

The Doors Of Perception: Why Americans Will Believe Almost Anything

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"Those who manipulate the unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested largely by men we have never heard of.

This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society.

In almost every act of our lives whether in the sphere of politics or business in our social conduct or our ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons who understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses. It is they who pull the wires that control the public mind."

<http://www.mercola.com/2001/aug/15/perception.htm>

The Doors Of Perception: Why Americans Will Believe Almost Anything
by Dr. Tim O'Shea

-- poster's note: data between brackets refer to the references section in the end. --

We are the most conditioned, programmed beings the world has ever known. Not only are our thoughts and attitudes continually being shaped and molded; our very awareness of the whole design seems like it is being subtly and inexorably erased.

The doors of our perception are carefully and precisely regulated. Who cares, right?

It is an exhausting and endless task to keep explaining to people how most issues of conventional wisdom are scientifically implanted in the public consciousness by a thousand media clips per day. In an effort

to save time, I would like to provide just a little background on the handling of information in this country.

Once the basic principles are illustrated about how our current system of media control arose historically, the reader might be more apt to question any given story in today's news.

If everybody believes something, it's probably wrong. We call that Conventional Wisdom.

In America, conventional wisdom that has mass acceptance is usually contrived: somebody paid for it. Examples:

Pharmaceuticals restore health
Vaccination brings immunity
The cure for cancer is just around the corner
When a child is sick, he needs immediate antibiotics
When a child has a fever he needs Tylenol
Hospitals are safe and clean.
America has the best health care in the world.
And many many more

This is a list of illusions, that have cost billions and billions to conjure up. Did you ever wonder why you never see the President speaking publicly unless he is reading? Or why most people in this country think generally the same about most of the above issues?

How This Set-Up Got Started

In *Trust Us We're Experts*, Stauber and Rampton pull together some compelling data describing the science of creating public opinion in America.

They trace modern public influence back to the early part of the last century, highlighting the work of guys like Edward L. Bernays, the Father of Spin. From his own amazing chronicle *Propaganda*, we learn how Edward L. Bernays took the ideas of his famous uncle Sigmund Freud himself, and applied them to the emerging science of mass persuasion.

The only difference was that instead of using these principles to uncover hidden themes in the human unconscious, the way Freudian psychology does, Bernays used these same ideas to mask agendas and to create illusions that deceive and misrepresent, for marketing purposes.

The Father Of Spin

Bernays dominated the PR industry until the 1940s, and was a significant force for another 40 years after that. (Tye) During all that time, Bernays took on hundreds of diverse assignments to create a public perception about some idea or product. A few examples:

As a neophyte with the Committee on Public Information, one of Bernays' first assignments was to help sell the First World War to the American public with the idea to "Make the World Safe for Democracy." (Ewen)

A few years later, Bernays set up a stunt to popularize the notion of women smoking cigarettes. In organizing the 1929 Easter Parade in New York City, Bernays showed himself as a force to be reckoned with.

He organized the Torches of Liberty Brigade in which suffragettes marched in the parade smoking cigarettes as a mark of women's liberation. Such publicity followed from that one event that from then on women have felt secure about destroying their own lungs in public, the same way that men have always done.

Bernays popularized the idea of bacon for breakfast.

Not one to turn down a challenge, he set up the advertising format along with the AMA that lasted for nearly 50 years proving that cigarettes are beneficial to health. Just look at ads in issues of Life or Time from the 40s and 50s.

Smoke And Mirrors

Bernay's job was to reframe an issue; to create a desired image that would put a particular product or concept in a desirable light. Bernays described the public as a 'herd that needed to be led.' And this herdlike thinking makes people "susceptible to leadership."

Bernays never deviated from his fundamental axiom to "control the masses without their knowing it." The best PR happens with the people unaware that they are being manipulated.

Stauber describes Bernays' rationale like this:

"the scientific manipulation of public opinion was necessary to overcome chaos and conflict in a democratic society." Trust Us p 42

These early mass persuaders postured themselves as performing a moral service for humanity in general – democracy was too good for people; they needed to be told what to think, because they were incapable of rational thought by themselves. Here's a paragraph from Bernays' Propaganda:

"Those who manipulate the unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested largely by men we have never heard of.

This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner

if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society.

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Here Comes The Money

Once the possibilities of applying Freudian psychology to mass media were glimpsed, Bernays soon had more corporate clients than he could handle. Global corporations fell all over themselves courting the new Image Makers. There were dozens of goods and services and ideas to be sold to a susceptible public. Over the years, these players have had the money to make their images happen. A few examples:

Philip Morris Pfizer Union Carbide
Allstate Monsanto Eli Lilly
tobacco industry Ciba Geigy lead industry
Coors DuPont Chlorox
Shell Oil Standard Oil Procter & Gamble
Boeing General Motors Dow Chemical
General Mills Goodyear

The Players

Though world-famous within the PR industry, the companies have names we don't know, and for good reason.

The best PR goes unnoticed.

For decades they have created the opinions that most of us were raised with, on virtually any issue which has the remotest commercial value, including:

pharmaceutical drugs
vaccines
medicine as a profession
alternative medicine
fluoridation of city water
chlorine
household cleaning products
tobacco
dioxin
global warming
leaded gasoline
cancer research and treatment
pollution of the oceans
forests and lumber
images of celebrities, including damage control

crisis and disaster management
genetically modified foods
aspartame
food additives; processed foods
dental amalgams

Lesson #1

Bernays learned early on that the most effective way to create credibility for a product or an image was by "independent third-party" endorsement.

For example, if General Motors were to come out and say that global warming is a hoax thought up by some liberal tree-huggers, people would suspect GM's motives, since GM's fortune is made by selling automobiles.

If however some independent research institute with a very credible sounding name like the Global Climate Coalition comes out with a scientific report that says global warming is really a fiction, people begin to get confused and to have doubts about the original issue.

So that's exactly what Bernays did. With a policy inspired by genius, he set up "more institutes and foundations than Rockefeller and Carnegie combined." (Stauber p 45)

Quietly financed by the industries whose products were being evaluated, these "independent" research agencies would churn out "scientific" studies and press materials that could create any image their handlers wanted. Such front groups are given high-sounding names like:

Temperature Research Foundation
Manhattan Institute
International Food Information Council
Center for Produce Quality
Consumer Alert
Tobacco Institute Research Council
The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition
Cato Institute
Air Hygiene Foundation
American Council on Science and Health
Industrial Health Federation
Global Climate Coalition
International Food Information Council
Alliance for Better Foods

Sound pretty legit don't they?

Canned News Releases

As Stauber explains, these organizations and hundreds of others like them are front groups whose sole mission is to advance the image of the global corporations who fund them, like those listed above.

This is accomplished in part by an endless stream of 'press releases' announcing "breakthrough" research to every radio station and newspaper in the country. (Robbins) Many of these canned reports read like straight news, and indeed are purposely molded in the news format.

This saves journalists the trouble of researching the subjects on their own, especially on topics about which they know very little. Entire sections of the release or in the case of video news releases, the whole thing can be just lifted intact, with no editing, given the byline of the reporter or newspaper or TV station – and voilà! Instant news – copy and paste. Written by corporate PR firms.

Does this really happen? Every single day, since the 1920s when the idea of the News Release was first invented by Ivy Lee. (Stauber, p 22) Sometimes as many as half the stories appearing in an issue of the Wall St. Journal are based solely on such PR press releases.. (22)

These types of stories are mixed right in with legitimately researched stories. Unless you have done the research yourself, you won't be able to tell the difference.

The Language Of Spin

As 1920s spin pioneers like Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays gained more experience, they began to formulate rules and guidelines for creating public opinion. They learned quickly that mob psychology must focus on emotion, not facts. Since the mob is incapable of rational thought, motivation must be based not on logic but on presentation. Here are some of the axioms of the new science of PR:

- technology is a religion unto itself
- if people are incapable of rational thought, real democracy is dangerous
- important decisions should be left to experts
- when reframing issues, stay away from substance; create images
- never state a clearly demonstrable lie

Words are very carefully chosen for their emotional impact. Here's an example. A front group called the International Food Information Council handles the public's natural aversion to genetically modified foods.

Trigger words are repeated all through the text. Now in the case of GM foods, the public is instinctively afraid of these experimental new creations which have suddenly popped up on our grocery shelves which are said to have DNA alterations. The IFIC wants to reassure the public of the safety of GM foods, so it avoids words like:

Frankenfoods Hitler biotech
chemical DNA experiments
manipulate money safety
scientists radiation roulette
gene-splicing gene gun random

Instead, good PR for GM foods contains words like:

hybrids natural order beauty
choice bounty cross-breeding
diversity earth farmer
organic wholesome

It's basic Freudian/Tony Robbins word association. The fact that GM foods are not hybrids that have been subjected to the slow and careful scientific methods of real crossbreeding doesn't really matter. This is pseudoscience, not science. Form is everything and substance just a passing myth. (Trevanian)

Who do you think funds the International Food Information Council? Take a wild guess. Right – Monsanto, DuPont, Frito-Lay, Coca Cola, Nutrasweet – those in a position to make fortunes from GM foods. (Stauber p 20)

Characteristics Of Good Propaganda

As the science of mass control evolved, PR firms developed further guidelines for effective copy. Here are some of the gems:

- dehumanize the attacked party by labeling and name calling
- speak in glittering generalities using emotionally positive words
- when covering something up, don't use plain English; stall for time; distract
- get endorsements from celebrities, churches, sports figures, street people – anyone who has no expertise in the subject at hand
- the 'plain folks' ruse: us billionaires are just like you
- when minimizing outrage, don't say anything memorable, point out the benefits of what just happened, and avoid moral issues

Keep this list. Start watching for these techniques. Not hard to find
– look at today's paper or tonight's TV news. See what they're doing;
these guys are good!

Science For Hire

PR firms have become very sophisticated in the preparation of news releases. They have learned how to attach the names of famous scientists to research that those scientists have not even looked at. (Stauber, p 201)

This is a common occurrence. In this way the editors of newspapers and TV news shows are often not even aware that an individual release is a total PR fabrication. Or at least they have "deniability," right?

Stauber tells the amazing story of how leaded gas came into the picture. In 1922, General Motors discovered that adding lead to gasoline gave cars more horsepower.

When there was some concern about safety, GM paid the Bureau of Mines to do some fake "testing" and publish spurious research that 'proved' that inhalation of lead was harmless. Enter Charles Kettering.

Founder of the world famous Sloan–Kettering Memorial Institute for medical research, Charles Kettering also happened to be an executive with General Motors.

By some strange coincidence, we soon have the Sloan Kettering institute issuing reports stating that lead occurs naturally in the body and that the body has a way of eliminating low level exposure.

Through its association with The Industrial Hygiene Foundation and PR giant Hill & Knowlton, Sloane Kettering opposed all anti–lead research for years. (Stauber p 92). Without organized scientific opposition, for the next 60 years more and more gasoline became leaded, until by the 1970s, 90% of our gasoline was leaded.

Finally it became too obvious to hide that lead was a major carcinogen, and leaded gas was phased out in the late 1980s. But during those 60 years, it is estimated that some 30 million tons of lead were released in vapor form onto American streets and highways. 30 million tons.

That is PR, my friends.

Junk Science

In 1993 a guy named Peter Huber wrote a new book and coined a new term. The book was Galileo's Revenge and the term was junk science. Huber's shallow thesis was that real science supports technology, industry, and progress.

Anything else was suddenly junk science. Not surprisingly, Stauber explains how Huber's book was supported by the industry-backed Manhattan Institute.

Huber's book was generally dismissed not only because it was so poorly written, but because it failed to realize one fact: true scientific research begins with no conclusions. Real scientists are seeking the truth because they do not yet know what the truth is.

True scientific method goes like this:

1. Form a hypothesis
2. Make predictions for that hypothesis
3. Test the predictions
4. Reject or revise the hypothesis based on the research findings

Boston University scientist Dr. David Ozonoff explains that ideas in science are themselves like "living organisms, that must be nourished, supported, and cultivated with resources for making them grow and flourish." (Stauber p 205)

Great ideas that don't get this financial support because the commercial angles are not immediately obvious – these ideas wither and die.

Another way you can often distinguish real science from phony is that real science points out flaws in its own research. Phony science pretends there were no flaws.

The Real Junk Science

Contrast this with modern PR and its constant pretensions to sound science. Corporate sponsored research, whether it's in the area of drugs, GM foods, or chemistry begins with predetermined conclusions.

It is the job of the scientists then to prove that these conclusions are true, because of the economic upside that proof will bring to the industries paying for that research. This invidious approach to science has shifted the entire focus of research in America during the past 50 years, as any true scientist is likely to admit.

Stauber documents the increasing amount of corporate sponsorship of university research. (206) This has nothing to do with the pursuit of knowledge. Scientists lament that research has become just another commodity, something bought and sold. (Crossen)

The Two Main Targets Of "Sound Science"

It is shocking when Stauber shows how the vast majority of corporate PR today opposes any research that seeks to protect

- public health
- the environment

It's a funny thing that most of the time when we see the phrase "junk science," it is in a context of defending something that may threaten either the environment or our health.

This makes sense when one realizes that money changes hands only by selling the illusion of health and the illusion of environmental protection. True public health and real preservation of the earth's environment have very low market value.

Stauber thinks it ironic that industry's self-proclaimed debunkers of junk science are usually non-scientists themselves. (255) Here again they can do this because the issue is not science, but the creation of images.

The Language Of Attack

When PR firms attack legitimate environmental groups and alternative medicine people, they again use special words which will carry an emotional punch:

outraged sound science junk science
sensible scaremongering responsible
phobiahoax alarmist hysteria

The next time you are reading a newspaper article about an environmental or health issue, note how the author shows bias by using the above terms. This is the result of very specialized training.

Another standard PR tactic is to use the rhetoric of the environmentalists themselves to defend a dangerous and untested product that poses an actual threat to the environment. This we see constantly in the PR smokescreen that surrounds genetically modified foods.

They talk about how GM foods are necessary to grow more food and to end world hunger, when the reality is that GM foods actually have lower yields per acre than natural crops. (Stauber p 173)

The grand design sort of comes into focus once you realize that almost all GM foods have been created by the sellers of herbicides and pesticides so that those plants can withstand greater amounts of herbicides and pesticides. (The Magic Bean)

Kill Your TV?

Hope this chapter has given you a hint to start reading newspaper and magazine articles a little differently, and perhaps start watching TV

news shows with a slightly different attitude than you had before.

Always ask, what are they selling here, and who's selling it? And if you actually follow up on Stauber & Rampton's book and check out some of the other resources below, you might even glimpse the possibility of advancing your life one quantum simply by ceasing to subject your brain to mass media.

That's right – no more newspapers, no more TV news, no more Time magazine or Newsweek. You could actually do that. Just think what you could do with the extra time alone.

Really feel like you need to "relax" or find out "what's going on in the world" for a few hours every day? Think about the news of the past couple of years for a minute.

Do you really suppose the major stories that have dominated headlines and TV news have been "what is going on in the world?" Do you actually think there's been nothing going on besides the contrived tech slump, the contrived power shortages, the re-filtered accounts of foreign violence and disaster, and all the other non-stories that the puppeteers dangle before us every day?

What about when they get a big one, like with OJ or Monica Lewinsky or the Oklahoma city bombing? Do we really need to know all that detail, day after day? Do we have any way of verifying all that detail, even if we wanted to? What is the purpose of news?

To inform the public? Hardly. The sole purpose of news is to keep the public in a state of fear and uncertainty so that they'll watch again tomorrow and be subjected to the same advertising.

Oversimplification? Of course. That's the mark of mass media mastery – simplicity. The invisible hand. Like Edward Bernays said, the people must be controlled without them knowing it.

Consider this: what was really going on in the world all that time they were distracting us with all that stupid vexatious daily smokescreen? Fear and uncertainty – that's what keeps people coming back for more.

If this seems like a radical outlook, let's take it one step further:

What would you lose from your life if you stopped watching TV and stopped reading newspapers altogether?

Would your life really suffer any financial, moral, intellectual or academic loss from such a decision?

Do you really need to have your family continually absorbing the illiterate, amoral, phony, uncultivated, desperately brainless values

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of the people featured in the average nightly TV program? Are these fake, programmed robots "normal"?

Do you need to have your life values constantly spoon-fed to you?

Are those shows really amusing, or just a necessary distraction to keep you from looking at reality, or trying to figure things out yourself by doing a little independent reading?

Name one example of how your life is improved by watching TV news and reading the evening paper.

What measurable gain is there for you?

Planet of the Apes?

There's no question that as a nation, we're getting dumber year by year. Look at the presidents we've been choosing lately. Ever notice the blatant grammar mistakes so ubiquitous in today's advertising and billboards?

Literacy is marginal in most American secondary schools. Three fourths of California high school seniors can't read well enough to pass their exit exams. (SJ Mercury 20 Jul 01)

If you think other parts of the country are smarter, try this one: hand any high school senior a book by Dumas or Jane Austen, and ask them to open to any random page and just read one paragraph out loud. Go ahead, do it. SAT scales are arbitrarily shifted lower and lower to disguise how dumb kids are getting year by year.

At least 10% have documented "learning disabilities," which are reinforced and rewarded by special treatment and special drugs. Ever hear of anyone failing a grade any more?

Or observe the intellectual level of the average movie which these days may only last one or two weeks in the theatres, especially if it has insufficient explosions, chase scenes, silicone, fake martial arts, and cretinesque dialogue.

Radio? Consider the low mental qualifications of the falsely animated corporate simians they hire as DJs — they're only allowed to have 50 thoughts, which they just repeat at random.

And at what point did popular music cease to require the study of any musical instrument or theory whatsoever, not to mention lyric? Perhaps we just don't understand this emerging art form, right? The Darwinism of MTV — apes descended from man.

Ever notice how most articles in any of the glossy magazines sound like they were all written by the same guy? And this guy just

graduated from junior college? And yet he has all the correct opinions on social issues, no original ideas, and that shallow, smug, homogenized corporate omniscience, which enables him to assure us that everything is going to be fine...

All this is great news for the PR industry – makes their job that much easier. Not only are very few paying attention to the process of conditioning; fewer are capable of understanding it even if somebody explained it to them.

Tea In the Cafeteria

Let's say you're in a crowded cafeteria, and you buy a cup of tea. And as you're about to sit down you see your friend way across the room. So you put the tea down and walk across the room and talk to your friend for a few minutes.

Now, coming back to your tea, are you just going to pick it up and drink it? Remember, this is a crowded place and you've just left your tea unattended for several minutes. You've given anybody in that room access to your tea.

Why should your mind be any different? Turning on the TV, or uncritically absorbing mass publications every day – these activities allow access to our minds by "just anyone" – anyone who has an agenda, anyone with the resources to create a public image via popular media.

As we've seen above, just because we read something or see something on TV doesn't mean it's true or worth knowing. So the idea here is, like the tea, the mind is also worth guarding, worth limiting access to it.

This is the only life we get. Time is our total capital. Why waste it allowing our potential, our personality, our values to be shaped, crafted, and limited according to the whims of the mass panderers?

There are many important issues that are crucial to our physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. If it's an issue where money is involved, objective data won't be so easy to obtain. Remember, if everybody knows something, that image has been bought and paid for.

Real knowledge takes a little effort, a little excavation down at least one level below what "everybody knows."

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