THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE AUDIENCE

By

H. L. HOLLINGWORTH

Professor of Psychology

Barnard College, Columbia University

AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY

New York Cincinnati Chicago Boston Atlanta

CHAPTER IX

Directing Action

DEFINING THE ACT

The principles involved in directing the action of the audience will vary considerably, no doubt, with the type of audience, the occasion for action, and the actual authority of the speaker. There is little that can be enumerated here beyond the simple rules of suggestion which apply to all human relations. Whether the action is to take place at once, as in the case of a deliberative assembly called on to vote on an issue, or whether the action is deferred until a time subsequent to the dispersal of the audience, as in the case of a political campaign, one principle should never be forgotten. This is the principle of suggesting in specific and definite terms the nature, place, and method of the desired response.

The treasurer of a society was frequently observed to rise at periodic intervals during the year and, pointing out the urgent need for funds, in the form of regular membership dues, to request that members kindly pay their assessments. No specifications were given beyond this gentle and vague suggestion, and as a consequence few assessments were paid, in spite of the frequent requests. The treasurer should have closed the first request by indicating at which door she would stand at the close of the meeting, or by writing her name and address on the board, or by some other such specific device should have suggested definite action at definite time or place.

Such an illustration is to be sure a far cry from the field of oratory, but it represents one of the real cases in which an audience must be effectively handled if it is to be won.

It is in just this spirit that the salesman always has his order book ready and requests the converted prospect immediately to "sign on the dotted line." The advertiser places a coupon in the corner of the page, or is sure to give his firm name, address, or place of business. Revival meetings which succeed provide specific altar directions —"Married men gather at the right of the platform," "All the dentists in the congregation now sing the third verse," "March up the aisle while the choir sings Onward Christian Soldiers." The climax of this specification of response is seen in the most completely polarized audience that we have described, that of the organized team or regiment or orchestra.

THE LAWS OF SUGGESTION

In much the same way, the remaining general laws of suggestion, which have been frequently formulated and illustrated, apply as fully to the winning of an audience to action as they do to the handling of individuals. We need here do no more than suggest these by a brief statement indicating the nature of each of the principles.

1. The strength of a suggestion depends in part of the degree to which it seems to be of spontaneous origin, an act of the individual's own initiative. Arrogance and domination are at once and instinctively resented and resisted. The more indirect the suggestion, the more it can be made to be an original determination or plan or conclusion on the part of the listener, the greater its dynamic power.

2. Within the limits of the law just indicated, the

dynamic power of a suggestion will be the greater, the more forcefully and vividly it is presented. This is especially true when the suggested act is in harmony with the pre-established habits and tendencies. When the suggestion violates life-long habits and instincts, attempts to be forceful and vigorous usually lapse into arrogance and thereby defeat their own purpose.

3. It is more effective to suggest the desired response directly than it is to argue against a response that is not desired. Suggestion is most active at its positive pole, and the negative suggestion tends to defeat its own purpose. The Old Covenant with its "Thou Shalt Not" was readily displaced by the New Covenant with its simple, positive "Thou Shalt."

4. The action power of a suggestion varies directly with the prestige of its source. The more we revere a speaker, for any reason whatsoever, the greater confidence we tend to place in anything he may say, and the more prone we are to imitate him and to adopt his suggestions, even when they are unsupported by sufficient reason.

5. The strength of a suggestion will be determined in part by the degree of internal resistance it encounters. That suggestion will be most effective which can call to its aid or appropriate the dynamic force of some other impulse that is already active or latent. Suggestions to violate life-long habits, firmly fixed moral feelings, and sacred relationships are impotent, even during the pronounced suggestibility of the hypnotic trance.

6. The strength of a suggestion varies with the frequency with which it is met. But mere mechanical repetition avails little unless the repeated suggestion is attended to with interest. Experiment shows that repetition of advertising appeals is twice as effective when the

form, style, and expression is varied, with constant theme, as when exact duplication of previous appeals is used. Repetition accompanied by sufficient variety to lend interest but with sufficient uniformity to acquire a constant meaning, produces a genuine cumulative effect.

7. In appealing over the short circuit for a specific line of action, no interference, substitute, rival idea, or opposing action should be suggested. Such an idea merely impedes the action power of the first suggestion, by inviting comparison and thus involves deliberate choice and hesitation.

There is an apparent contradiction between what we have just said concerning the advantages of repetition with variety and LeBon's [40] assertion that "Affirmation has no real influence unless it be constantly repeated, and so far as possible *in the same terms*." Both principles, however, are valid. The apparent contradiction arises from the fact that a suggestion or affirmation may have two very distinct functions.

PSYCHOLOGY OF THE SLOGAN

For the purposes of maintaining attention and interest, of linking up the impression with the individual's background of experience, and of persuading him toward a general course of action, repetition with variation seems to be the most effective measure. But another function of the suggestion, and an important one, as we have seen, is that of specifying and giving precise definition to the act. Here the principle of repetition in the same terms, of duplication instead of variation, has its advantages. This is what is involved in the psychology of the slogan. "Swat the fly," an exhortation constantly reiterated, defines the act, and serves effectually to perpetuate the decision beyond the immediate occasion of

its formation. It crystallizes the propaganda of a whole evening's program, remains with the auditor as a succinct formula of action. Becoming a slogan, it unites in a common decision audiences geographically remote from each other and readily spreads to individuals not present at the local program.

Along with the demand for a concrete symbol,—a seal, a flag, a color, a badge, trademark, battle cry, or other single device for representing and suggesting the essence of an abstract principle or a group enterprise,—goes the popular craving for a terse slogan which will take the place of careful description, conceal the lack of real understanding, identify, and rally the devotees of a leader or party, and serve as a convenient challenge to the enemy. Political leaders, as well as juvenile organizers and advertisers, have learned the practical utility of the slogan, and the individualism and partnership of enterprise and control give the practice respectable standing in spite of its dubious psychological implications.

HATE AND FEAR

Along with the power of the slogan should be mentioned the unifying effect of participation in a common punishment or deprivation. The levy of a tax at once establishes bonds of community between individuals who are liable to it, however dispersed they may be. Limitations and regulations imposed on the individual's personal ration of sugar, flour, or milk go far toward arousing to active belligerency a population apathetic or resistant to the progress of military operations and the plans of the chief of staff. In the fusion of heterogeneous elements of a population into an effective social group nothing is more potent than a common hatred or a common fear. Any common emotion tends to have this con-

solidating effect on an audience, but on the whole it is said that mobs are more easily organized for malicious than for ennobling enterprises.

Such a statement, implying the malicious predisposition of the group, is scarcely based on evidence that is either objective or controlled. In the first place, it is commonly made of the mob as distinguished from the audience, which is a differently organized group. And the statement is usually based on historical evidence which concerns, in the main, groups manifesting relatively low degrees of intelligence, and therefore relatively low degrees of inhibition of that "proneness to error" which is characteristic of the simple mind. Furthermore, the difficulty of objectively demonstrating the truth of such an assertion is shown by the subjective and variable nature of the criteria which must be employed in distinguishing the "malicious" from the "ennobling."

Perhaps what lies behind this frequent assertion is the fact that anger and fear are emotions most readily recognized in others. Experiments show not only that adults agree quite unanimously on the significance of the facial expressions of these emotions, but that children correctly interpret them at an early age. Now the signs of emotion on the part of others readily serve as cues to the excitement of these emotions in ourselves. The more definitely these expressive signs are recognized and understood, the more easily and unanimously will the exciting words of the speaker be re-enforced by the expressive reactions of neighboring auditors. It is perhaps in part for this reason that audiences are so readily moved to fear and anger.

Numerous experiments have been performed to measure the relative ease and accuracy of the interpretations of facial expressions. The investigations quite generally

agree that *pleasure* is most easily and surely identified, or at least most unequivocally expressed. *Pain* comes definitely next in ease and accuracy, then *fear, hate, anger.* Such emotions as *surprise, contempt, doubt, disgust, wonder,* and *amazement* are less equivocally expressed, less unanimously identified by adults, and correctly recognized by children only in their later years.

An illustration of the type of evidence on which such conclusions are based is afforded by some of the experiments of G. S. Gates.[18, 19] This investigator, using photographs of the same face, studied the accuracy with which the facial expressions were recognized. She concludes that:

"The evidence from the testing shows, then, that the probable order of difficulty for the pictures (from least to greatest) is for children—Laughter, Pain, Anger, Fear, Surprise and Scorn. This differs from that found for adults where the order is—Laughter and Scorn, Fear, Anger, Pain and Surprise."

The approximate ages at which, in this and later studies by the same author, expressive reactions are understood correctly from photographs, by at least three fourths of the children tested, were as follows:

Amusement, laughter, glee.....by the age of three or four.
Anger, rage, pain, and suffering.....by the age of six or seven.
Fear, terror, horror.....by the age of eight.
Defiance .....by the age of ten.
Pity or sympathy, and scorn.....by the age of eleven.
Surprise, amazement .....by the age of twelve.
Wonder, admiration, and suspicion..by adults only.

The important point in the present connection is that the consolidation and integration of the audience depends not alone upon the actions of the leader, but also upon the contributory signs afforded constantly by the atti-

tudes and expressions of each individual to his neighbor. The organization of the group for one purpose or for another, therefore, depends in part on the quickness and certainty or accuracy with which these contributory influences spread.

We might therefore expect that the most contagious emotion in an audience would be amusement. Next would come anger, pain, and fear. Amusement does not tend to lead to further action, hence does not promote overt crowd organization. But the latter emotions lead to further overt acts of protection, punishment, and revenge. It is the readiness with which these emotions spread that seems to facilitate the organization of the crowd for what are likely to be called "malicious purposes," as distinguished from the milder reactions involved in pity, wonder, surprise, or sympathy. At least the experimental results are consistent with such an interpretation.

AUDIENCES AND MOBS

It has been popular, in the literature of group psychology, to belittle the function of intelligence in the mental processes of an audience. Thus LeBon[40] insists that:

"As soon as a few individuals are gathered together they constitute a crowd, and although they should be distinguished men of learning, they assume all the characteristics of crowds with respect to the matter outside their specialty. . . . From the moment that they form part of a crowd the learned man and the ignoramus are equally incapable of observation."

Again he refers to:

"the slight importance of the mental level of the different elements composing a crowd, so far as the decisions it comes to are concerned. . . . When a deliberative assembly is called

upon to give its opinion on a question not entirely technical, intelligence stands for nothing. For instance a gathering of scientific men or artists, owing to the mere fact that they form an assemblage, will not deliver judgments on general subjects sensibly different from those rendered by a gathering of masons or grocers. . . . The decisions affecting matters of general interest come to by an assembly of men of distinction, but specialists in different walks of life, are not sensibly superior to the decisions that would be adopted by a gathering of imbeciles."

This assumed "mental inferiority of all collectivities," whatever their composition, leads LeBon to emphatic advice on the way to influence assemblies to action:

"Crowds are not to be influenced by reasoning and can only comprehend rough-and-ready associations of ideas. The orators who know how to make an impression on them always appeal in consequence to their sentiments and never to their reason. . . . An orator wishing to move a crowd must make an abusive use of violent affirmation. To exaggerate, to affirm, to resort to repetition, and never to attempt to prove anything by reasoning, are methods of argument well known to speakers at public meetings."

LeBon attributes special potency to the seduction of the audience by images,—to "the magic force of words and formulae, independent of their real sense." "The chief concern of a good counsel," he says, "should be to work upon the feelings of the jury, and, as with all crowds, to argue but little or only to employ rudimentary modes of reasoning."

We need not concern ourselves with the naïve explanations which this writer gives for the tendencies he attributes to all assemblages. It is clear that the composition of the "average audience" usually suffices to explain such phenomena when they actually occur. There is no necessity to invoke a "mental leveling," a "collective con-

sciousness," a "brain paralysis," or "the unconsciousness of the mob."

The truth is that men are less different from each other in their physical make-up and anatomy, and in their original instinctive and emotional reactions, than they are in intelligence and wisdom, or in their acquired skills and standards. Men who agree in their repugnance to a given odor or their fear in danger may yet differ remarkably both in intelligence and knowledge. In so far as verdicts and acts relating to what LeBon calls "matters of general interest" are based on the fundamental interests, and such common inclinations as those toward mercy, justice, revenge, jealousy, pride, there is nothing either surprising or mysterious in the agreement of "the artist and the grocer." Their difference will lie rather in the type of object or situation most likely to arouse such reactions.

But the conception of the assembly as a mob which the speaker invariably seeks to stampede to some tumultous act or verdict, to be recalled perhaps with chagrin on the morrow or in history, is far from representing the audience or the enterprise which most speakers will confront. To present the frenzied and vociferous delivery of magical formulae, striking images, and seductive metaphors as the goal of public speaking is, to say the least, woefully to underestimate the varieties and occasions of public congregation.

MAJORITY VERSUS EXPERT OPINION

It is well known of course that individual opinion is influenced not only by strictly relevant data and personal evaluation, but also to a considerable extent by the suggestive influence of the opinions of others. The knowledge that the majority hold a given opinion inclines many

individuals favorably toward the majority's decision. Similarly the verdict of an expert in the field in question gives a bias to the individual's judgment. Is the majority or the expert more potent in thus deflecting the individual opinion? Is the audience more susceptible, in general, to the statement of public opinion or to the quotation of authority?

In an experiment conducted in 1910, the writer attempted to measure the effectiveness of various types of appeal in the case of the description of marketable products. Among the thirty main interests or instincts represented were two which bear on the point just raised. Thus three appeals based their claim on the prestige of the group, thereby suggesting the desirability of the article. Two appeals, on the other hand, were based on the recommendations of prominent persons, who, in the public eye, might well represent expert opinion. If a perfect appeal, that is, one which for every member of the experimental group was the most effective of the series, be considered to have a value of 100 per cent, then, on this basis, the recommendation scores only 14 per cent whereas the Group Suggestion scores 50 per cent. The suggestion of the group is in this field apparently much more effective than is the opinion of the expert.

An experiment of H. T. Moore's [47] is directed toward a similar point. This investigator studied three types of situations; *viz.*, speech, morals, and music. "Ninety-five subjects were given eighteen paired comparisons for each of three types of situation. The instructions for the linguistic judgments were that the subjects check the more offensive one of each pair of expressions. . . . The ethical judgments involved the checking of the more offensive of two traits of character in each of eighteen

pairs. . . . The musical judgments involved an expression of preference for one of two resolutions of the dominant seventh chord, played on a reed organ. Eighteen paired resolutions were played, and the preferences recorded after each."

After these opinions had been recorded and a time interval of several days had elapsed, a repetition of the experiment showed the chance of reversal for such judgments, when no suggestive influence was used. On later occasions this second half of the experiment was accompanied in each case by a statement of what the majority opinion had been on the original occasion. In a third case the statement was used instead of the opinion of some expert in the field of question. The investigator now inquired whether the suggestion of group opinion and of expert opinion produced a greater number of reversals of judgment than came by chance alone, and how these two influences compared in this respect, in the three fields of speech, morals, and music. The following tabulation of the results shows the outcome of this suggestive experiment.

Field of Judgment	Reversals without Suggestion	Reversals under Suggestion of Majority Opinion	Reversals under Suggestion of Expert Opinion
Speech . . .	13.4%	62.2%	48.0%
Morals . . .	10.3	50.1	47.8
Music . . .	25.1	48.2	46.2

It is clear from this table alone that both types of suggestion have a very real effect in producing reversal of the individual's previous judgments, in all three fields. But the figures cannot be compared directly, since the chance reversals in the three fields were not equally fre-

quent. We may divide each value for the suggestive procedures by the chance result in the same field, and thus arrive at a more directly comparable statement of the strength of the two influences. This the investigator has done and the figures are as follows, using in each case the chance result as the unit.

Field of Judgment	Influence of Majority	Influence of Expert
Speech	4.60	3.50
Morals	4.86	4.60
Music	1.90	1.80

The author concludes:

"If we now take as our unit of measurement the per cent recorded as the chance of reversal, we find, as indicated . . . that the probability of reversing favorably to the majority in matters of speech and morals in approximately five times chance; whereas in matters of musical feeling the probability is only about twice chance. By majority is meant here of course only the special type of majority provided in the experiment, but if generalization is permissible on the basis of the evidence available, we may venture the statement that a man is two and a half times as individualistic in his musical likes and dislikes as in his moral and linguistic perferences. Similarly we may conclude that expert and majority opinion hold about equal sway over the individual in morals and music, but that the chances are about ten to seven in favor of majority prestige in matters pertaining to speech."

An experiment similar to Moore's was more recently reported by Marple.[42a] Three groups of 300 subjects each were used, averaging respectively 18, 22, and 39 years of age. Opinions (Yes, No, Uncertain) were secured from all these on an array of 75 debatable propo-

sitions or questions. A month later opinions were again recorded, under the following three conditions:

A. Control Group—No suggestions offered.
B. Majority Opinion Influence—These subjects were now informed what the majority opinion had been on the earlier occasion.
C. Expert Opinion Influence—These subjects were now informed of the recorded opinion of 20 "experts."

The changes in the second opinion, to agree with the suggestive influence, were then computed. Two outstanding results appeared.

In the first place "whether measuring changes due to chance or those which occur in the presence of group or expert preference, there appears to be a decline of suggestibility with increasing age."

In the second place, "the influence of group preference in facilitating opinion is in every case greater than the influence of expert opinion."

The net outcome is consistent in all three of these investigations, and tends to indicate that, in the words of Marple, "Group opinion, with these groups, is more powerful in affecting individual agreement than is expert opinion."

Moore's concluding words, in pointing out the limitations of such an experiment, may also be given, as having relevance to the type of enterprise we are here undertaking. "Whether the shrunken prestige of a defeated political candidate or of an abdicated emperor follows any accurately describable laws, one would scarcely venture to say; but it is sufficiently obvious that until so-called social laws rest on more than the personal observations of individual writers, we shall have a great excess

of laws and only a minimum of confidence in applying them."

THE DETERMINANTS OF BELIEF

In the long run the final test of belief is the readiness or the willingness to act. Indeed some psychologists have been convinced that the experience of belief is nothing more than the feeling of this readiness for action. However this may be, inducement to act must proceed either through relying on a belief explicitly or implicitly held, or else through the establishment of a new belief. Even the emotional appeal operates through the utilization of a native or long-acquired value, interest, preference, or conviction.

The psychology of arousing action thus involves in part the psychology of belief, and it would be useful in this connection to know what are the most effective determinants of our convictions. Such information would be of specially practical value in the endeavor to establish a new belief in the minds of one's audience, inasmuch as it would enable the speaker to take advantage of thought habits and lines of least resistance. Very little is known quantitatively or experimentally as to the relative potency of the different determinants of conviction, and this constitutes a field in which exploration will surely be profitable. It is unsafe to rely solely on anecdotal evidence, generalized clinical findings, and occasional striking or bizarre incidents, however instructive and suggestive these may be. Pending fuller experimental knowledge, the following account of a preliminary investigation of the determinants of belief in the case of educated adults has a significant value. All of the individuals studied were high-school graduates and all had had at least two years of college training in addition. The results thus

apply to the most enlightened and reflective section of the population, and must not yet be taken as characterizing the average man.

Lund [42] presented to these thirty-five individuals a list of thirty propositions, presumably representing typical assertions in fields of general knowledge, science, ethics, politics, and religion. Each proposition was to be graded on a scale of belief. In each case also a statement was to be made of the determinants of the belief. The question was then, how firmly is this proposition believed, and what are the factors, influences, or determinants to which the direction and degree of belief is to be attributed.

The following propositions will serve as illustrations of the longer list, and will suggest the straightforwardness of the statements.

A. Were the higher forms of life derived from the lower forms through a gradual process of evolutionary growth?

B. Is the earth practically round?

C. Is morality a man-made institution?

D. Is the golden rule a practicable concept in business relations?

E. Is democracy the best form of government?

F. Is the protective tariff a wise policy for the United States?

G. Did Shakespeare write *The Merchant of Venice*?

H. Is slander wrong?

I. Does death end personal existence?

J. Does a black cat crossing your path bring bad luck?

The scale ratings ranged from a neutral attitude to very high degrees of belief or disbelief; beliefs in different fields displayed varying degrees of certainty; and numerous other interesting tendencies were observed. But our present interest is instead in the nature of the determining influences cited as responsible for the degree

of belief. By these we do not mean "arguments" that might be given for or against the proposition, but instead the candid report of the presumed influences underlying or leading to the conviction.

These "determinants" (1050 indications, 30 from each of 35 individuals) were classified, independently, or in consultation, by a group of 20 college students of psychology, in an experimental course. It was found that ten categories adequately took account of such classification as could be made. The designations of these categories, and the frequency with which they occurred in the total number of "determinants" cited, are given in the following table.

DETERMINANTS	FREQUENCIES
A—Teaching and training	326
B—Personal experience	151
C—Personal opinion	116
D—Personal reasoning	92
E—Desire and satisfyingness	58
F—Authoritative opinion	46
G—Public opinion	44
H—Axiomatic principle	6
(Individual responses)	125
(No response)	86
TOTAL	1050

Such results will no doubt vary with different groups of individuals and with differently chosen propositions, and they will depend also on the degree of conscious insight which individuals actually have into the grounds of their convictions and the process of forming them. But if these data are typical, they show that the appeals to emotional satisfaction, to authoritative and crowd opinion, and to unsupported acceptance are reported as much less accredited than are more reflective and empirical considerations, and that most accredited of all are

the habits of thought established through the long process of training and teaching.

Of course the accrediting of a determinant is not a demonstration that that factor was actually operative in shaping the individual belief. It is however an indication of the probable esteem in which the individual holds the determinant,—an indication of his own belief concerning the determination of his beliefs. An interesting feature of Lund's investigation consisted in requiring his subjects also to rate these determinants as they supposed them to apply to the average individual of their social and educational status. The noteworthy result was that the more rational determinants were indicated as being more potent for each individual in his own case than he supposed them to be for people at large.

We have already shown how close is the correlation between the satisfyingness of a proposition's content and its degree of belief strength. The present result shows that in general, although we are inclined to attribute this non-rational determination to the beliefs of others, we suppose ourselves to be more rationally guided. It is in part this inclination which leads the average man to welcome evidence, but to be satisfied with the fallacious modes of proof. For this is enough to enable conviction, which springs from desire, to possess the appearance of cogent rational support.

PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS

1. The first principle for directing the acts and verdicts of the audience is that of indicating specifically and definitely rather than vaguely and generally the precise nature, place, time, and method of the proposed act.

2. The strength of a suggestion varies directly with its spontaneity, vividness, positive form, prestige, and frequency.

3. The strength of a suggestion varies inversely with the internal resistance it encounters and with the number of rival suggestions operating.

4. Repetition with variation promotes conviction; repetition with duplication better specifies and defines the response to be made.

5. A slogan or catch-word crystallizes a whole program and remains with the audience as a succinct formula of action.

6. If audiences are more easily aroused to malicious than to ennobling acts or verdicts, this is in part because anger, hate, and fear are emotions most easily recognized in others and propagated through their demeanor.

7. The mobilization of an audience depends no more upon the actions of the leader than upon the contributory signs afforded one another by the auditors, through their attitudes and visible expressions.

8. The traditional "mental inferiority of all congregations" is only a result of the fact that people are more alike in the simple, primitive, concrete structural, and fundamental traits than they are in complex, more recently acquired, symbolic, functional, and derived traits.

9. The prevalent "mob conception" of the nature of an audience woefully underestimates the varieties and occasions of public congregation.

10. There is no "mind of the audience"; there are only the individual people with their individual minds; but in a congregation special stimuli and hence special behavior occur which are absent when the individuals are alone.

11. Whether the opinion of the public or the judgment of experts has higher prestige with an audience, varies with the subject matter of the discourse.

12. People prefer their acts to appear rationally determined; they suppose their own acts to be more rationally determined than the acts of others; they suppose their own acts to be more rationally determined than they actually are.