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Intelligence and Counterintelligence Operations: The Role of Implicit Social Influence

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Title: Intelligence and Counterintelligence Operations: The Role of Implicit Social Influence

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Abstract. This article highlights psychological research on implicit social influence and advocates that this research can be a heuristic source of applications for intelligence and counterintelligence operations.

Intelligence and counterintelligence operations can often involve influencing other people: how to think, how to feel, what to want, how to act. One area of social psychological research--social implicit influence--has comprised how the influencer's own behavior can influence the thoughts, feelings, motives, and actions of the targeted individual. Examples of this influence include setting up self-fulfilling prophecies and shaping desired nonverbal behaviors through modeling these behaviors without calling attention to them in the context of ongoing social interaction. The influence seems to occur dependent on the target's propensities and sensitivities for reciprocity norms, pressures to conform, reward potentials, justice and equity concerns, expectations concerning the informational value of the influencer's own behavior, the values of the influencer's impressions of the targeted individual, and concurrent salient phenomenology.

Of special interest for intelligence and counterintelligence is that targets often do not seem to be aware that they are being influenced. Why is this? (1) The target--and note that all people can be targets--may exhibit seemingly limited conscious access to the thoughts, feelings, motives, and behaviors of interest to the influencer. Thus, when the target engages in what the influence desires them to engage in, they may be less than fully aware that this is occurring. (This may be especially the case for nonverbal behaviors.) (2) The target may have so much information about who he or she really is--the true self--that it is more difficult to be aware that there is an ongoing deviation from the true self. The behavior desired by the influencer may finally occur and the target may ignore its occurrence all together, discount it, or interpret it to reduce any dissonance or noxious reactions or maximize any consonant or pleasant ones. (In some espionage anecdotes, the individual who gives sensitive information to a representative of another government may sincerely not believe that there is a violation of trust or an engagement in any misbehavior.) (3) Irrespective of issues about the true self, the target may engage in similar feats of ignoring, discounting, or interpreting.

A further aspect of the research on implicit social influence is that people of low self-esteem may be unusually susceptible to such influence. If for classical psychoanalysts dreams may be the royal road to the unconscious, for intelligence and counterintelligence specialists breaking down an individual's self-esteem or targeting an individual already low in self-esteem may be the royal road to implicit social influence.

Even more fortuitous is another common finding that implicit social influence not only can be robust in inducing specific thoughts, feelings, motives, and behaviors but also a different self-concept, a different true self embracing varying degrees of a target's psychological or social concerns or environments.

In conclusion, besides the crude but often effective methods of coercion, threat, and blackmail, there are more subtle and sophisticated methods that can be applied unknowingly (from the target's viewpoint) that can result, not only in desired behavior, but in a change of self-concept and the true self.

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As with much of life, the sociality of humans affords potential for threat as well as opportunity. (See Barr, C.L., & Kleck, R.E. (1995.) Self-other perception of the intensity of facial expressions of emotion: Do we know what we show? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68, 608-618; Vorauer, J.D., & Miller, D.T. (1997.) Failure to recognize the effect of implicit social influence on the presentation of self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 281-295.) (Keywords: Counterintelligence, Intelligence, Social Influence.)