The Spiral of Silence

Public Opinion – Our Social Skin

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann

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4 *Public Opinion: What Is It?*

"Well, I still don't know what public opinion is," said a participant in the morning session of a conference about public opinion as he left the auditorium for the noon break. That was in 1961 in Baden-Baden at a symposium of media practitioners and researchers. He was not alone in his annoyance. Generations of philosophers, jurists, historians, political theorists, and journalism scholars have torn their hair in the attempt to provide a clear definition of public opinion.

Fifty definitions

Moreover, no progress has been made since that time. On the contrary, the concept unraveled and dissolved more and more until it was for all practical purposes useless. In the mid-1960s a Princeton professor, Harwood Childs (1965, 14–26), undertook the tedious task of collecting definitions and was able to assemble around fifty from the literature. In the fifties and sixties, the demand to abandon the concept increased. Public opinion was said to be a fiction that belonged in a museum of the history of ideas; it could only be of historical interest. Remarkably enough, this was of no avail. "The concept simply refuses to die," complained a German professor of journalism, Emil Dovifat (1962, 108). Also in 1962, in his inaugural dissertation, "Structural Change in the Concept of the Public: An Investigation of a Category in Bourgeois Society," Jürgen Habermas commented that "not only colloquial usage . . . clings to it, but so do scientists and scholars, especially those in jurisprudence, political studies, and sociology, who are apparently incapable of replacing traditional categories such as 'public opinion' with more precise terms" (1962, 13).

W. Phillips Davison, professor of journalism at Columbia University, began his article "Public Opinion," written for the 1968 edition of the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, with the sentence: "There is no generally accepted definition of 'public opinion.' Nevertheless," he continued, "the term has been employed with increasing frequency. . . . Efforts to define the term have led to such expressions of frustration as 'public opinion is not

the name of some thing, but a classification of a number of somethings'" (Davison 1968, esp. 188). Here he cites Childs's collection of some fifty definitions.

This perplexity is found also in the writings of the German historian Hermann Oncken, who, in an article published in 1904, put it thus: "Whoever desires to grasp and define [the concept of public opinion] will recognize quickly that he is dealing with a Proteus, a being that appears simultaneously in a thousand guises, both visible and as a phantom, impotent and surprisingly efficacious, which presents itself in innumerable transformations and is forever slipping through our fingers just as we believe we have a firm grip on it. . . . That which floats and flows cannot be understood by being locked up in a formula. . . . After all, when asked, everyone knows exactly what public opinion means" (Oncken 1914, esp. 224–25, 236).

It is remarkable that a scholar of Oncken's sagacity and conceptual power retreats to the evasion "after all . . . everyone knows" and reduces the search for definitions, which are the prerequisites for applying the scientific method, to "locking up in a formula."

The spiral of silence as a process that creates and spreads public opinion

In the early 1970s, I was developing the hypothesis of the spiral of silence in an effort to clarify the puzzling findings of 1965—voting intentions that did not change, yet an increasing expectation that one side would win. At that point I began to ask myself whether we perhaps had a handle on a part of that monster, "public opinion." "In innumerable transformations and . . . forever slipping through our fingers," as Oncken described it (1914, 225). The spiral of silence might be one of the forms in which public opinion appeared; it might be a process through which a new, youthful public opinion develops or whereby the transformed meaning of an old opinion spreads. If this were so, it would still be necessary to attempt a definition of public opinion, in order to avoid having to state that "the spiral of silence is that process by which something indefinable is spread."

The scholarly controversy swirled around both parts of the concept, around both "public" and "opinion."

Meinung and "opinion" are understood differently

For the meaning of what in German is termed *Meinung* (opinion), our research led back to Plato's *Republic*. On the occasion of a festival in the port city of Piraeus, in a discussion on the state with Glaucon and other friends, Socrates works out an idea of opinion which is roughly the same as the traditional German one:

> Think you then, said I, that opinion is more obscure than knowledge, but clearer than ignorance?
> Far, said he.
> Does it lie then between them both?
> Yes.
> Opinion then is between the two?
> Entirely so. (Plato 1900, 165–66)

Opinion takes a middle position. As Plato saw it, it was not completely worthless. However, many other voices differentiated it only negatively from knowledge, belief, and conviction. Kant (1893, 498) characterized opinion as "insufficient judgment, subjectively as well as objectively." The Anglo-Saxons and the French, in contrast, saw "opinion" as more complex. They left it open how valuable or worthless opinion might be, but considered it the unified agreement of a population or a particular segment of the population. "Common opinion" is what the English social philosopher David Hume called it in a work published in 1739 (Hume 1896, 411). Agreement and a sense of the common is what lay behind the English and French "opinion."

Agreement that demands recognition

In the context of what we have learned about the spiral of silence, the French and English approach makes much more sense than the German preoccupation with the value or lack of value of opinion. Individuals would observe the consensus in their environment and contrast it with their own behavior. It was not thereby necessarily the consensus of *opinion* that would be at issue; it might deal with concurrent *behavior*—wearing or not wearing a badge, offering one's seat to an old person or remaining seated in a public vehicle. For the spiral of silence process, it was immaterial whether a person isolated himself through an opinion or through behavior. These considerations forced us to see that, in the definition we sought, opinion was to be understood as a synonym for the expression of something regarded as acceptable, thereby hinting at the element of consensus or agreement found in the English and French usage.

Three meanings of "public"

The interpretation of "public" proved to be at least as critical as that of "opinion." Many scholars have argued over the concept "public." As Habermas contended, "the use of 'public' and of 'the public' betrays a multiplicity of competing meanings" (1962, 13). To begin with, there is the legal sense of "public," which emphasizes the etymological aspect of its openness: it is open to everyone—a public place, a public path, a public trial—as distinguished from the private sphere (from the Latin *privare*), something distinguished or set aside as one's own. A second meaning can be found in the concepts of public rights and public force. Here "public" expresses some involvement of the state. According to this second usage, "public" has to do with public interests, as expressed, for example, in the phrase "the public responsibility of journalists." This means we are dealing with issues or problems that concern us all, that concern the general welfare. States base the legalized use of force on this principle: the single individual has surrendered the possibility of using force to the organs of the state. The state has the monopoly to use force. Finally, in the phrase "public opinion," "public" must have a related but different meaning. Legal scholars such as Ihering and von Holtzendorff have marveled at the amazing power public opinion has in making regulations, norms, and moral rules prevail over the individual without ever troubling legislators, governments, or courts for assistance. "It is cheap" was the praise public opinion received in 1898 from the American sociologist Edward Ross (1969, 95). The equation of "public opinion" with "ruling opinion" runs like a common thread through its many definitions. This speaks to the fact that something or other clinging to public opinion sets up conditions that move individuals to act, even against their own wills.

The social skin

The third meaning of "public" could be characterized as social-psychological. The individual does not live only in that inner space where he thinks and feels. His life is also turned outside, not just to other persons, but also the collectivity as a whole. Under certain conditions (I am thinking of the famous distinction of Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*), the exposed individual is

sheltered by the intimacy and trust engendered through, for example, a shared religion. In great civilizations, however, the individual stands exposed even more openly to the demands of society (Tönnies 1922, 69, 80). What is it that "exposes" the individual and continually requires that he attend to the social dimension around him? It is fear of isolation, fear of disrespect, or unpopularity; it is a need for consensus. This makes a person want to focus his attention on the environment, thus leading to an awareness of the "public eye." Ordinary individuals always know whether they are exposed to or hidden from the public view, and they conduct themselves accordingly. To be sure, people seem to differ greatly in the way they are affected by this awareness. The individual directs his anxious attention toward this anonymous court, which deals out popularity and unpopularity, respect and scorn.

Fascinated by the ideal of the self-reliant, independent individual, scholars have hardly noticed the existence of the isolated individual fearful of the opinion of his peers. Instead, they have explored many other possible meanings and dimensions of the concept, often as barren academic exercises. They have considered the *content* of public opinion: this is assumed to consist of relevant, "public affairs" issues. Next they have considered whose opinion constitutes public opinion: those persons in a community who are ready and in the position to express themselves responsibly about questions of public relevance and thereby exercise an office of criticism and control over the government in the name of the governed. They have also considered the forms of public opinion: those which are openly expressed and are therefore generally accessible—opinions made public, and particularly those made public in the mass media. Only the social-pyschological aspect of "public" seems practically to have been neglected in the twentieth century's wealth of definitions. Yet this is the meaning felt by people in their sensitive social skin, their social nature.

Opinions that one can express in public without isolating oneself

In the preceding chapters I have tried to identify elements that seem to be linked with the process of public opinion and are amenable to empirical investigation: (1) the human ability to realize when public opinions grow in strength or weaken; (2) the reactions to this realization, leading either to more confident speech or to silence; and (3) the fear of isolation that makes most people willing to heed the opinion of others. It is on these three elements that an operational definition of public opinion may be built: opinions on controversial issues that one *can* express in public without isolating oneself. This definition, then, will serve as our tentative guideline for further investigations.

Of course, this interpretation of public opinion needs to be supplemented, because it applies only to situations in which opinions vie with one another, whenever newly arising ideas are being approved or existing conceptions overthrown. Ferdinand Tönnies, in his 1922 publication *Kritik der Öffentlichen Meinung* (Critique of Public Opinion), was of the view that public opinion existed in various degrees or states of aggregation: solid, fluid, and gaseous (1922, 137–38). If one uses Tönnies's analogy, the spiral of silence appears only during the fluid state. For instance, when one camp speaks of *Radikalenerlass*, not allowing radicals into public service jobs, and the other camp speaks of *Berufsverbot*, prevention of a person's right to pursue his or her profession, then each camp has its own language, and we can follow the movement of the spiral of silence by noting the frequency with which each term is used by the majority. Where opinions and forms of behavior have gained a firm hold, where they have become custom or tradition, we can no longer recognize an element of controversy in them. The controversial element, a prerequisite for the potential of isolation, enters only after a violation, when firmly established public opinion, tradition, and morals have been injured. In the late nineteenth century, Franz von Holtzendorff (1879–80, 74) spoke of the "censor's office" of public opinion, and von Ihering (1883, 340) called it the "taskmistress of all things moral," removing from it all trace of the intellectual. This is what he meant when he spoke of the conscious or unconscious "reaction of an interest against its own injury, a defense in the service of the common security" (Ihering 1883, 242). The definition of public opinion remains to be completed; for in the field of consolidated traditions, morals, and, above all, norms, the opinions and behaviors of public opinion are opinions and behaviors that one *must* express or adopt if one is not going to isolate oneself. The existing order is preserved on the one hand by the individual's fear of isolation and his need to be accepted; and on the other by the public's demand, carrying the weight of a court sentence, that we conform to established opinions and behaviors.

Public opinion as approval and disapproval

Can a proper definition ignore what has been presented as public opinion in hundreds of books, that is, opinion only about matters of political significance? By our definition, public opinion—

whether it refers to change or to defending established and consolidated positions—is not restricted in subject matter. What we are speaking of is the approval and disapproval of publicly observable positions and behavior. We are speaking of the approval or disapproval that makes itself noticeable to the individual. The spiral of silence is a reaction to openly visible approval and disapproval among shifting constellations of values. The question of whose opinion should count is equally unrestricted. In this view, public opinion is not just a matter for those who feel a calling, or for talented critics—the "politically functioning public" of Habermas (1962, 117). Everyone is involved.

A venture into the past: Machiavelli, Shakespeare, Montaigne

To find out whether the concept of public opinion as it has developed out of the spiral of silence is well founded, we may go back two hundred years and to the land in which the term "public opinion" first appeared—eighteenth-century France. In a famous novel first published in 1782, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, Choderlos de Laclos casually uses the term *l'opinion publique* as everyday language. Laclos's passage concerns an exchange of letters between a sophisticated woman and a young lady. The older woman advises her friend against keeping company with a man of bad repute: "You believe him capable of change for the better, yes, and let us further assume that this miracle actually occurs. Would not public opinion persist in remaining against him, and would not this suffice to make you adjust your relationship with him accordingly?" (Choderlos de Laclos 1926, 1:89).

We find public opinion active here as a court of judgment in spheres far removed from politics and far removed from persons especially distinguished by their political judgment. The author of the letter assumes that the vaguely described and anonymous group characterized as the public will, through its opinion, so influence the recipient of the letter as to lead to appropriate adjustments in her behavior. But we can go back even further into the past, to a time before the expression "public opinion" had been coined. Here we encounter the same anonymous court passing judgments, and, although under a different name, it bears witness to an almost identical conflict. Shakespeare describes an exchange between King Henry IV and his son, the future Henry V. The king reprimands his son for being seen too often in bad company. He should have more regard for opinion. Opinion is of the greatest importance: the king says that he himself was raised by opinion to the throne: "Opinion that did help me to the crown" (*Henry IV, Part I*, act 3). If Shakespeare could use "opinion" so decidedly on the stage at the end of the sixteenth century, then it is not surprising that the longer expression "public opinion" was first coined not in England but in France. The English word "opinion" apparently contained enough of the element of "publicness"—the court-of-judgment quality by which reputations were created and destroyed—that it did not require the additional element of "public" at all.

The idea that a ruler or a future king must pay attention to the opinion of his environment, to his general public, was certainly nothing odd or new to Shakespeare. His century was acquainted with Machiavelli's 1514 *The Prince*, which contained important sections advising rulers on how best to deal with the public. There are never, says Machiavelli, more than a few who "feel" a government or, one can translate, who feel themselves directly affected by it. But everyone *sees* it, and everything depends on its seeming, in the eyes of its viewers, to be powerful and virtuous. "The vulgar are always taken by appearances." "It is not, therefore, necessary for a prince to have all the desirable qualities [mercy, faithfulness, humanity, sincerity, religiousness, etc.], but it is very necessary to seem to have them." The prince, Machiavelli said, must avoid everything that could lead to his becoming hated or that might make him appear contemptible. He must trouble himself to make sure that the people are satisfied with him (Machiavelli 1950, 64–66, 56, 67; Rusciano n.d., 35, 40, 33, 25, 37).

The theory that lay at the foundation of Henry IV's admonition to his son ran like this in Machiavelli's Discourses on the First Decade of Livius' Roman History: "There is no better indication of a man's character than the company he keeps; and therefore very properly a man who keeps respectable company acquires a good name, for it is impossible that there should not be some similitude of character and habits between him and his associates" (Machiavelli 1971/1950, 509–11; Rusciano n.d., 64).

Here we are in the first half of the sixteenth century, and yet we hardly feel that we have strayed into a time when people were less sensitive than they are today about what a good reputation means, or less sensitive to the critical court of public opinion.

We have, however, obtained a new insight from Machiavelli and Shakespeare, namely, that the court of judgment called public opinion does not merely make little people tremble for their reputa-

tion. Princes, lords, and rulers are likewise subject to its dicta. Machiavelli warns the prince he is trying to instruct that, in order to rule, he must know the nature of his subjects thoroughly (Machiavelli 1971, 257). The power of the people lies in their capacity to reject the government of the prince and to overthrow him if he is insensitive to their desires (Rusciano n.d., 49).

Discoverer of the public dimension: Montaigne

At the University of Mainz, we began some systematic studies of literature by putting together a questionnaire with twenty questions to be asked of texts rather than of persons. Does the text contain the concept of public opinion or related concepts? Does it describe the fear of isolation? Does it describe conflicts between the individual and the collective, between the prevailing opinion and deviant opinion? We combed texts as one might comb the countryside—the Bible, myths, fairytales; works by philosophers, essayists, poets.

In a paper by Wilhelm Bauer (1920), who wrote several works on public opinion, Kurt Braatz (a doctoral student) found a comment to the effect that Machiavelli had used the concept in Italian. There was no citation, however, and we could not locate the passage. Although English translations of Machiavelli have used the expression "public opinion," the *Discorsi* use such terms as *opinione universale* (I, 58), *commune opinione* (II, 10), or *pubblica voce* (III, 34).

To determine the meaning of public opinion, we believed, we needed to see how the concept was first used, in what context, based on what observations—just as one can gain knowledge of a plant by studying its habitat. Our expectation was confirmed. Michael Raffel (1984) summarized the findings of his master's thesis in an article titled "Creator of the Concept of Public Opinion: Michel de Montaigne." In the 1588 edition of his essays, about seventy years after the appearance of Machiavelli's *Discorsi*, Montaigne twice used the collective singular *l'opinion publique*. Explaining why he sprinkled his writings with so many quotations from writers of antiquity, he said, "It is really for the sake of public opinion that I appear with this borrowed finery" (Montaigne 1962, 1033). The second time he used the expression "public opinion" was in addressing the question of how customs and moral notions can be changed. Plato, he said, considered pederasty a dangerous passion. To combat it, Plato (in his *Laws*) recommended that it be condemned by public opinion. He demanded that poets portray this vice as execrable, thus creating public opinion on the subject. Although the new, negative view might still go against majority opinion, it would, if presented as the prevailing view, later become valid for slaves and free men alike, women and children, and the entire citizenry (ibid., 115).

It is no accident that Montaigne was so attentive to the social nature of man and to the effect of publicity, public approval, and public condemnation. To my knowledge, every scholar or writer to have made an important contribution to the topic of public opinion has had firsthand experience of it. Machiavelli wrote of it after a change of government in Florence, after he had been accused of involvement in a conspiracy and had been incarcerated, tortured, and then set free, retiring to his estate at San Casciano. Montaigne's experience was threefold. First, he had the experience of his immediate family. The corporate system that had been entrenched throughout the Middle Ages had begun to change; a newly formed group of wealthy but nonaristocratic citizens was striving to be recognized as having equal rights with the aristocracy. A battle was raging over dress codes and status symbols—what furs, what jewels, what kinds of material could be worn appropriate to one's rank—a battle over the public, visible conditions of life. Montaigne had witnessed this in his own family. His father's family had acquired its wealth in the wine and dye trades and had bought the Château Montaigne in 1477; his father had added "de Montaigne" to the family name. Montaigne's sensitivity to symbols and new modes of behavior had been learned at home.

Even more important was the experience of changing beliefs, the religious struggle between Catholics and Protestants initiated by Luther's posting of the ninety-five theses in 1517, a struggle which, in France, took the form of the wars of religion (1562–89). Montaigne complained that there was no escape from the wars anywhere in France, and that his home town of Bordeaux, of whose *parlement* he was a member, was particularly restless, an arena for continual clashes. One had to observe the social environment and the strength of the respective camps carefully, and to adjust one's behavior accordingly. After all, three to four thousand Huguenots were murdered in Paris in the notorious massacre of Saint Bartholomew's Eve (23 August 1572), and twelve thousand others had perished elsewhere in France.

These, surely, were the conditions that prompted Montaigne to withdraw from public life on his thirty-eighth birthday (28 Febru-

ary 1571). He had an inscription placed over the entrance to his library in the tower of the Château Montaigne, stating that he wished to spend his remaining days there in peace and solitude. This is where he wrote his famous Essays. He did eventually return to public life, becoming mayor of Bordeaux in 1582 and traveling on a variety of diplomatic missions across Europe. Hence he was much aware of the contrast between public and private life and of the way different convictions were held in different countries and, in each case, regarded as binding. "What kind of truth is it," he asks, "that is delimited by mountains and becomes a lie on the other side of those mountains?" (Montaigne 1962, 563). "If mountains can set limits to 'truth,' then opinion must have a social aspect and strict boundaries to its realm" (203). "So Montaigne sees prevailing opinions as tied to a particular place and time—something observable as a social reality with only temporary validity. It is legitimated only by the fact that it presents itself as an opinion without alternative, one that is binding: . . . 'so that we really have no standards of truth and reason other than the examples and ideas of opinions and habits that we see around us every day" (Raffel 1984).

By alternating essentially public and essentially private phases in his life, Montaigne in his writing becomes the discoverer of the public dimension. He consciously divides up his life: "A wise man ought inwardly to retire his minde from the common presse, and hold the same liberty and power to judge freely of all things, but for outward matters, he ought absolutely to follow the fashions and forme customarily received" (Montaigne 1962/1908, 129). For Montaigne, the public sphere has its own inherent laws. It is a sphere dominated by a consensus inimical to individuality. "Of our habitual actions, not one in a thousand concerns us as individuals" (Raffel 1984). Montaigne invents a variety of new concepts for this new element. He coins the term *le publique*, and, in addition to the new concept *l'opinion publique*, he speaks of *l'opinion commune* (Montaigne 1962, 174), *l'approbation publique* (ibid., 1013), and *référence publique* (ibid., 9).

Why did the concept of *opinion publique* not become established then rather than a century and a half later? "Perhaps a letter from a friend of Montaigne's, Estienne de Pasquier, to an acquaintance is of some help here," suggests Michael Raffel. Pasquier complains that Montaigne frequently takes the liberty of using uncommon words "which, if I am not mistaken, he will have a hard time making fashionable" (Raffel 1984; Frame 1965).

John Locke, David Hume, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau read Montaigne. But it was not until the second half of the eighteenth century, in the decade preceding the French Revolution, that he became a fashionable writer.

After our description in previous chapters of empirical investigations, our search through the past has taken us to the first appearance of the concept of public opinion in the sixteenth century. Everything described as public opinion, general opinion, public approbation, public propriety in the works we have looked at is so remarkably familiar to us from empirical work that it is as if we were now seeing two views, which are really of a piece, coming together again. This encourages us to continue looking for historical evidence in the hope that it will help us toward a better understanding of public opinion.

20 The Journalist's Privilege: Conferring Public Attention

"I have experienced the spiral of silence in my club." "I've seen it at work in my volleyball team." "That's just the way things are in my business." In this way people often confirm the concept of a spiral of silence. This is as it should be, for there are varied opportunities to observe this all too human conforming behavior. Experiences such as we all have in small groups are parts of the process. When public opinion is forming, identical or similar experiences across various groups lead observant individuals to suppose that "everyone" will think the same way. Something unique happens, however, as soon as the spiral of silence starts to develop in public; it is this blending with publicity that gives the process its irresistible force. The element of public attention is brought into the process most effectively through the mass media. In fact, mass media objectify publicity—shapeless, faceless, unreachable, immovable public attention.

Feeling powerless facing the mass media

Communication may be classified as one-sided or two-sided (a conversation, for example, is two-sided); as indirect or direct (a conversation is direct); as public or private (a conversation is generally private). The mass media are one-sided, indirect, public forms of communication, thus contrasting threefold with the most natural form of human communication, the conversation. This is why individuals faced with the mass media feel so helpless. In every survey where people are asked, who in today's society has too much

power, the mass media are ranked right there at the top.[20] This powerlessness is expressed in two ways. The first occurs when a person tries to gain public attention (in Luhmann's sense) and the media, in their selection processes, choose not to give that person attention. The same thing occurs if there are unsuccessful efforts to gain public attention for an idea, a piece of information, or a perspective. This may result in a desperate outbreak in the presence of the guardians who have denied access to public attention—someone throws a bottle of ink at a Rubens in an art museum in Munich; a bottle of acid is thrown at a Rembrandt in an Amsterdam museum; someone hijacks an airplane in order to borrow public attention for some message or cause.

The second aspect of powerlessness comes into play when the media are used as a pillory; when they draw faceless public attention to an individual who is surrendered to them as a scapegoat to be "exhibited." He cannot defend himself; he cannot deflect the slings and arrows. The means of rebuttal are grotesque in their comparative weakness, in their awkwardness compared to the polished objectivity of the media. Those who freely consent to appear on a television talk show or to give a television interview without belonging to the inner circle of media gatekeepers are putting their heads into the jaws of a tiger.

A new start for research on media effects

Public attention can be experienced from two viewpoints, from that of the individual who is exposed to it or who is ignored by it—which we have just described—and from the perspective of the collective event, when hundreds of thousands, when millions of people observe their environment and either speak or keep quiet, thereby creating public opinion. Observation of the environment has two sources; public opinion is nourished from two springs: the individual undertakes direct observation in his or her environment, and receives information about the environment through the mass media. Today, television with its color and sound creates extensive

20. Allensbach Archives, surveys 2173 (January 1976) and 2196 (February 1977): "Would you please take a look at this list. Among the items on the list, which do you think exercise too great an influence on the political life of the Federal Republic?" "Television" ranked third in both surveys, named by 31 percent and 29 percent respectively. "Newspapers" was found in ninth and tenth place with 21 and 22 percent. There were eighteen possible answers on the list.

confusion between one's own observation and mediated observation. "Good evening," the weatherman said at the start of his television weather report. "Good evening," answered the guests in a hotel in which I was spending my vacation.

People have long been questioning the effects of the mass media, expecting a very simple, direct relationship between cause and effect. They have assumed that the statements in any one medium cause changes in opinion, or—also to be considered as an effect—reinforce opinion in the audience. The relationship between mass media and audiences is somehow likened to a private conversation between two persons, one saying something and the other being strengthened or converted. The reality of media effects is much more complex, and differs considerably from the individual conversation model. Walter Lippmann taught us this when he showed how the media imprint stereotypes through innumerable repetitions, and how these become building blocks in that "in-between world" which intervenes between people and the objective external world to serve as their pseudo-reality. This is the implication of Luhmann's agenda-setting function, the selection of what the public must attend to, of indicating what is urgent, which questions everyone must be concerned with. All of this is decided by the media.

Moreover, the media influence the individual's perception of what can be said or done without danger of isolation. And finally we encounter something that could be called the articulation function of the mass media. This brings us back, then, to the starting point of our analysis of the spiral of silence, the train test as a paradigm situation for a small group in which public opinion is created through talk and reluctance to talk. For the moment, however, we will remain with the topic of how persons experience the climate of opinion through the mass media.

Public notice legitimates

Everyone who read reprints of the purported "memorial address" that was put out by a group of students on the occasion of the death of Buback, a federal prosecutor murdered by terrorists in 1977, knew that more was involved in the reprint than mere documentation. The text, brought out under the pseudonym "Mescaleros," was reissued, ostensibly, to let the widest possible circles have the opportunity to read the original and thereby form their own judgment of it. The active publicity attending its republication

increased the text's impact. Despite mildly disapproving editorial comments that barely concealed an underlying approbation, the publicity created the impression that one might secretly be pleased to hear that a federal prosecutor had been murdered, and might publicly express oneself to that effect without running the risk of isolation. Something like this occurs whenever a tabooed behavior receives public notice—for whatever reasons—without being painted as evil, something to shun or pillory. It is quite easy to sense whether we are dealing with publicity that stigmatizes or condones the behavior. To publicize behavior that violates norms without strongly disapproving of it makes it more fit for polite society, more acceptable. Everyone can see that engaging in this behavior no longer makes one isolated. Those who break social norms are often eager to receive the merest hint of sympathetic publicity; and their eagerness is well founded, for the rule, the norm, is thereby weakened.

21 Public Opinion Has Two Sources—One, the Mass Media

Early in 1976, half a year before the German federal election, the full resources of survey research instrumentation and observation were for the first time set up to trace the development of a climate of opinion and the resulting formation of voting intentions according to the spiral of silence theory. The principal method was the repeated interviewing of a representative sample of voters, technically called a panel study. In addition, normal representative surveys were used to keep track of developments. Two surveys among journalists were carried out, and the political broadcasts of the two national television networks were recorded on videotape.[21] We will examine only a small segment of the complete effort here in order to indicate how the theory of the spiral of silence guided the empirical research (Noelle-Neumann 1977b; 1978; Kepplinger 1979; 1980a).

21. The research program was made possible by the close cooperation between the Allensbach Institut für Demoskopie and the Institut für Publizistik at the University of Mainz.

We had developed pertinent questions starting with the federal election of 1965. These involved the voting intentions of the respondents, their beliefs concerning who was going to win the election, their willingness to demonstrate publicly their political preferences, their overall interest in politics, and their level of media use (newspapers and magazines read and television watched), with special attention to political broadcasts.

Before the 1976 election, a sudden change in the climate of opinion

In July, during the height of the vacation season, a set of completed questionnaires arrived at the Allensbach Institute. They constituted the second wave of questioning of a panel of around 1,000 voters, representative of the total West German population. I was staying in Tessin, Switzerland, at the time, enjoying the cloudless summer days, and I vividly remember the contrast between the broad green leaves in the vineyards and the granite table with the computer output spread upon it. It was a few months before the election and not the right time to forget about work altogether. One thing was emerging clearly from the printouts. The most important measurement, the question concerning people's perceptions of the climate of opinion, showed a dramatic deterioration for the Christian Democrats. The question was: "Of course no one can know for sure, but what do you think: Who is going to win the coming federal election? Who will receive the most votes: the Christian Democratic Union or the Social Democratic Party/Free Democratic Party?" In March of 1976, panel respondents gave a 20 percent advantage to the Christian Democratic Union, expecting that they would triumph at the polls, but now the sentiment had changed and the estimates for the Christian Democratic Union and the Social Democratic Party/Free Democratic Party were only 7 percent apart. A little while later the Social Democratic Party/Free Democratic Party overtook the Christian Democratic Union (table 21).

My first guess was that the supporters of the Christian Democrats had behaved about as they had done in 1972, remaining publicly silent and not indicating, even before the election campaign began, what their convictions were. I knew that the campaign leadership of all the parties, including that of the Christian Democratic Union, had tried to make clear to their supporters how important it was to affirm their position publicly; but, as we know, people are cautious and afraid. I telephoned Allensbach and asked

Table 21. Early in the election year 1976, the climate of opinion favoring the Christian Democratic Union deteriorated

Question: "Of course no one can know for sure, but what do you think: Who is going to win the coming federal election? Who will receive the most votes: the Christian Democratic Union or the Social Democratic Party/Free Democratic Party?"

	Population 18 and over		
	March 1976 (%)	July 1976 (%)	September 1976 (%)
Christian Democratic Union	47	40	36
Social Democratic Party	27	33	39
Impossible to tell	26	27	25
	100	100	100
N =	1052	925	1005

Source: Allensbach Archives, surveys 2178, 2185, 2189

for the results of the questions about willingness to stand up for a party publicly. The finding was puzzling; it did not fit the theory. Compared to the results for March, the supporters of the Social Democratic Party tended to be lazier than those of the Christian Democratic Union. In answer to the question of what they were willing to do for their party, and given a list of possible activities including the answer "none of these," between March and July, supporters of the Social Democratic Party saying they would do nothing increased from 34 to 43 percent, while supporters of the Christian Democratic Union stayed almost constant (38 percent in March and 39 percent in July said they would do nothing). The Christian Democratic supporters' declining willingness to stand up for their party could not explain the change in the climate of opinion (table 22).

With the eye of television

I then thought of the two sources we have for obtaining information about the distribution of opinions in our environment: firsthand observation of reality and observation of reality through the eyes of the media. So I ordered a tabulation from Allensbach recording the data according to who had read much or little in the

Table 22. The supporters of the Christian Democrats do not appear to be remiss in their readiness to affirm their support between spring and summer of 1976: therefore the reduced expectation of the chances for a Christian Democratic victory cannot be explained by a poor public showing of Christian Democratic supporters

Question: "Now a question about the party that comes closest to your views. If you were to be asked whether you would like to do something for the party that you regard as the best, for example, some of the things on these cards here, is there anything at all that you would do for this party? Could you pull out the cards that apply?" (Cards are given to the respondent)

	Christian Democratic Supporters		Social Democratic Supporters	
	March 1976 (%)	July 1976 (%)	March 1976 (%)	July 1976 (%)
I would take part in a meeting of this party	53	47	52	43
I would stand up in a meeting of this party and contribute something to the discussion if it seemed important to me	28	25	31	23
I would put a bumper sticker on my car	18	25	26	24
I would also represent the standpoint of this party in the meetings of another party	22	20	24	16
I would wear a campaign button	17	17	23	22
I would help distribute campaign literature	17	16	22	14
I would contribute funds to this party's campaign	12	12	10	11
I would take part in a discussion on the streets and stand up for this party	14	11	19	15
I would put up posters for this party	11	9	13	10
I would put a poster for this party on my home or in my window	10	9	8	6
I would ring the doorbells of strangers and discuss the advantages of this party with them	4	4	5	3
None of these	38	39	34	43
	244	234	267	230
N =	468	444	470	389

Source: Allensbach Archives, surveys 2178, 2185

press, and watched much or little television. When the results were spread out on the table, they looked as simple as a primer. Only those who had more frequently observed the environment through the eyes of television had perceived a change in the climate; those who had observed their environment without television's eyes had noticed no change in climate at all (table 23).

The several checks we ran to determine whether the filtering of reality through television changed the climate of opinion in the election year of 1976 are described in detail elsewhere (Noelle-Neumann 1977b; 1978). Still, we cannot help being curious about the way this impression of a changed climate of opinion was brought about. Once again we enter into territory barely touched by research.

Reporters did not manipulate; they presented what they saw

In order at least to approach the solution to this riddle, we analyzed the surveys of journalists and the videotapes of political broadcasts during that election year. If one starts with Walter Lippmann's thesis, it was not at all surprising that television viewers saw the Christian Democratic Union's chances disappearing. The journalists themselves saw no chance for the Christian Democrats to win the 1976 federal election. In reality, the two political camps were of almost identical strength, and the Christian Democratic Union would have won on election day, 3 October 1976, if 350,000 persons from among about 38 million voters (0.9 percent) had switched their votes from the Social Democratic Party or the Free Democratic Party to the Christian Democratic Union. An objective assessment of the situation before the election should have led journalists to answer the question, "Who do you think will win the election?" with "It's completely up in the air." Instead, more than 70 percent answered that they thought the Social Democratic/Free Democratic coalition would win, while only 10 percent expected a Christian Democratic victory. Journalists saw the world quite differently than the electorate, and, if Lippmann is right, they could only show the world as they saw it. In other words, the audience had two views of reality, two impressions of the climate of opinion—an impression from their own, firsthand observations, and an impression from the eyes of television. A fascinating phenomenon arose: a "dual climate of opinion" (table 24).

Why did the population and the journalists see the political situation so differently? After all, the electorate still believed (in

Table 23. Concerning the second source of public opinion, impressions from the eye of television, regular TV viewers perceived a worsening of the climate of opinion for the Christian Democrats, but persons who saw little TV between spring and summer noticed no worsening of the climate for the Christian Democrats

Question: "Of course, no one can know for sure but what do you think: Who is going to win the coming federal election? Who will receive the most votes—the Christian Democratic Union or the Social Democratic Party/Free Democratic Party?"

	Frequent viewers of political TV broadcasts		Persons who seldom or never view political TV broadcasts	
	March 1976 (%)	July 1976 (%)	March 1976 (%)	July 1976 (%)
Total				
Christian Democratic Union	47	34	36	38
Social Democratic Party/ Free Democratic Party	32	42	24	25
Impossible to tell	21	24	40	37
	100	100	100	100
N =	175		118	
Politically Interested Persons				
Christian Democratic Union	49	35	26	44
Social Democratic Party/ Free Democratic Party	32	41	26	17
Impossible to tell	19	24	48	39
	100	100	100	100
N =	144		23	
Politically Disinterested Persons				
Christian Democratic Union	39	26	39	37
Social Democratic Party/ Free Democratic Party	32	45	23	26
Impossible to tell	29	29	38	37
	100	100	100	100
N =	31		95	

Source: Allensbach Archives, surveys 2178, 2185

Table 24. Journalists see the political situation differently than the Electorate. Is their manner of seeing things transmitted to the television viewers?

Question: "Of course, no one can know for sure, but what do you think: Who is going to win the coming federal election? Who will receive the most votes: the Christian Democratic Union or the Social Democratic Party/Free Democratic Party?"

	July 1976	
	National sample 18 years and older (%)	Allensbach's survey of journalists (%)
Predictions:		
Christian Democratic Union	40	10
Social Democratic Party/Free Democratic Party	33	76
Impossible to tell	27	14
	100	100
	N = 1265	1235

	National sample August 1976 (%)	Journalists in July 1976 (%)
Voting intentions:		
Christian Democratic Union	49	21
Social Democratic Party	42 } 50	55 } 79
Free Democratic Party	8	24
Other parties	1	x
	100	100
	N = 1590	87

Source: Allensbach Archives. Upper half of the table: surveys 2185, 2187. A survey of journalists run parallel to this one by the Institut für Publizistik at the University of Mainz resulted in 73 percent expecting a Social Democratic/Free Democratic win, 15 percent a Christian Democratic win, 12 percent "impossible to say." N = 81. Lower part of the table: surveys 3032, 2187. It presents the answers of persons who gave a specific party preference. x = less than 0.5%.

the summer of 1976) that a Christian Democratic victory was a little more likely than a Social Democratic/Free Democratic one.

One reason was that the population and the journalists diverged substantially in their political convictions and party preferences. And, of course, as Lippmann makes clear, convictions guided their views. Supporters of the Social Democratic Party and the Free Democratic Party (Liberals) saw many more indications of a victory for their own parties, whereas supporters of the Christian Democratic Union thought their party more likely to win. This is true in general, and it was true for the population and for the journalists in 1976. Since the national sample was split about evenly between the Social Democratic Party/Free Democratic Party on the one hand and the Christian Democratic Union on the other, whereas the journalists were split about three to one in favor of the Social Democratic Party/Free Democratic Party, it was only natural that they perceived the reality differently.

Decoding the language of visual signals

So began the expedition into the unresearched territory of the way television journalists transmit their perceptions to the viewers through pictures and sound. First we looked to America and England, to Sweden, to France in hopes that the communication researchers in these countries had already solved this problem. But we found nothing. Then we sat in a seminar—students, assistants, professors—and tested ourselves. Without discussion, we watched video recordings of political rallies, or interviews with politicians, and immediately afterward completed questionnaires about how the manner in which the persons we had seen had affected us. Where we found ourselves largely in agreement in our decoding of the visual message, we sought to ferret out which clues we had used to obtain the particular impression. Finally, we invited well-known communication researchers, such as Percy Tannenbaum from the University of California at Berkeley and Kurt and Gladys Engel Lang from the Stony Brook University in New York, to come to Mainz to the Institut für Publizistik. We played the video recordings of the political broadcasts for them and asked for their advice. Percy Tannenbaum suggested that we do a survey of cameramen and ask them what visual techniques they employed when they wanted to achieve a particular effect. Or we might ask it the other way around: what effect did they feel particular shots and techniques had on viewers. We carried out this suggestion in 1979 (Kepplinger 1983; Kepplinger and Donsbach 1982). A majority of the cameramen, 51 percent, answered our written questions, and we received back 151 questionnaires. Seventy-eight percent of the cameramen thought it "very likely indeed" and 22 percent "quite possible" that "a cameraman through purely visual means could cause persons to be seen in a particularly positive or particularly negative fashion." What techniques can have these effects?

The cameramen we surveyed agreed overwhelmingly on one point. For a politician they particularly liked, two-thirds of the cameramen would take a frontal shot at eyelevel, since, in their view, this would tend to strike a sympathetic note and establish the impression of calmness and spontaneity. None of them, on the other hand, would use a high shot (bird's eye view) or a low shot (frog's eye view), since these positions would tend to be unsympathetic and to convey the impression either of weakness or of emptiness.

Professor Hans Mathias Kepplinger and a working group subsequently studied videotapes of the television election campaign as covered by the two German television systems, the ARD and the ZDF, between 1 April and the election of 3 October 1976. Among the many findings they reported: Helmut Schmidt was seen only 31 times in shots taken from a frog's or a bird's perspective while Kohl was presented this way 55 times. But due to ongoing protests by journalists and cameramen who were opposed to analyzing the effects of camera angles, the research was not continued.

Today, more than a decade later, we are still exploring how television journalists transmit their perceptions to the viewers through images and sound. But the indignation over the scientific study of cameramen and film editors has meanwhile subsided. Experimental studies published subsequently have provided definite confirmation of the influence exerted by camera and editing techniques on viewers' conceptions of reality. These studies were so dispassionately written, however, that they are unlikely to stir up further excitement (Kepplinger 1987, 1989b).

Also, there has not been a federal election in Germany with an outcome as close as the election of 1976. Bitter accusations about the effects of the media on the climate of opinion will not be made, of course, unless there is a potential for decisive influence, with the outcome depending on a few hundred thousand votes. For communications research seeking to determine the influence of television

images on the viewers, this absence of public excitement has actually proved favorable. Michael Ostertag devoted his dissertation (1992) at the Institut für Publizistik in Mainz to the subject of how journalists' party preferences affect politicians being interviewed on television and how this effect in turn shapes the impression politicians make on the public. In analyzing 40 television interviews with the top candidates—Schmidt, Kohl, Strauss, and Genscher—during the federal election campaign of 1980, Ostertag and his collaborators worked with the sound turned off. They wanted to avoid being influenced by the arguments put forward and the language used, as well as by the elements connected with speech, such as voice pitch, intonation, and deliberate pauses—in other words, by what are considered "paralinguistic" or "paraverbal modes of expression." Their sole concern was the visual content.

Ostertag's research included a comparison of the facial expressions and gestures of the four leading German politicians, depending on whether they were being interviewed by a journalist with similar political views or by one tending to the opposing side. It appeared that the typical facial expressions and gestures of the four leading politicians remained essentially unchanged in all the interviews. There was, however, a change of degree. When speaking with a journalist of a different political persuasion, the politicians' rhythmic nodding became more emphatic while they were speaking; and the process of looking away from or staring at the other person was prolonged. This intensity seemed to have an unfavorable effect on the viewer. When interviewed by journalists with whom they seemed to be in agreement, each of the four leading politicians was, for the most part, given a positive rating by the viewers, while politicians who argued with the interviewing journalist got a negative rating (Ostertag 1992, 191ff.).

Nonetheless, although we are now in a position to identify some of the visual signals that influence opinion about politicians appearing on television, research still has far to go before it can really determine how television transmits the climate of opinion.

22 The Dual Climate of Opinion

In *Germany at the Polls: the Bundestag Election of 1976*, an American political scientist, David P. Conradt, reported to those Americans interested in politics that

> Union strategists . . . sought to make the spiral of silence work to the benefit of the Union in 1976. At the party's convention in Hamburg in December 1973, [the] findings were presented to the party leaders. In 1974 simplified summaries of the spiral-of-silence concept were given to the party's activists . . . Finally, the decision to begin the Union's nationwide advertising and poster campaigns before those of the Social Democratic Party was also a result of the [spiral-of-silence] thesis, which, in operational terms, meant that the party had to become visible before the Social Democratic campaign could get into full swing. (Conradt 1978, 41)

Struggle against the spiral of silence

As a matter of fact, in 1976 the people at the grassroots acted differently than they had in 1972. There was no spiral of silence. Supporters of the Christian Democrats gave public evidence of their convictions, wore buttons, and fastened signs to their cars to no less a degree than the supporters of the Social Democrats. They argued where they could be heard and they canvassed for their cause. Five or six weeks after the election, when people were asked which party's supporters had been most active in campaigning, 30 percent named the Christian Democratic supporters and only 18 percent the Social Democratic supporters.

The "dual climate of opinion"—the climate the population perceives directly, in contrast to the climate as portrayed by the media—was strong enough in 1976 to prevent a bandwagon effect in the direction of the expected winner. This was probably the first time in a modern election campaign that any group has consciously fought the bandwagon effect. For months, the two political camps had run neck and neck in terms of their strength (figure 22). And they stayed neck and neck as the election results were being counted on the evening of 3 October 1976, until the Social Democratic Party/Free Democratic Party managed to cross the finish a scant margin ahead. We need more experience before we can say whether the Christian Democratic Union might have won if the

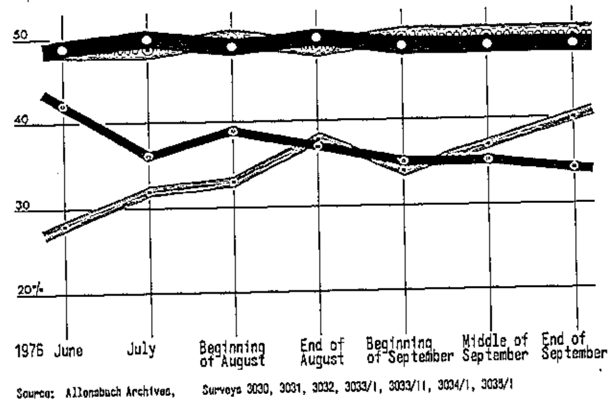


Figure 22
1976: The Dual Climate of Opinion
Conscious struggle against the spiral of silence: in contrast to 1965 and 1972, there is no last-minute bandwagon effect favoring the expected winner of the election.

media climate had not been against it. The dual climate of opinion is a fascinating phenomenon. It is as exciting as an unusual weather situation or a distant vista; it is like the warm spring wind that occurs only once a year, a double rainbow, the northern lights, for it can only arise under very special circumstances. It only happens when the climate of opinion among the people and that dominant among media journalists diverge. From this observation, however, it is also possible to develop a worthwhile instrument. Whenever one stumbles upon a divergence between opinions or intentions as they are actually expressed by the individuals and an assessment of how most people feel or—which is very much the same—who will win, it is worthwhile checking the hypothesis that the error in judgment was caused by the mass media.

Pluralistic ignorance: the people misjudge the people

The longer one has studied the question, the clearer it becomes that fathoming the effects of the mass media is very hard. These effects do not come into being as a result of a single stimulus; they are as a rule cumulative, following the principle that "water dripping constantly wears away stone." Further discussions among people spread the media's messages further, and before long no difference can be perceived between the point of media reception

and points far removed from it. The media's effects are predominantly unconscious; people cannot provide an account of what has happened. Rather, they mix their own direct perceptions and the perceptions filtered through the eyes of the media into an indivisible whole that seems to derive from their own thoughts and experiences, as Walter Lippmann predicted. Most of these media effects occur indirectly, on the rebound, as it were, to the extent that the individual adopts the eyes of the media and acts accordingly. All of these conditions make it seem particularly necessary to find systematic procedures for researching media effects. What American sociologists have called pluralistic ignorance,[22] a condition whereby the people have a mistaken idea about how most people feel, will serve as a kind of guide for tracking down the media's effects.

You may remember an observation reported in chapter 3 of this book. It had to do with a test that failed—a picture of several persons sitting together in a friendly way, and one person sitting apart, segregated, isolated. We were trying to find out whether respondents were conscious of the relationship between representing a minority opinion and being isolated, so that they would implicitly assign a clear minority opinion to a person who appeared isolated.

As a minority opinion we used in this test the view that members of the German Communist Party should be able to serve as judges. In April 1976, at the time of the test, only 18 percent of the population agreed with this statement while 60 percent opposed it. Only 2 percent imagined that the majority of the population favored the measure, while 80 percent assumed that the majority was opposed. The test, as we said, did not work. An almost equal proportion of respondents saw the isolated person as either opposing or as favoring Communist Party members as judges. Did this indicate a dual climate of opinion? Did some respondents attribute the minority opinion to the loner while others, who saw with the eyes of the media, attributed to this isolated figure the majority view that the media currently scorned as utterly conservative and incorrigibly antiliberal?

22. Merton 1968; Fields and Schuman 1976; O'Gorman and Garry 1976; Taylor 1982; Katz 1981.

23 *The Articulation Function: Those Whose Point of View Is Not Represented by the Media Are Effectively Mute*

Scientists tend to be very vulnerable people. When I saw for the first time the results of the train test asking whether members of the Communist Party should be allowed to be appointed as judges, I had to rub my eyes. It looked like a clear refutation of the spiral of silence. The supporters of the majority opinion, in full awareness that they were the majority, wanted to keep quiet. The supporters of the minority opinion were happy to enter into conversations to the tune of more than 50 percent (table 25).

The hard core

Even the earliest tests of the spiral of silence, run in 1972, had shown that there were exceptions to the rule. An important part of the empirical examination of theories consists in determining where their boundaries lie, finding the conditions under which a theory is not confirmed and thus must be modified. Right from the first tests, we had found that the minority that followed Franz Josef Strauss in the early seventies was much happier to enter into conversation in the train test than the overwhelming majority of Strauss opponents (table 26) (Noelle-Neumann 1974/1979, 189–90).

At that point, for the first time, we encountered the hard core—the minority that remains at the end of a spiral of silence process in defiance of the threats of isolation. The hard core is, in a certain sense, related to the avant-garde; it regards isolation as a price it must pay. Unlike the members of the avant-garde, a hard core can turn its back to the public, can close itself completely off when it finds itself in public with strangers, can encapsulate itself like a sect and orient itself to the past or to the most distant future. The other possibility is that the hard core simultaneously feels itself to be an avant-garde. We discern this from its willingness to speak up, a willingness that at least equals that of the avant-garde. A hard core that is counting on the future is encouraged by a condition which an American social psychologist, Gary I. Schulman (1968), has empirically demonstrated; the supporters of a majority opinion that becomes large enough will, with time, be unable to argue well

Table 25. The majority, knowing well that it is the majority, is effectively silenced. The minority, knowing well that it is a minority, is quite willing to talk. Does the majority lack arguments because the media have insufficiently formulated them?

	The majority: Persons who are against having members of the Communist Party appointed as judges and meet someone in a train compartment who—	
	thinks differently than they do (%)	shares their view (%)
In a conversation during a train trip about appointing members of the Communist Party as judges—		
would willingly join in	27	25
would not join in	57	67
no opinion	16	8
	100	100
	N = 169	217

	The minority: Persons who are in favor of having members of the Communist Party appointed as judges and meet someone in a train compartment who—	
	shares their view (%)	thinks differently (%)
In a conversation during a train trip about members of the Communist Party as judges—		
would willingly join in	52	52
would not join in	40	42
no opinion	8	6
	100	100
	N = 48	54

Source: Allensbach Archives, survey 3028, April 1976

Table 26. At the end of a long spiral of silence process, a hard core remains that is willing to isolate itself by talking

Question: "Suppose you had a five-hour train journey ahead of you, and someone in your compartment began to talk strongly *in favor of* (in every second interview, *against*) Franz Josef Strauss gaining more political influence among us. Would you gladly hold a conversation with this person, or would you not think it worth your while?"

	1972	
	Majority: Strauss opponents (%)	Minority: Strauss supporters (%)
Would gladly converse	35	49
Would not think it worth my while	56	42
No opinion	9	9
	100	100
	N = 1136	536

Source: Allensbach Archives, surveys 2087/I+II, October/November 1972

for it, since they no longer meet anyone who has a different opinion. Schulman found supporters of the viewpoint that one should brush one's teeth daily completely lacking in assurance when they were suddenly confronted by someone with the contrary opinion.

In any event, Strauss's supporters were in no sense inclined to turn their backs to the public; they didn't crawl into a hole or turn themselves into a sect; they certainly didn't write off the possibility that they would win ground again in the near future. They were a hard core that saw themselves as an avant-garde, and, for this reason despite their representing a minority opinion, they were prepared to engage in direct conversation.

If the mass media fail to provide them, there will be no words

In the issue of allowing members of the Communist Party to become judges, however, something else was happening. Those who were in favor of allowing such appointments were no hard core, and the great majority of the opponents had not fallen asleep in their opposition. In fact, the fear that communism might gain ground was as strong as ever. If they kept quiet in the train test with

both fellow believers and opponents in strikingly large numbers, then it must have been for a reason that was not yet known. Could it be that words failed them because opposition to communists as judges had scarcely ever been articulated in the mass media, in particular on television?

If we accept this hypothesis, we will have to add yet another item to the known ways in which the media work: the articulation function. The media provide people with the words and phrases they can use to defend a point of view. If people find no current, frequently repeated expressions for their point of view, they lapse into silence; they become effectively mute.

In 1898, Gabriel Tarde wrote an essay titled "Le public et la foule" (The public and the crowd). We close our discussion of public opinion and the effects of the mass media with Tarde's concluding reflections:

> A private telegram addressed to the editor-in-chief results in a sensational new story of intense immediacy, which will instantaneously arouse crowds in all the great cities of the continent; from these dispersed crowds, in intimate though distant contact through their consciousness of their sumultaneity and their mutual action born of the news story, the newspaper will create an immense, abstract, and sovereign crowd, which it will name opinion. The newspaper has thus finished the age-old work that conversation began, that correspondence extended, but that always remained in a state of a sparse and scattered outline—the fusion of personal opinions into local opinions, and this into national and *world* opinion, the grandiose unification of the public mind. . . . This is an enormous power, one that can only increase, because the need to agree with the public of which one is a part, to think and act in agreement with opinion, becomes all the more strong and irresistible as the public becomes more numerous, the opinion more imposing, and the need itself more often satisfied. One should thus not be surprised to see our contemporaries so pliant before the wind of passing opinion, nor should one conclude from this that characters have necessarily weakened. When poplars and oaks are brought down by a storm, it is not because they grew weaker but because the wind grew stronger. (Tarde 1969, 318)

What would Tarde have written during the age of television?

26 Toward a Theory of Public Opinion

In the mid-thirties, after the method of representative population surveys had proved itself by accurately predicting the outcome of the U.S. presidential elections of 1936, expectations for the field of public opinion research were high. A few months later the first issue of the new journal *Public Opinion Quarterly* appeared. It contained an introductory essay by Floyd H. Allport titled "Toward a Science of Public Opinion." Twenty years later, in 1957, the same confidence was expressed in the title of Herbert H. Hyman's essay "Toward a Theory of Public Opinion," also published in *Public Opinion Quarterly.*

The next time this key word figured in a review article in *Public Opinion Quarterly,* in 1970, there were signs of impatience. The proceedings of the 25th Annual Conference of the American Association for Public Opinion Research had included a report on a session titled "Toward a Theory of Public Opinion." The main speakers were psychologist Brewster Smith and the political scientist Sidney Verba from the University of Chicago. The psychologist stated that research has "not yet faced the problem of how opinions of individuals articulate to produce social and political consequences. The problem of articulation implied in any conception of public opinion as a social fact is primary agenda for political science and for sociology" (Smith 1970, 454). The political scientist maintained: "Much political public opinion research is irrelevant for the development of macro-political theory dealing with the relationship between mass attitudes and behavior and significant political outcomes. The main reason for this irrelevancy is the focus in most public opinion research on the individual citizen as a unit of analysis" (Verba 1970, 455).

Basically, both speakers were seeking an answer to the same question: How does the sum of individual opinions as determined by public opinion research translate into the awesome political power known as "public opinion?"

No feel for public opinion

The answer took so long to find because nobody was looking for an awesome political power. Not one of the fifty definitions of public opinion compiled by Harwood Childs in the famous second chapter of his book *Public Opinion* explicitly focuses on the power of public opinion (Childs 1965, 12–41). Instead, several definitions

confuse the barometer with the weather, so to speak. "Public opinion consists of people's reactions to definitely worded statements and questions under interview conditions" (Warner 1939, 377). Or: "Public opinion is not the name of a something, but a classification of a number of somethings, which, on statistical distribution in a frequency distribution, present modes or frequencies that command attention and interest" (Beyle 1931, 183).

How could frequency distributions statistically arranged topple a government or fill an individual with fear?

The spiral of silence is not compatible with the democratic ideal

It was to be expected that the spiral of silence theory was not hailed as progress toward a theory of public opinion when it was first presented at the 1972 International Congress of Psychology in Tokyo or in 1980 or 1984 when my book appeared in German and English respectively. There was no room here for the informed, responsible citizen, the ideal upon which democratic theory is based. Fear of public opinion—fear on the part of the government and of the individual—is not provided for by classical democratic theory. Democratic theory does not deal with topics such as the social nature of man, social psychology, or what creates cohesion in society.

A German-American research team consisting of Wolfgang Donsbach from the University of Mainz and Robert L. Stevenson from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill tested the hypotheses of the spiral of silence in the North Carolina Poll surveys conducted by the university's Institute for Communication Research. They were able to confirm the tendency for one side to remain silent on the controversial issue of abortion legislation. At the same time they were pessimistic about the possibilities of defending the spiral of silence. The theory consists, they wrote, of a long chain of theses, a chain of causal relations. "The chain begins in micro-sociological terms with the social-psychological variable of fear of isolation and with the tendency to speak out or remain silent, and in macro-sociological terms with integration into society" (Donsbach and Stevenson 1986, 14; see also 7). Every link in the chain offered points for criticism. The theory also linked theses from a variety of different social sciences which are traditionally viewed separately, namely hypotheses about behavior and attitude theory, from communication theory and from social theory (ibid., 8ff.). Perhaps they were right in maintaining that the theory's fail-

the consensus. Individuals, in turn, have a largely subconscious fear of isolation, which probably is genetically determined. This fear of isolation causes people constantly to check which opinions and modes of behavior are approved or disapproved of in their environment, and which opinions and forms of behavior are gaining or losing strength. The theory postulates the existence of a quasi-statistical sense for making such assessments. The results of these assessments affect people's willingness to speak out, as well as their behavior in general. If people believe that their opinion is part of a consensus, they have the confidence to speak out in both private and public discussions, displaying their convictions with buttons and car stickers, for example, but also by the clothes they wear and other publicly visible symbols. Conversely, when people feel that they are in the minority, they become cautious and silent, thus reinforcing the impression of weakness, until the apparently weaker side disappears completely except for a hard core that holds on to its previous values, or until the opinion becomes taboo.

Testing the theory is complicated because it is based on four separate assumptions as well as a fifth one that deals with the interrelations between the previous four.

The four assumptions are:

1. Society threatens deviant individuals with isolation.
2. Individuals experience fear of isolation continuously.
3. Because of this fear of isolation, individuals are constantly trying to assess the climate of opinion.
4. The results of this estimate affect behavior in public, particularly the open expression or concealment of opinions.

The fifth assumption is that the above assumptions are connected and thus provides an explanation for the formation, maintenance, and alteration of public opinion.

Any empirical test of these assumptions requires that they be translated into observable indicators in situations which can be recorded in survey interviews.

Testing the threat of isolation

Does public opinion exert a threat of isolation? Does public opinion employ the threat of isolation to defend itself against individuals holding deviant opinions? Is it through the threat of isolation that public opinion gains acceptance? We view ourselves as a liberal society. "Liberal" has a nice ring to it according to 52 percent of the German population,[1] and "tolerance" is a virtue which 64 percent of today's German parents want to instill in their children.[2]

To threaten a person who deviates from the generally held public opinion is certainly intolerant. That is the reason it is so difficult to ask questions about this topic in an interview. Nevertheless, we were able to describe several forms of the threat of isolation in the 1984 edition of *The Spiral of Silence*. One example is the questionnaire item dealing with the slashing of the tires on a car that bears a sticker for a party disapproved of by the respondent (see above, pp. 52ff.). As part of our election surveys, we also use a question about a driver who is a stranger in a city and is refused information by a pedestrian. The question ends: "I should mention that the driver is wearing a political badge on his jacket. What do you think: which party did this badge support?" We also ask a question about which party's posters were most often defaced or torn down, which we regard as a measure of the public threat of isolation against supporters of this party (see above, pp. 55ff.).

In Mainz, we began to delve seriously into the topic of how the threat of isolation works. Sabine Holicki (1984) wrote a master's thesis titled "The Threat of Isolation—Sociopsychological Aspects of a Concept in Communications Theory." A second master's thesis, by Angelika Albrecht, (1983), was titled "Laughing and Smiling: Isolation or Integration?" We recalled that Stanley Milgram had resourcefully used acoustic signals such as whistling, booing, and derisive laughter as signs of the threat of isolation (see above, p. 40). But it was not until 1989 that the test we had sought for so long finally occurred to me. All one had to do was keep in mind the signals of conformist behavior described in the literature on the field and those dealing with laughter described in social psychology, even though there was no mention of public opinion in these studies (Nosanchuk and Lightstone 1974; Berlyne 1969).

We applied the new test immediately to the issue of nuclear energy, using the indicators of booing and derisive laughter. The text of the question read: "I would like to tell you about an incident which recently took place at a large public meeting on nuclear energy. There were two main speakers: One spoke in favor of nuclear energy and the other opposed it. One of the speakers was booed by

1. Allensbach Archives, IfD Survey 4005, question 21, February 1982.
2. Allensbach Archives, IfD Survey 5013, question 20B, November 1988.

Table 27. Testing the threat of isolation in Germany and England: Nuclear energy

Question: "I would like to tell you about an incident which took place recently at a large public meeting on nuclear energy. There were two main speakers: One spoke in favor of nuclear energy and the other opposed it. One of the speakers was booed by the audience. Which one do you think was booed: the speaker supporting nuclear energy or the speaker opposing it?"

	February 1989 Federal Republic of Germany (%)	March 1989 Great Britain (%)
Supporter of nuclear energy	72	62
Opponent of nuclear energy	11	25
Undecided	17	13
	100	100

Source: Germany: Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, IfD Survey 5016, question 38, 2,213 respondents. Great Britain: Social Surveys (Gallup Poll) Limited, approximately 1,000 respondents.

the audience. Which one do you think was booed: the speaker supporting nuclear energy or the speaker opposing it?" Seventy-two percent of German respondents were of the opinion that the speaker in favor of nuclear energy had been booed; 11 percent assumed that the opponent of nuclear energy had been booed. Only 17 percent remained undecided (see table 27).[3]

There is no doubt that the threat of isolation exists and that the public knows which opinions run a high risk of triggering the threat of isolation when publicly expressed. Just a few weeks after we applied it, the same test was applied in England. Our colleague, Robert J. Wybrow, included the question in an omnibus survey with 1,000 interviews and released the results shortly thereafter. In England too, the climate of opinion was clearly against supporters of nuclear energy, though not to the same extent.

There can be no doubt that such a hostile climate of opinion influences an individual's willingness to speak out or remain silent. The fact that the respondents in England accepted the test question

3. Allensbach Archives, IfD Survey 5016, question 38, February 1989.

was important, however. Any theory of public opinion must be internationally applicable. While it may include points specific to the country in question, it must be possible to confirm the essence of these studies on an international basis.

Thus the tests must also be applicable in a variety of cultures. I thought of the civilized manner of social intercourse in Japan and had doubts about the new threat of isolation test being suitable for use in that culture. For even American students felt affronted when I described the test in which the tires on a car bearing a sticker for an unpopular party had been slashed.

When I discussed the test question with Hiroaki Minato, a Japanese student in one of my seminars at the University of Chicago, he rejected the feasibility of applying the boo test question in Japan. After we had discussed a wide variety of options, he said: "This is the way the situation would be in Japan." The revised text for Japan now reads: "There was a debate about nuclear energy at a neighborhood meeting. One person present spoke out in favor of nuclear energy, while another spoke out against it. One of the two later heard that there had been gossip behind his back condemning him. What do you think: Which of the two was condemned behind his back?"

Testing the fear of isolation

Many Americans were discomfited by the fear-of-isolation experiments conducted by Asch and Milgram (see pp. 37ff., above). Milgram repeated his experiments—with a modified design—in France and Norway, because he wanted to know whether conformist behavior was as prevalent in Europe as it seemed to be in America.

The thought that Americans could experience fear of isolation so offended the students during one of my lectures at the University of Chicago that many walked out of the auditorium. It was obviously impossible to ask in an interview, "Do you have a fear of isolation?" even though this same question had actually been asked in America in testing the spiral of silence. The theory had often been criticized for what was felt to be too great an emphasis on the irrational and emotional motives for conformity; it was claimed that I underestimated the good and rational reasons for it. This is, of course, a traditional area of contention between European and American social scientists, with Americans favoring rational explanations for human behavior.

One method for testing the fear of isolation is described in chapter 3 above (pp. 42ff.). In the "threat test," smokers were intimidated when confronted with a sketch showing one person saying angrily: "I think smokers are terribly inconsiderate. They force others to inhale their unhealthy smoke." But we were still far removed from being able to satisfy our American colleagues' demand that we find a method for actually measuring the fear of isolation (See Glynn and McLeod 1985, 47ff., 60).

We experienced a breakthrough while looking at research that went back to Charles Darwin in the nineteenth century and which led in the 1940s and 1950s to the flourishing area of research known as group dynamics.[4] The focus here was on questions relating to group cohesion: What is the stability of a group based on? What does the group do when individual members violate the rules and threaten the group's existence? Sabine Holicki (1984) came upon research in this area while tracking down material on the threat and fear of isolation. She found that experiments in the area of group dynamics had recorded a three-phase process. In the first phase the group uses friendly persuasion to try to win back the deviant member. If this does not work, the deviant individual is threatened with exclusion from the group. If this too fails, "the group redefines its boundaries" (in the idiom of group dynamics), meaning that the deviant individual is excluded from the group (Cartwright and Zander [1953] 1965, 145).

We are reminded here of Edward Ross's phrase, "until the dead member drops from the social body" (see pp. 95–96, above). One thing is strange: researchers in the field of group dynamics studied how groups maintain cohesion but stopped there. Why didn't they go one step further and investigate what holds society as a whole together? Had they taken this step, they would have had to deal with the phenomenon of public opinion as an instrument of social control.

But the term "public opinion" is never mentioned in connection with group dynamics. Nor does it appear in the writings of Erving Goffman, whose systematic research in the 1950s and 1960s took up where Montaigne left off around 350 years ago. According to Goffman, as soon as people are no longer alone—even with only

4. For examples of research conducted in the early stages of this field of research in the 1930s, see Moreno [1934], 1953; Lewin [1935–1946], 1948; Sherif [1936], 1965.

one other person present, and even more so when there are many—they are transformed by the awareness that others are forming an opinion about them. Goffman focused on the public from the point of view of social psychology, illuminating an area that had formerly been ignored. *Behavior in Public Places* was the laconic title of one of his pioneering works (Goffman 1963a). All of Goffman's books published between 1955 and 1971 (e.g., 1956, 1963b) reflect his preoccupation with the social nature of man and the suffering created by that social nature.

In the course of his studies on personality, Goffman found Darwin's description of the many physical symptoms pointing to the social nature of man. We too can usefully refer to Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1873) in our search for evidence of man's fear of isolation. In chapter 13 of that work, Darwin turns his attention to the topic of embarrassment and describes the physical symptoms associated with it, such as blushing, turning pale, sweating, stuttering, nervous gestures, trembling hands, a tight, cracked or abnormally high or low voice, unnatural grinning, looking away—about which Darwin comments that people try to avoid noticing that they are being observed by reducing eye contact (Darwin 1873, 330).

Darwin distinguishes between two sides of human nature, one oriented outward and the other inward. When the individual orients himself outward, he conforms to his social nature; this is confirmed by objective signs, such as blushing, which is not found in animals. Darwin makes a distinction between feelings of guilt, shame, and embarrassment: a person may be deeply ashamed of a minor lie without blushing, but he will blush as soon as he believes that his lie has been detected. Shyness, Darwin states, leads to blushing. But shyness is merely a sensitivity to what *others* may think of us.

Darwin never uses the term "public opinion." Although he never mentions the fear of isolation, his observations clearly indicate that man's social nature causes him to reflect upon the opinions of others, to consider how he is seen by the outside world and to hope that he creates a favorable impression so that no one can point a finger at him, whether explicitly or implicitly. Even the public attention created by good deeds is embarrassing to many people.

Erving Goffman, to the contrary, assumed that embarrassment was a form of mild punishment, forcing people to abide by

certain rules of conduct in public (Goffman 1956, 265, 270ff.). This assumption was refuted by Michael Hallemann in his doctoral thesis written at the University of Mainz. Hallemann showed embarrassment to be a reaction to any situation in which an individual feels isolated, even if he is thrust into the limelight as a hero for having saved a child from drowning (see table 28 below).

Table 28. Cross-Cultural Comparison of Embarrassing Situations in Germany, Spain, and Korea

Question: "These cards describe some situations people might find themselves in at one time or another. Could you please distribute the cards onto this sheet according to whether you would find the situation embarrassing or not? Just put aside the cards with situations you have no opinion on."

(Presentation of a set of cards and a list with the categories: "Would find embarrassing;" "Would not find embarrassing.")

"Would find embarrassing"	Federal Republic of Germany (%)	Spain (%)	South Korea (%)
Somebody slaps you in public	79	83	92
You are unjustly accused of being a shoplifter by an employee in a store	78	89	88
In a department store you accidentally knock over and shatter a valuable crystal glass	76	84	92
While at a restaurant, you spill soup on your pants	70	73	74
You are at the cash register in the supermarket with a cartful of groceries when you discover you don't have any money with you	69	65	84
You are at the theater and have a cold, but you don't have a handkerchief with you	68	66	41
You are attending a concert with a friend. Your friend falls asleep and starts to snore	63	59	63
In a group you're standing with, someone is being discussed who is listening all the while and then joins the group	56	51	64

(*continued*)

Table 28. (*Continued*)

"Would find embarrassing"	Federal Republic of Germany (%)	Spain (%)	South Korea (%)
Someone makes fun of you in front of others	56	68	76
In the middle of a busy street you suddenly slip and fall down flat on your face	56	76	75
In the train, you open the door to the toilet in the restroom, and someone is sitting there who has forgotten to lock the door	55	71	88
You address someone by the wrong name	52	37	65
You are at a friend's house when you happen to enter a room where someone is undressing	50	73	94
You find yourself in the same room as an old friend you're eager to say hello to, but he walks out without so much as a glance in your direction	49	46	64
You meet an old friend whose name you can't think of	45	41	66
You feel sweaty after doing some work, but you have to go shopping before you can wash up	44	44	22
You are planning to spend a vacation with friends. When you arrive at your destination, you discover that what is involved is a nudist beach	43	59	-
You are in a train and the ticket collector comes, but you can't find your ticket	-	-	92
You tell a joke to friends and no one laughs	40	41	46
The plumber comes and your apartment is messy	36	43	36

(*continued*)

Table 28. *(Continued)*

"Would find embarrassing"	Federal Republic of Germany (%)	Spain (%)	South Korea (%)
Because you did your laundry too late, it's still hanging on the line to dry on Easter Sunday (Korea: on New Year's Day)	33	17	28
You have to make an important telephone call that takes a bit longer than usual from a public phone booth. There are two or three people in line behind you	31	49	69
You are approached by a television reporter with his TV camera on	28	39	74
By chance you succeed in saving a small child from drowning. As a result, a reporter absolutely insists on taking your picture for the local paper	27	37	62
You run out of butter or margarine at the weekend and have to go to the neighbors to borrow some	27	27	40
You notice around noon that your shoes haven't been cleaned	26	25	11
In a hotel room you can hear what is going on in the room next door through the thin walls	24	33	35
You run into someone on the street and don't know whether you should greet him	23	37	48
In a train compartment that is half empty, one of the other travelers suddenly begins talking to himself	15	31	23
You dial the wrong number when phoning	12	16	26
You are addressed by the wrong name	12	18	28
	1343	1498	1766
n =	2009	1499	352

- = not asked

Sources: Germany: Allensbach Archives, IfD Survey 4031, August 1983. Population 16 and over.
Spain: DATA, S.A., June 1984. Population 15 and over.
South Korea: Tokinoya, September 1986. Population 20 and over.

Van Zuuren (1983) describes a group of young Dutch social scientists conducting self-experiments about embarrassing situations. Stopping to chat in the midst of a busy pedestrian zone, for example, the group was able to experience what it felt like to be the target of angry, disapproving looks. In a half-empty cafe they joined another couple at a table and observed their own reactions at this infringement of an unspoken rule. They went into a store twice and purchased the same item within a short period of time. One task involved taking the elevator up to the top floor in an unfamiliar apartment house and just looking around. One of the participants in the experiment said that she was afraid she would not know what to say if someone were to ask her what she was doing there. "Suddenly I realized how grotesque I must look with my pink slacks and my pink blouse."

These self-experiments showed that there is a type of internal personal control which filters behavior prior to social control, anticipating the threat of isolation. The mere thought of how unpleasant a situation *could* be causes an individual to correct behavior divergent from the public consensus before external social control is exercised by the collective, and even before the collective learns of the intended infraction. Indeed, many of the participants in the Dutch self-experiments did not go through with the actions they had planned. This is the area of "symbolic interaction" described by George Herbert Mead of the University of Chicago. The "symbolic interaction," the thought of what others would think or how they would react, influences the individual as if it were reality. But this world of silent debates held within one's own mind, with the fear created by man's social nature, was so foreign to Mead's contemporaries in the social sciences that he never published a second book. One of his main works, "1927 Class Lectures in Social Psychology" (in Mead 1982), which is today read and used in seminars on public opinion, is based on notes compiled by Mead's students.

Embarrassment as a manifestation of man's social nature

How does the individual recognize the threat of isolation? What are the signals? How does the individual experience the fear of isolation and how can it be measured? A group of students in a Mainz "workshop seminar" planned a self-experiment. In Germany the carnival in Mainz is an important event which may be assumed to be supported by a public consensus. The students set up a stand on a busy street and hung a banner to drum up membership

in a newly founded organization—an organization opposed to money being wasted on the annual carnival in Mainz. The leaflets argued that the money would be better spent in helping the Third World. The leaflets were piled in big stacks on the stand and the students tried to distribute them to passersby and to gather signatures for their cause. One of the students filmed the event from a neighboring house, making it possible to analyze the types of behavior exhibited (Ewen et al. 1981–82). Even the shop owners on the adjacent streets participated. They tried to detour passersby around the stand with gestures clearly indicating they thought the students were crazy.

The experience of having people turn their backs when he approached and of seeing others immediately go out of their way to avoid him, made such a strong impression on Michael Hallemann that he devoted his master's and doctoral theses to the subject (Hallemann 1984, 1989; see also 1986).

In a representative survey, the Allensbach Institute presented respondents with a drawing. Male respondents were shown the picture of two men, and females the picture of two women. In each, one person is saying to the other: "Can you imagine what happened to me yesterday—it was so embarrassing: I . . . " The interviewer then says: "Here are two people talking. Unfortunately, the man/woman got interrupted in mid-sentence. But what do you think he or she wanted to say, what could have happened to him or her?" After analyzing the replies from approximately 2,000 respondents, Hallemann designed thirty situations. During the next Allensbach survey, interviewers presented these situations, written on separate cards, to respondents, with the question: "These cards describe some situations people might find themselves in at one time or another. Could you please distribute the cards on this sheet according to whether you would find the situation embarrassing or not?"[5]

The various embarrassing situations are listed in table 28, along with the findings from the Federal Republic of Germany, Spain, and Korea. In June 1989, researchers replicated the series of questions.[6] There appeared to be hardly any change in what people find embarrassing. The results of the replicated survey were almost identical to those of the first survey. Until this test, we had

5. See Allensbach Archives, IfD Survey 4031, August 1983.
6. See Allensbach Archives, IfD Survey 5021, June 1989.

Figure 24
Ascertaining embarrassing situations
Illustration for sentence completion test used in interview. By projecting themselves into the situation of the portrayed individual and by being compelled to complete the sentence, respondents are more easily able to associate with an embarrassing situation

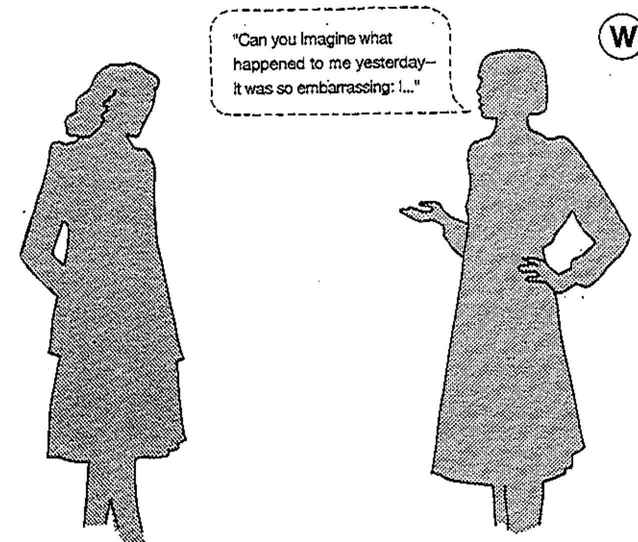
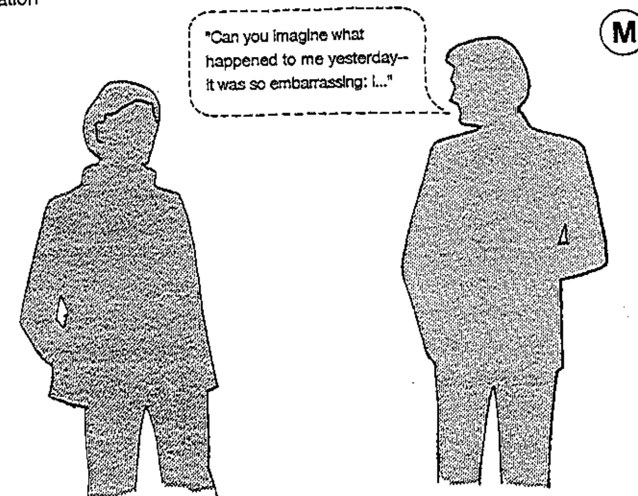


Figure 25
Ascertaining embarrassing situations
Illustration for sentence completion test used in interview. By projecting themselves into the situation of the portrayed individual and by being compelled to complete the sentence, respondents are more easily able to associate with an embarrassing situation



assumed that embarrassment depended largely on cultural traditions and would vary greatly from country to country. At least in Germany, Spain, and Korea, there is a surprising similarity between the situations perceived as embarrassing.

Goffman (1956, 270) wrote that if we want to learn more about man's social nature, we must study the situations that cause embarrassment. Because we cannot ask people directly about their social nature—most people would much rather ignore their social nature (the majority of Germans maintain: "I don't care what others think of me")—we must search for indicators, as Emile Durkheim stated in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895). Indicators are not identical with what one is looking for but they provide insight into what we want to study.

Measuring the fear of isolation

The publication of *The Spiral of Silence* raised a host of difficult questions. Social research had focused on the area of group dynamics since the 1930s, and so one criticism was that the various groups to which an individual belongs are much more influential than the undefined public the theory focused on. People place far greater importance on what their neighbors, colleagues, fellow club members, and reference group members say and think than on what strangers in an anonymous public do.

Donsbach and Stevenson tried to refute this objection (1986, 10ff). They stated that the spiral of silence was not meant to be a deterministic theory seizing upon one particular factor—for example, the fear of isolation—as the sole determinant of an individual's behavior, affecting all people in the same manner. The fear of isolation in public is one of several factors determining the process of public opinion. Reference groups also play a role. They cited a study conducted by the Dutch scholar Harm t'Hart, showing that whether the opinions of the primary reference group are reinforced by or are in opposition to the pressure of public opinion, or whether the groups a person is involved with continue to defend views that are in the minority, is important in determining whether a person will speak out or remain silent in defense of his opinion on a controversial issue (t'Hart 1981).

After decades of successful social research in the area of group dynamics, the influence of groups on the process of opinion formation was self-evident. But researchers in the field of group

dynamics did not go beyond the boundaries of the groups they were studying; they failed to consider the public element. Thus it seemed vital to direct attention to this area, which represents the key to understanding the term "public opinion." Without a clear understanding of the implications of the public as a jury for man's social nature, it is impossible to grasp the phenomenon of public opinion.

Using the indicator developed by Hallemann to measure embarrassment, the significance of the anonymous public can be demonstrated. When respondents are asked to spontaneously describe embarrassing situations, they seldom pick situations involving small groups of people familiar to them; 21 percent of the situations take place in the presence of a rather small group of strangers, and 46 percent involve a large, anonymous public (Hallemann 1989, 135: table 14). Hallemann regrouped his test situations into private settings and settings involving a small versus a large public. The results showed that the larger the public is, the greater the percentage of people who find the situation especially embarrassing (ibid, 137: table 15).

It seems perfectly logical that an unpleasant situation among acquaintances would be more embarrassing than with strangers one may never see again, that is, in the presence of an anonymous public. But the results refute this logic. The stigma attached to an embarrassing situation involving acquaintances is not final. There is always the opportunity to rectify the impression; but there is no recourse, no way to explain or excuse one's actions, when an anonymous public is involved. The stigma is indelible.

Hallemann has also come closer to the objective of measuring the fear of isolation than anyone else to date. He calculated a score based on the number of situations an individual considered embarrassing: the sensitivity of the respondent's social nature was rated as very exceptional, exceptional, average, limited, or very limited, with corresponding ratings for the fear of isolation. He then examined the respondents' willingness to speak up or remain silent. He found that individuals with a stronger sense of embarrassment—and, we may add, a stronger fear of isolation—also had a stronger tendency to remain silent on controversial issues. This was not, however, due to a shy or taciturn nature, for they were just as willing as anyone else to join in conversations about noncontroversial topics (ibid., 178ff.).

Testing the quasi-statistical sense

Is there really such a thing as the quasi-statistical sense, as described by the theory of public opinion? Can people determine the climate of opinion? Respondents in every country we studied readily supplied answers to questions such as: "How do most people think?" or "Do most people favor or oppose a particular issue?" One would expect the respondents to reply: "Why are you asking me? You're the opinion pollster!" But that is not what they say. The willingness to make an assessment is an indication that people continually try to assess the strengths of opposing sides on a given issue.

The assessments, however, are often incorrect. Opinions supported by the influential media are often overestimated. This phenomenon is what is now generally termed "pluralistic ignorance."[7] "The public misjudges the public." In his book *Social Psychology* (1924), Floyd Allport discussed this phenomenon, which had been analyzed extensively by R. L. Schanck in his community study (1932; cf. Merton 1949; Newcomb 1950). Allport pointed out that the individual has only three ways of making deductions about the opinions and views that prevail among the population: the press, rumor and "social projection." The concept of "social projection" is actually identical with the "looking-glass perception," a term introduced later in an effort to explain pluralistic ignorance (O'Gorman and Garry 1976; Fields and Schuman 1976) and to counter the assumption of a quasi-statistical sense (Glynn and McLeod 1985; Salmon and Kline 1985). In fact, tests have unanimously confirmed the looking-glass perception but at the same time they have shown that, regardless of individual points of view, the population as a whole does notice which opinions are gaining and which are losing ground, just as one notices whether it is getting warmer or colder (Noelle-Neumann 1985, 1991). What other explanation could there be for this if not that people have the ability to sense distribution frequencies? It is obvious that attempts have been made to influence such perceptions from the beginning of time and not just in recent years when social research has shed light on this phenomenon. This makes it all the more remarkable that the media, i.e. the press, cited by Allport as an additional source of orientation about prevailing opinion in the community at large, were not considered significant until well into the 1980s. To-

7. See Noelle-Neumann 1989b; Katz 1981, 28–38.

day we know that the media represent the most important source for the individual's constant observation of his or her environment. Whenever the frequency distribution of popular opinion on an issue deviates from the population's assessments of how most people think about that issue, we may suspect that media effects are involved—in other words, impressions about frequency distributions are conveyed by the media (Noelle-Neumann 1989).

Testing people's willingness to speak out or remain silent

It is unfortunate that so few countries have a well-developed railroad network. From the first publication of *The Spiral of Silence*, the "train test" has been used to measure willingness to speak out or remain silent (see pp. 16ff., above). As the theory spread internationally, however, there were more and more complaints that the test would not work in other countries, where a five-hour train ride was far too unusual a situation for respondents to imagine. We therefore developed a substitute: "Assuming you are on a five-hour bus trip, and the bus makes a rest stop and everyone gets out for a long break. In a group of passengers, someone starts talking about whether we should support . . . or not. Would you like to talk to this person, to get to know his or her point of view better, or would you prefer not to?" Donsbach and Stevenson designed another question where a television reporter asks people on the street for an interview on a controversial topic. Here, however, the public dimension is too large. Halleman found that the fear of isolation increases with the size of the public. The television audience, after all, constitutes the largest public today.

There are many other public expressions of an individual's willingness to show his or her convictions: hairstyles, beards, bumper stickers—used as symbols both in America and in Europe—or, in Germany, purple scarves symbolizing participation in large church conventions and rallies. All this could be translated into test situations to detect the readiness to show or to conceal one's convictions.

The hard core: A response from "Don Quixote"

There were some misunderstandings when the spiral-of-silence theory was put to the test after the first edition of this book appeared, in part because chapter 17 (on heretics and the avant-garde) and chapter 23 (on the hard core) were too short in that edition. Today we still know no more about the avant-garde than Plato

did when he attempted to win over the poets to effect a change in values, as we saw in chapter 25.

Several commentators have assumed that the hard core is simply made up of people who are especially convinced of an opinion, or people with extremely stable voting behavior. Then there are critics who maintain that I invented the hard core to have an excuse whenever findings did not confirm the theory.

But Maria Elisa Chuliá-Rodrigo's Master's thesis for the University of Mainz, in which she examines public opinion in Cervantes' *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, has better defined the hard core. Reading Cervantes with public opinion theory in mind heightens the tragic dimension of this work. Don Quixote has become imbued with society's system of values by reading too many romances of chivalry. And now he is dying to fight and be rewarded for this, "to be viewed by the world with honor and respect." But everything he does, the clothes he wears and the peculiar weapons he carries, belong to a world that existed two hundred years before his time. He finds himself isolated, laughed at, defeated, and yet he remains true to the ideals of chivalry almost to the end of the novel (Chuliá-Rodrigo 1989).

Those who belong to the avant-garde are committed to the future and thus, by necessity, are also isolated; but their conviction that they are ahead of their time enables them to endure. The "hard core" remains committed to the past, retaining the old values while suffering the isolation of the present.

How the sum of individual opinions is transformed into public opinion

At the conference held by the American Association for Public Opinion Research in 1970, Sidney Verba, the political scientist, contended that political opinion research was making no progress toward a theory of public opinion because it "usually focuses on the individual as a unit of analysis" (Verba 1970, 455). I disagree. It was not the fact that the individual was the unit of analysis that kept a theory from being developed; it was that survey research neglected the social nature of the individual. Survey questions inquired about the individual's opinion, behavior, and knowledge: "Are *you* in favor of . . . ?" "Are *you* interested in . . . ?" "Are *you* concerned about . . . ?" "Do *you* prefer . . . ?" And so on.

What was lacking, especially in election research, were questions about the climate of opinion—"What do *most* people think?" "Who is winning . . . ?" "What is IN, OUT?" "What might you argue about with even the best of friends?" "Who is jeered?" "Who is snubbed?"—questions oriented toward the social setting, and thus toward the individual's social nature.

It is not that man's social nature has been completely neglected in social research. In 1949, in *Psychologie der öffentlichen Meinung*, Peter R. Hofstätter wrote: "For an opinion to be public it must possess what at first glance appears to be a peculiar characteristic: its expression must be accompanied by an unclear—possibly even false—understanding of the opinions held by the other members of the group. . . . Our present definition of public opinion as the frequency distribution of individual opinions, is incomplete: The aspect of publicness demands that one's own position be localized somewhere along the assumed frequency distribution of expressed viewpoints" (Hofstätter 1949, 53). But no conclusions were drawn from this in opinion research. Thus the vital question of how the mighty structure known as public opinion develops from the sum of individual opinions, which survey research expresses in percentages, was not answered. Public opinion, which induces fear and trembling in governments, forcing them to take political action and "producing social and political consequences," as psychologist Brewster M. Smith stated at the conference in 1970, was ignored. So were the forces that kept individuals quiet if they did not share public opinion, as remarked by James Bryce.[8]

As far as we know, it is the constant interaction between people, due to their social nature, that accounts for the transformation of the sum of individual opinions into public opinion. The threat of isolation, the fear of isolation, the continual observation of the climate of opinion and the assessment of the relative strength or weakness of different sides determine whether people will speak out or keep silent.

8. See pp. 92–93, above; and Tönnies 1922, 138.