

Notes

1. Portions of the data were presented at the annual meetings of the Midwestern Psychological Association in Chicago, 1998, 2000, and 2001. An earlier version of Study 1 was presented at the annual convention of the American Psychological Society in Miami Beach,

- June 2000, and as an invited session at the Mid-America Conference for Teachers of Psychology in Evansville, IN, October, 2000.
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PSYOP and Persuasion: Applying Social Psychology and Becoming an Informed Citizen

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This project teaches students about persuasion techniques, especially as governments use them. Most project examples came from the work of the U.S. military's modern Psychological Operations division. Social psychology students (a) reviewed influence techniques; (b) examined posters, leaflets, and other persuasion tools used in World War II, the Gulf War, Kosovo, and Afghanistan; (c) pondered legal and ethical issues related to persuasion campaigns; and (d) considered the differences between persuasion and propaganda. Finally, students considered ways to inoculate themselves against unwanted influence attempts.

The American Psychological Association's most recent draft of curriculum guidelines suggested that faculty in undergraduate psychology programs should educate students regarding their roles in the public domain (American Psychological Association, 2002). Such education involves helping students to investigate important social and political concerns (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, Rosner, & Stephens, 2000; Schneider, 2002) as well as to acquire skills that promote effective citizenship (American Psychological Association, 2002).

A commitment to the "big questions" of human behavior comes naturally to social psychologists (Aron & Aron, 1986; Bleske-Rechek, 2001; Craig, 1999). This approach stems, in part, from the fact that much of modern social psychology is derived from scholarly attempts to understand citizen behavior in Nazi Germany. A challenge for the modern educator is to engage students in social psychological principles and research that inform issues confronting modern citizens. In this regard, I describe a project for investigating the influence principles used in government persuasion campaigns. Moreover, I touch on relevant ethical and legal questions and explore how individuals can protect themselves from such unwanted influences. Although developed for a social psychology class, this project could easily be adapted for other courses such as cultural psychology, industrial/organizational

psychology, or cultural anthropology because the information campaigns discussed often depend on cross-cultural understanding and rely on techniques used by both public and private organizations.

PSYOP

Perhaps one of the best known examples of the work of the U.S. military's modern Psychological Operations division (PSYOP) involved its effort to frazzle General Manuel Noriega into surrender. To accomplish this goal, troops blasted Noriega with extremely loud U.S. propaganda and rock music. The military's efforts to persuade are, however, much broader than this example would imply.

PSYOPs are defined as "planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and, ultimately, the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals" (*DOD Dictionary*, 2001). Such PSYOPs are "planned, co-ordinated, and executed before, during, and after conflicts" (Defense Science Board, 2000, p. 7).

In World War II, each side developed extensive print and video persuasion campaigns aimed at both their own and opposing citizens and soldiers. More recently, the United States advanced PSYOP operations in Haiti, Somalia, the Gulf War, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. These operations have included dropping leaflets, broadcasting news and music from an airborne radio station, distributing newsletters, and providing information via truck-mounted loudspeakers. PSYOPs are becoming ever more sophisticated today. Navy Commander Randall G. Bowdish (1998-1999) argued that three recent developments have made it possible to greatly increase PSYOP effectiveness: (a) information technologies such as networks and Web sites, (b) the world-

wide explosion of mass media such as television and radio, and (c) advances in social science research concerning influences on human behavior. On this latter point, the U.S. military (Bowdish, 1998–1999; Brooks, 2000) may appreciate social psychology more than many psychology students do!

The idea that U.S. PSYOPs need to be ongoing—“executed before, during, and after conflicts”—is based, in part, on the observation that foreign governments and even international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) constantly are mounting their own persuasion campaigns. However, modern persuasion campaigns are not only continuous, they are also borderless. With the interconnection of worldwide media, the possibility of localizing any particular media campaign diminishes; that is, every PSYOP campaign has both a direct and indirect audience. The challenge for PSYOP planners is to construct materials that are effective for, and inoffensive to, all likely audiences. The concern for U.S. citizens is that the ubiquity of persuasion campaigns makes it increasingly difficult to identify the source, evaluate the accuracy, or discern the significance of news, government, and NGO-generated information. Given the growing role of PSYOPs worldwide, therefore, understanding the mechanisms of persuasion would seem to be a “citizenship skill” of more importance than ever before.

Theoretical, Conceptual, and Ethical Issues Raised in a Social Psychology PSYOP Project

Students in my survey course in social psychology investigated PSYOP in the context of the study of attitudes, compliance, and conformity. They had read related chapters in Brehm, Kassin, and Fein’s (2002) *Social Psychology* as well as Cialdini’s (2001) *Influence: Science and Practice*. The PSYOP project provided a chance to work with the gamut of concepts in persuasion and compliance, including (a) Petty and Cacioppo’s (1986) elaboration likelihood model; (b) source, message, and audience characteristics; (c) cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957); (d) emotion-based appeals; (e) social proof (Cialdini, 2001); (f) informational influence; (g) normative influence; (h) the role of classical and operant conditioning; and (i) self-perception theory (Bem, 1972). Ethical issues raised in this project included questions about the circumstances in which governments should use “peripheral route” or nonrationally based influence attempts as well

as the obligations of citizens in a democracy to take responsibility for their government’s decisions.

Student Preparation for the In-Class Project

Students prepared for the in-class project by reviewing one article about PSYOP (Bowdish, 1998–1999) and at least one of a number of related Web sites. Both the article and many of the Web sites explicitly referred to theory and data in social psychology. One site provided a link to a home page featuring social psychologist Cialdini’s (2001) work on influence (<http://www.influenceatwork.com>).

The Web sites included university-based and government archives of World War II print and video propaganda, along with university-based and private megasites. These sites provided numerous links to PSYOP documents, pamphlets, research materials, and mainstream media and media watchdog sites that have archived stories about the United States, the United Nations, and other governments’ persuasion campaigns. The sites I used for my class appear in Table 1.

PSYOP Demonstration and Discussion

The class began with a November 9, 2001, National Public Radio story (Kestenbaum, 2001) that discussed PSYOP campaigns in Afghanistan and in the Gulf War. The report included an interview with psychologist Anthony Pratkanis, who has co-authored a text on propaganda and persuasion (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001). It also mentioned airborne radio broadcasts in the Gulf War that announced each day, at random times, the next day’s U.S. B-52 bombing targets: If Iraqi soldiers wanted to know the targets, they would need to spend the entire day listening to U.S. propaganda.

Students quickly recognized that the target announcements were reinforcers for listening to the day-long broadcast and, thus, began the process of identifying underlying influence techniques. The class then looked at World War II U.S. and Nazi posters. These materials provided important, albeit limited, historical context for government persuasion efforts. Furthermore, each poster provided a straightforward example of one or two influence mechanisms. For instance, the U.S. poster “When You Ride Alone You Ride With Hitler” (<http://wopr.stanford.edu/propaganda/15—wwii/60—us/50—conserve>

Table 1. Propaganda and PSYOP Web Sites

Calvin College: German Propaganda Archive (Print and video)	http://calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa
National Archive and Records Administration (WWII, print and audio)	http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/index.html?page=2
World War II Poster Collection (Northwestern University Library)	http://www.library.northwestern.edu/govpub/collections/wwii-posters/
World War I & II Propaganda Poster Archive (Large poster collection)	http://wopr.stanford.edu/propaganda/index.html
Aaron Delwiche Propaganda Analysis Site (University of Washington, print, poster, video)	http://www.propagandacritic.com/
The Information Warfare Site (Links to documents, Iraq & Serbia PSYOP leaflets)	http://iwar.org.uk/psyops
University of Kent Centre for the Study of Propaganda (PSYOP links)	http://www.ukc.ac.uk/history/centres/proplinks.htm
Psywarrior (Leaflets from the Gulf War, Kosovo, Vietnam, along with other information about Black and White PSYOP projects)	http://www.psywarrior.com/links.html
Africa2000 (Links to large numbers of documents, print and video examples. It has a general focus, but also has information about U.N. population control persuasion projects in Africa.)	http://www.africa2000.com/PNDX

_resources/ridewithhitler.jpg) attempted to persuade citizens to conserve fuel by evoking cognitive dissonance: Indulging in driving alone was equivalent to supporting the enemy. Other posters tried to influence attitudes by associating the government's message with religious authority ("Pvt. Joe Louis Says [sic] 'We're going to do our part... and we'll win because we're on God's Side,'" http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/powers_of_persuasion/united_we_win/images_html/private_joe_louis_says.html) or with patriotic symbols such as a flag ("Victory Awaits Your Fingers," http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/powers_of_persuasion/its_a_womans_war_too/images_html/victory_waits.html). Similar to many posters, these latter two also manipulated source characteristics in an attempt to address particular audiences: Louis was a prestigious African American boxer; the unnamed female stenographer, apparently urging the equation of women's employment with patriotism, was an attractive young blonde.

Students then turned their attention to more current materials such as U.S. leaflets used in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and the Gulf War designed to influence citizens or soldiers with whom the country was in conflict. One depicted a Serbian tank in the crosshairs of a bomb sight with the caption, "Attention: 78th Motorized Brigade, 211th Armor Brigade, 52nd and 78th Mixed Artillery, and attached units: You are a NATO bombing target. You will continue to be bombed until you return to your garrisons. Return while you still can" (<http://www.iwar.org.uk/psyops/resources/kosovo/b9905e-f.jpg>). This leaflet, along with a similar one used in the Gulf War, "Do You Really Want To Die?" (<http://www.psywarrior.com/gulf3.html>), demonstrated the use of fear appeals in combination with specific directions for avoiding the threat—in this case, surrender. Another leaflet, one that announced U.S. humanitarian food drops in Afghanistan ("Enduring Freedom," <http://www.psywarrior.com/afghanleaf03.html>), illustrated an informational influence attempt that included use of a similar source, along with reference to religious authority. Although not formally identified as such, this food drop, by itself, is consistent with PSYOP efforts to build both Afghani and international support for U.S. military activity.

The posters and leaflets described previously are samples of those used in my class. Hundreds of other PSYOP materials—including video clips—that can be used to demonstrate influence techniques are available on the Web (see Table 1). The most likely limitations on an instructor's selections are available classroom technology and network bandwidth. Instructors can avoid some potential problems on the day of demonstration by downloading materials in advance.

I concluded the demonstration with two brief comments about the character of modern PSYOPs. PSYOPs are classified as *white* or *black*, the latter distinguished by an element of deceit. A good example of black PSYOP, suggested Pratkanis (cited in Kestenbaum, 2001), was the media report—whether true or false—that food dropped by the U.S. for Afghanistan was poisoned by the Taliban. Other examples might include fake letters and surreptitious bank deposits implicating an enemy official as treasonous or planting false information by other means (<http://www.psywarrior.com/sog.html>).

Second, I noted that a PSYOP campaign can be multifaceted and take simultaneous advantage of a large array of influence techniques. For instance, the campaign to win

Bosnian support for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military intervention featured a multimedia campaign (adult and youth magazines, television spots, radio broadcasts, public service leaflets) that maximized opportunity to manipulate source and message characteristics while targeting particular audiences. It also used individually based approaches. NATO soldiers sought to change civilian attitudes through friendly face-to-face contact. They also tried to garner civilian support by distributing free toys, reading material, and other small gifts, attempting to trigger attitude change by securing an initial "commitment" of accepting the gift (Siegel, n.d.).

Armed with examples, students then worked in small groups to apply what they had learned by designing a PSYOP project to support one of the current U.S. military campaigns. Groups constructed a leaflet, radio script, or television ad or developed a person-to-person strategy. The task required that they (a) select a format, (b) select influence techniques to use, (c) identify primary and secondary audiences, (d) articulate a strategy for delivering their message, and (e) take time to evaluate the ethical quality of their project design.

Groups presented their PSYOP suggestions to the entire class, and the discussion concluded by focusing on three points of application. The first, the ethical and legal issues associated with government persuasion campaigns, raised many student questions. The obligation of government to be truthful to its citizens, particularly in the context of ongoing persuasion campaigns by other countries and NGOs, was a significant concern for students. Bowdish's (1998–1999) observation that isolating a PSYOP media campaign is probably now impossible also was troubling because information disseminated elsewhere by the U.S. government is likely to find its way into the U.S. media. Examples of other government-sponsored campaigns, such as the scripting of antidrug messages into prime-time television dramas (Forbes, 2000), helped extend our focus to the broad political, legal, social, and social scientific questions arising from any publicly funded information operation.

A second discussion point focused on the differences between persuasion and propaganda. We relied on Pratkanis and Aronson's (2001) suggestion that persuasion has enlightenment as a goal, whereas propaganda attempts to influence through manipulation. As these authors noted, however, this distinction blurs quickly in application.

Our third discussion point addressed the ways that individuals can inoculate themselves against persuasion attempts. Obviously, being forewarned is a major component of being forearmed. Being able to identify influence tactics is an important citizenship skill. A second means of inoculation requires that individuals avail themselves of multiple sources of information. A chance to compare articles from the U.S. Department of Defense (2002), Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (2002), the British Broadcasting Corporation (Carver, 2002), and the *Washington Post* (Ricks, 2002) about the U.S. government's since-suspended decision to establish a permanent Office of Strategic Influence helped students see how information from one source might be reinterpreted in the context of other points of view.

One point important to keep in mind when discussing PSYOPs in class is that some university students may have been, or are currently, involved with military PSYOP pro-

jects. Much PSYOP material is classified, and instructors should be careful to avoid putting these students in the awkward position of being asked to reveal classified information.

Conclusions

McLuhan argued that future international conflict will take the form of an information war aimed at soldiers and civilians alike (McLuhan, Fiore, & Agel, 1968). To the degree that he was accurate, understanding persuasion campaigns becomes an increasingly important component of both education in social psychology and education for democracy.

This PSYOP project gives students a chance to identify persuasion techniques, to observe the respect that the U.S. government has for social science research, and to question their responsibilities as citizens. Many instructors are understandably uneasy with classroom discussions that grapple so directly with political values and ethics; however, one need not promote any particular ethical viewpoint "except a commitment to democratic ideals, such as procedural fairness, respect for persons, and a willingness to engage in reasoned discourse" (Colby et al., 2000, p. xxv).

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