



Abusive Psychological Techniques used during Covid-19

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Abstract

Following the outbreak of Covid -19 Pandemic in March 2020, this paper will describe the use of various psychological and emotional techniques which were used by most Governments in the Western world who consider themselves to be Democracies, to gain compliance with measures designed to limit the spread of Covid -19. Chief among these techniques were the use of “nudges”, processes and procedures similar to Domestic Abuse and techniques of Brainwashing (Lifton, 1989) as used by the Chinese authorities following the Communist takeover in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The 8 aspects of Lifton’s model will be described in detail and how these were used by Western Governments during the Covid-19 pandemic. The conclusions reached regarding the use of such techniques demonstrate the unethical and abusive nature of how many Western Governments treated their citizens during the pandemic.

Keywords: Covid -19 Pandemic, Psychological models, Vaccine, Lockdown

Introduction

In or around March 2020 most Western Liberal Democracies introduced very quickly, draconian limits on core democratic values of free association, freedom to practice religion, economic activity and commerce, free speech and respect for private dwellings of their own citizens in an effort to control the spread of COVID-19 (C19), with one notable exception (ie) Sweden.^{1,2} In 2 weeks in March 2020, democratic freedoms were taken away in nearly all developed countries. Bizarrely, even the most ridiculous policies spread like a virus from country to country. For example, you could not try on new clothes in a shop in London, Sydney, New York or Christchurch, NZ, even though it was well established that the C19 virus was least likely to live on fabrics, unless the wearer had symptoms of C19. Compliance with these severe restrictions on personal liberty in most of these democracies was high and was quickly achieved without much protest from citizens on the whole. That the

compliance achieved with these restrictions was obtained by using psychological methods is what these paper addresses and whether such psychological methods were ethical or desirable.

Psychological Techniques

In the UK, the Behavioural Insight Team (BIT – most of whom were psychologists) was created by the Prime Minister’s office in 2010 with the aim of using applying behavioural science to policy. A comprehensive description of the psychological approaches used by BIT is provided in the document called “MINDSPACE: Influencing behaviour through public policy”.³ What is clear if one reads the “MINDSPACE” document is that the UK Government policy shifted from a conscious, rational approach to one reliant on tools that impact on people’s subconscious and by their very nature therefore, outside the realm of conscious decision-making and thereby, non-consensual. This raises major ethical questions of informed consent of the population to be influenced.⁴ The whole architecture

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of the profession of Psychology is built on providing informed consent to the people we work with professionally. The BIT approach compromises this professional psychological ethic and appears to be based on the end justifies the means type of thinking.

Waters⁵ outlines the unethical procedures used by the State during the last 2 years and likens it to the processes involved in domestic abuse. She describes such processes as threats, enforcing trivial demands, isolation, monopolisation of perception, degradation, demonstrating omnipotence, occasional indulgences and induced debilitation – all of which are involved in domestic abuse / coercive control. It is not difficult to see how the UK Government and most Western governments used these “tools” to frighten and intimidate their citizens into compliance with measures to control the spread of C19. Laws were passed regarding social distancing (2 metres/ 6 feet – WHO only recommended 1 metre so where was the scientific evidence that 2 metres was more effective?) along with sanctions and threats as if people were biohazards in themselves just by being human. There were cases of the police cautioning people for sitting on benches in public parks in the UK. Citizens were ordered to stay indoors for weeks at a time (enforced isolation or house arrest) and avoid large gatherings. In Ireland, there was a specific “rule” to not gather in groups of more than 3 people – not even Stalin made such a demand! Mask wearing became compulsory even though C19 can enter through the eye ducts – why not goggles as well then? The monopolisation of perception was achieved by the use of demeaning epithets such as “Covidiot” in the Press and the active suppression of competing alternative narratives about C19 by categorizing same as “misinformation”, with the active assistance of Big Tech, especially around the origins of C19 – remember the ridicule heaped on President Donald Trump for suggesting that it might have originated from a lab in Wuhan? And now today the lab leak theory is quite respectable and perhaps even quite plausible!

While Waters makes a compelling case for viewing the measures used by governments to control citizens’ perceptions and behaviours in relation to C19 as domestic abuse, there is an even more powerful model which may provide a more comprehensive account of the processes used by Governments over the last 2 years in Western Democracies. This is the work of Lifton (1989) called “Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism” which I shall outline below.¹

Lifton’s Thought Reform

Lifton describes “Thought Reform” (TR) as an indoctrination process used by the Chinese authorities during the Communist takeover which was “more organized, comprehensive and deliberate” than anything done by governments up to that time. TR brings about a systematic change in a person’s mode of thinking and feel-

ing or “a process of political indoctrination”.⁶ It has an emotional momentum of its own such that, once installed, there is no further need for an indoctrination authority figure because the person who has been indoctrinated polices their own and others’ loyalty to the ideology. This process is also evident in the manner in which Cults motivate and control their members.

Lifton describes 8 aspects involved in TR which I shall delineate here in order for the reader to assess how the influence of the mainstream media (MSM) and Governments has affected the population as a whole and the profession of Psychology in particular.

Milieu control

The most critical feature of TR is the control of the environment of human communication. By having total control of what a person sees, hears, reads or writes or of what can be experienced or expressed, the TR regime limits the individual’s communication with self and others – reality checking becomes impossible and the maintenance and development of a separate identity which is unique is undermined. Inner reflection and the possibility of meaning making for themselves is eradicated. In Transactional Analysis terms, the “**Adult Ego State**” goes offline.⁷

During the pandemic association with other people was severely curtailed as were the numbers of people who could meet up together and how close they may stand to one another. Free association, whether in pubs, clubs, churches and sports venues were closed or had their capacity significantly reduced. Thus, the opportunity to hear different viewpoints, express diversity of opinions and discussion were all significantly inhibited. The MSM hammered home the messages from Government of the dangers of not wearing masks, the threat of infecting others or of becoming infected, and, the requirement for social distancing, which all significantly interfered with human beings’ basic need and ability to connect with others through social interactions. Indeed, the journalists were often cheerleaders for lockdown, the only criticisms of Government being for not acting more sternly and sooner.

Demand for purity

Lifton’s model suggests that in an ideologically totalitarian regime, everything is divided into pure and impure, good and evil. Actions, feelings and ideas that are in harmony with the totalitarian ideology are deemed good and pure and everything else is bad and impure. A war on impurity ensues and the weapons by which this is achieved are shame and guilt. Guilt and shame are used to manipulate and control the population.

In terms of C19, the pure are those who accept the government’s and MSM’s doctrine hook line and sinker whilst the impure are those who question the dominant narrative or refuse to follow the directives and restrictions. Those people who opposed the

dominant C19 narrative found themselves censored, censured and perhaps criminalised at times.

From the get go, the BIT advised the UK Government about the most influential methods of communicating the “purity message” to the people. For example, “Helping Loved Ones” was a purity message designed to appeal to people’s desire to protect and support their family and friends. Thus, anyone who doesn’t accept this message implicitly lacks care for their Loved Ones and should be ashamed of themselves. Indeed, so powerfully intolerant of dissent was the MSM and Government messaging, that any discussion of the harm or disproportionality of lockdown was characterised as being on the side of disease and death. In Ireland, Government Ministers referred to such dissent as “The let it Rip” school of epidemiology.

The cult of confession

Religious confession is a vehicle for absolution through penance which in turn brings some comfort. In the totalist ideology, confession is a means of exploitation as a symbolic self-surrender – form of merging the individual with the environment. This merging results in a deep sense of oneness and intimacy and relief from feelings of guilt and self-criticism.

In terms of C19 this can be observed through mask wearing, testing and vaccines. When it comes to mask wearing, those who don’t wear masks for medical reasons have often been accosted in public and by the police and threatened with sanctions and they then have to explain why they are not wearing one. Similarly, people feel the need to confess whether they have been vaccinated or not or if they have a positive or negative PCR test result. The cult of confession demands full exposure whose aim is the complete ownership of every person’s public and private self.

Mystical manipulation

Lifton describes mystical manipulation as a process by which experiences which appear to be spontaneous are in fact planned and orchestrated by the leader. The purpose of these events is to demonstrate the authority of the leader who has exceptional talent such that their leadership is necessary which then allows the leader to interpret events in ways that furthers their own agenda. Governments around the world have taken their advice from the WHO whilst in the UK the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) does the same for the UK government as does the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) in the US.

Thousands of eminent and respected scientists have questioned the advice emanating from these august bodies and have been censored, and censured, for their pains by powerful elites in each country with the connivance of the MSM and social media.

A good example of mystical manipulation is Ferguson’s Imperial College London Coronavirus model⁹ which has been highly

publicised, together with its corresponding predictions about C19 and presented as “the most serious public health crisis in generations”. This model denied that there were any treatments for C19 and predicted that there would be 500,00 deaths in the UK. Ferguson’s model rationalised the use of mask wearing, social distancing, isolating and quarantining. The fear generated by this model appears to have overwhelmed politicians’ critical thinking abilities together with the general public leaving them in survival mode and vulnerable, complying with any measures the authority figure recommends. This is exactly what mystical manipulation is about (ie) placing our trust and faith in authority figures in a climate that has been construed as highly dangerous, where information and scientific data is restricted or withheld and opposing views are demonised and shamed. Which is exactly what happened in the UK and many other countries throughout the world over the last 2 years.

Science as Sacred

Science is about experiment and scrutiny of its own assumptions with evidence. Scientism on the other hand is about dogma of so-called “Science”. Western populations have been told time and again to “Follow the science” whether in relation to mask wearing, vaccines or social distancing. This Scientism has been created by WHO, the CDC and the pharm industry aided and abetted by the MSM such that any critical analysis or alternative ideas to scientism is prohibited and censored as immoral, irrelevant and “unscientific”. Its principle are laid down by the above authorities as “incontrovertibly true”. As Parker Hall⁶ notes:

“Its introduction saw the abandonment of previously well thought through pandemic preparation in virtually every country in the world in favour of a never conceived of before, homogenous global and “one size fits all approach”.

Scientism as associated with C19 which has given us the “science” of mask wearing, social isolation, social distancing, closing down the economy and schools and the vaccines. These interventions have never been used before in response to a virus and despite lacking any evidence base, they have been presented as “science” to be obeyed unquestioningly, despite there being no empirical data to support such measures. In a totalitarian environment, which has been “created” in most Western democracies by this “Scientism”, whether people comply with or resist the so-called “science” of “Scientism” they experience a desire to shut down or avoid engaging with other people as well as avoiding the “*experience necessary for genuine self-expression and creative development*”.¹

Language as a Tool

It is axiomatic that the first casualty of war is Truth! One of the major ways this happens is through the use of language and the meanings of words. The language of fear was used by BIT in the UK to alarm people about C19 and also to think about emotion-

ally and psychologically damaging policy interventions in benign terms. Thus, house arrest became “cocooning” or “sheltering”. A fundamental need of human beings as social animals is socializing with other people. This was effectively prohibited under the terms “social distancing” of 2 metres, a policy directive which almost certainly resulted in huge numbers of people experiencing a loss of community, sense of well-being and which, for children, can affect learning and growth. Surveillance became “contact tracing”. “Flattening the curve” was the euphemism for a host of life limiting policies and in a message which said that life could never be the same again, there was the innocently sounding “new normal”.

Equally, anyone who dared question or disagreed with any of the above policies was labelled as uneducated, stupid, anti-scientific, a covidiot, selfish, reckless, inconsiderate and anti-vax. Thus, shaming and guilt were used by Scientism to garner widespread public compliance and, it has to be admitted, was by and largely successful, which is the really frightening aspect of this whole process.

Waters⁵ has shown how the WHO under the guidance of Tedros Ghebreyesus as Director General, changed the definitions of 3 major terms including the definition of what a pandemic is, what a vaccine is and what herd immunity is. This last term, herd immunity, used to be defined by WHO as:

“The indirect protection from an infectious disease that happens when a population is immune either through vaccination or immunity developed through previous infection”

In October 2020, in opposition to decades of medical science, the DG of WHO told the press in Geneva that *“Using the principle of herd immunity to stem C19 pandemic is unethical and not the option that countries should pursue to defeat the virus”*.⁹ Suddenly and without any great fanfare, “herd immunity” became about protecting people from the virus, not by exposing them to it, but by protecting them from it! In terms of Doublethink, this is not a stone’s throw away from Orwell’s “1984”!

Ideology Over People

In totalitarian regimes an abstract idea or value is placed above human life – the ideology is always more important than people. Personal doubts or inconsistencies in the ideology are seen as arising from deficiencies of the person’s mind or of unenlightened thinking. Diversity of thoughts, feelings or experiences are denied and negated.¹

In C19, one example of this is the official medical doctrine (propounded by the NHS in England and CDC in the USA) that there is no such thing as early treatment of C19. Both the NHS and CDC appear to recommend that if you get C19 then the only treatment is to stay at home until you get so ill that you can’t breathe and then go to

hospital! There are treatment guides which are supported by the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons (AAPS) and the Front-Line Critical Care Consortium (FLCCC) whose websites support the home treatment approaches described by McCullough.^{10,11} This is just one example of how the official medical ideology of “Scientism” triumphed over empirical research findings and the advice of immunologists around the world and other expert medical practitioners.

Persons and Non-Persons

In any totalitarian environment there are usually only two groups (ie) those who have a right to exist and those who don’t (ie) non-persons. In the recent C19 pandemic, the “outgroup” (those who do not accept the narrative of the dominant group) would be classified as “non-persons” and were frequently denigrated with such epithets as ignorant, unscientific, alt-right extremists and anti-vaxxers or conspiracy theorists who should be punished and ridiculed to the extent that they can be thought of as inconsequential, or in other words, “non-persons”. They are expendable and should not be allowed a voice. The “in-group” who were dominant and were driving this process of scapegoating the “non-persons” were the WHO, CDC, FDA, Governments, MSM and social media as well as the NHS in the UK. The creation of Vaccine Passports to move around and gain admittance to public and social environments such as pubs and restaurants was a particularly effective method of identifying the “non-persons” as were masks to identify the non-conformists or non-persons.

The deep human need to belong probably meant that a lot of people were intimidated into wearing masks or getting the Vaccine Passport just so that they could move about and meet other people rather than appear to be a “non-person”. In the totalitarian ideology there is just one valid existence, all others are invalid. This creates a painful psychological bifurcation in a non-believer who must make a choice between ignoring their own personal experience to have their existence acknowledged or hold onto their truth and become an outsider of no consequence.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined various psychological models which were used and abused by many Western Democratic Governments over the last 2 years since the C19 pandemic began. Before March 2020, it was “unthinkable” that Western liberal democracies would introduce curbs on freedom of movement & assembly, freedom of speech and freedom to practice religion in order to deal with a pandemic like C19. As Prof Niall Ferguson put it, the authorities in the West believed that they would not “*get away with it*”. In the UK, Lord Justice Hikenbottom has described the Government regulations there as “*possibly the most restrictive regime on the public life of persons and businesses, ever*”. Myers¹² suggests that some of the

reasons lockdown did happen, and was embraced by the populations of Western Democracies so enthusiastically, have to do with the culture of safetyism, public health authoritarianism and the widespread denigration of free speech.

In this paper, I have tried to show just how many of the psychological techniques used by the authorities in Western Democracies shared many of the elements of Domestic Abuse such as isolation, control over access to the outside world, threats, enforcing trivial demands, monopolisation of perception, demonstrating omnipotence through criminalizing social gatherings, occasional indulgences and induced debilitation of the population. Lifton's¹ model of brainwashing is perhaps a more comprehensive delineation of just how thorough the authorities managed to persuade millions of their citizens to abandon long cherished democratic values such as freedom of association, freedom of thought & speech, freedom to practice religion etc, all with the assistance of the MSM who, by and large, were acquiescent in their role of holding governments to account. Woolhouse¹³ has demonstrated that it is now clear that lockdowns for whole populations failed to eliminate C19. It is worth reminding ourselves that C19, with a mortality rate of under 1% across all age categories, was designated a pandemic by the WHO, which permitted drastic measures that have significantly harmed a great number of people throughout the world, both psychologically, physically, economically and the full extent of which has yet to be revealed, which may take years to uncover, if ever.

There is cause for concern at the global trend, especially in USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand of citizens becoming "non-persons" through the use of "vaccine passports" which restrict them from restaurants, shops, travel and employment. Those who protested such exclusion were treated to the use of tear gas and water cannon in Paris and Athens in July 2021 and rubber bullets in Melbourne in September 2021. Indeed, the recent use of the emotive word "brutal" by the WHO to describe those countries who dispensed with masks in March 2022 gives no reason to believe that this repressive mind-set is over and offers little consolation that

things might be approached differently in any future Pandemic. The "Branch Covideans" have not gone away you know!

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Conflicts of Interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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