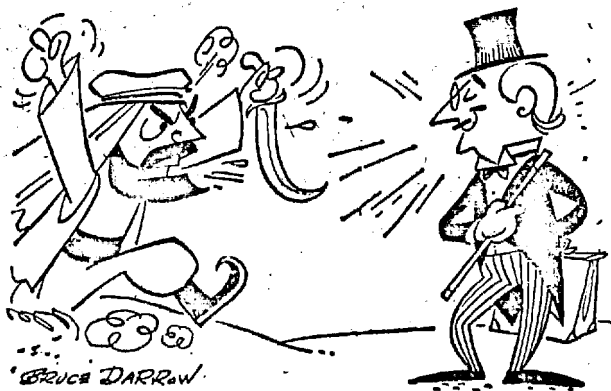
North American Newspaper Alliance
IN A cartoon one rat says to another, "Boy, have I got this guy trained! Everytime I push this bar, he gives me a pellet of food."

Just who is manipulating whom and just how powerful psychologists are in influencing us is a big question today.

Few people realize that a "conservatively estimated" 5 per cent of American Psychological association members work for the United States department of defense.

In the fiscal year 1960 the federal government spent almost 18 million dollars for psychological research in defense problems.

PSYCHOLOGISTS are used by the CIA to screen personnel being used for counter-intelligence. It is their responsibility to weed out potential traitors. Incidentally, Gary Powers, the U-2 pilot, recently married a CIA psychologist.



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Psychologists are used by the defense department to combat the effects of guerrilla warfare in such hot spots as Viet Nam.

Charles Windle and T. R. Vallance of the Special Operations Research office, American university, wrote a report on the "future of Military Psychology" in the A. P. A. journal, the American Psychologist.

THE TWO researchers revealed that "psychological operations include use of mass media directed toward friendly and neutral as well as enemy countries; military movements, policy statements, economic transactions, and developmental assistance."

They said a "major part of the battle for men's minds is being fought primarily with

words as weapons."

"Psychologists should be able to apply some of their experience from child and clinical psychology to increase understanding of psychological conditions in developing nations," they said, "and perhaps suggest therapeutic measures more developed nations might take."

Indeed, many diplomats are quietly consulting psychologists for "an analysis of the 'psychological style' of different peoples and for advice on how to deal with them."

FOR INSTANCE, one diplomat sought advice because a government-controlled radio in an Arab country poured

out a steady stream of violent abuse of the west. The diplomat, fearing for the safety of American personnel, was considering asking Wash-

ington to close the mission.

But a psychological analysis of the situation showed that the threatening words were just the way the Arabs expressed themselves in public and did not imply actual hostile intention.

Psychologists are not only influencing our foreign policy, they are powerful puppeteers behind the domestic political scene.

Pollsters, many of whom are psychologists, use psychological techniques. They have been notoriously wrong, but they have also been amazingly influential.

DANIEL Yankelovich, a Harvard-trained psychologist, did a survey for Life magazine during the 1960 elections to determine "The United States Voters' Image of the Ideal President."

He found the voters wanted "a man of conviction who is willing to fight for his principles but who is able, by conciliation and compromise, to avoid such a fight. A man who is above partisan considerations. A man with the common touch. A vigorous, decisive man who can make up his mind, get things done, and not be pushed around by other people—especially Russians. A man with experience in foreign affairs."

As far as Richard Nixon was concerned, Yankelovich found: "To many voters in our study, Nixon comes much closer than the other six candidates to the Presidential image described above. But a strongly opposed group thinks he is farther from the image than any other candidate.

IF THE election were held today and all seven candidates were permitted to run, Nixon would be the first choice of one out of every three voters. But he would also be the last choice of

more than one out of every four voters.

Of John F. Kennedy Yankelovich said at the time, "Apart from religion, most people's personal feelings toward Kennedy are extraordinarily warm and friendly. There is far less hostility toward him as a person than to Nixon and Adlai Stevenson. Kennedy rates very high on some of the 'ideal' Presidential qualities. To most of our voters Kennedy has a really human touch; he is seen as a strong man of action with deep inner convictions and as nonpartisan. . . . But he rates lowest of all the candidates in experience, particularly in foreign affairs."

Of course, it can't be proven, but whether or not Nixon and Kennedy saw the Yankelovich poll in Life, they did seem to be influenced by it.

KENNEDY, whom voters rated "low on experience," surrounded himself with heavyweight intellectuals who helped to combat the perceived inexperience.

Nixon, on the other hand, bore down on his qualifications to meet the great issues, especially the foreign-policy issues.

So psychologists are in a sense truly magicians of the mind. They can manipulate us without our ever knowing it.

Psychologists can devise tests to estimate a person's intelligence and coordination, but they cannot successfully test one's personality or drive.

Psychologists can do a great deal of harm.

A PARENT may argue with his child's teacher, but never with the school psychologist. Psychologists can, thru mass media, cause guilt feelings among parents or swing the pendulum of discipline from one extreme to the other.

Some psychologists can get carried away with their abilities, like the author of best-selling psychology books who advised a mother after a 14-minute interview that her 11-year-old son "had holes in his head and would grow up to be in and out of jails and mental institutions."

The majority of psychologists are trying to do a good job. They have gone thru long years of training for less monetary reward than other professionals with equal or less preparatory requirements.

BUT, AS the psychologists gain understanding of our behavior and our society as a whole, they do gain a certain amount of power. Their word is often taken with blind faith.

"But the idea that man will be controled by psychologists is a product of the imagination of the computer age," says Dr. Samuel Kutash, chief of psychological service of the Veterans administration, Newark, N. J.

"The study of people can never be reduced to a mechanical device, or a method can never be devised, which will make them do what you want them to do. That is why human liberty has always re-established itself.

"There is no doubt that psychology sometimes oversells itself, but it can contribute a great deal to human happiness."

KUTASH SAID a psychologist feels he has helped a person when:

Vocationally, the person is making the best use of his potentials and has found satisfaction and enjoyment in his work.

Socially, he has managed himself well in his relation to others in the community and at home.

Sexually, he has adjusted himself to find satisfaction under socially acceptable conditions.