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Propaganda Analysis: The Personal is Political, but the Political is Personal

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

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Abstract. This article analyzes implications of a propaganda theme--viz., the personal is political.

Propaganda themes can prove very effective in helping achieve intermediary and long-term political objectives. The former objectives include creating a group of people who believe that they share some segment of an identity, ensuring that this identity segment embraces suitable political concerns, and establishing a consensus for behavioral intentions and actual behaviors based on such political concerns. The latter objectives include reinforcing social phenomena and institutions that are consonant with a desired social state, inducing new social phenomena and institutions on a de facto basis that are consonant with a desired social state, and transforming these phenomena and institutions towards a de jure status.

One such propaganda theme is "the personal is political." At onetime it was very effective in strengthening variants of feminism worldwide. The theme suggested that to change the world from a feminist perspective one did not need to be a master or mistress of political abstractions and of political machinations of affairs of state. In fact, one already was as proficient in understanding and praxis as one needed to be because of the isomorphic parallelisms between the formal worlds of politics and the psychology--if not psychopathology--of everyday life. One could effect changes in understanding and praxis of others with whom one interacted through these interactions. Everyday decisions and non-decisions, actions and non-actions--e.g., concerning initiations and qualities of sexual behavior, cooking, cleaning, clothing, hygiene, and extra-domicile work and play-- constituted expressions of and pathways towards political status quo and change.

There have been at least two problems with this propaganda theme. First, the political could destroy the personal in so far as the personal is founded on private as opposed to public experience. The conflation of the personal and the political then would become a conflation of private and public with the public destroying the private. In that the political--and, thus, public--spheres can denote a competitive context with finite resources and needs beyond those resources, so would the personal and private. Life truly becomes a permanent campaign without respite from struggle. Perhaps this is indeed the case, but perhaps a convenient fiction is necessary for human welfare.

Second, "the personal is political" draws attention away from an equally salient phenomenon--that the political is personal. To some IBPP readers, this phenomenon as identified and analyzed by Harold Lasswell marks the beginning of a formal and academic political psychology. Not attending to the phenomenon detracts from understanding and praxis in the political sphere, as well as reifying "the personal is political" and transforming it into a subjugating discourse that delimits the conception of human experience.

Yes, there are those who live personal lives in a political fashion and those who act out their personal dynamics on the political stage. And, yes, there is a politics of the personal and a personal of the political. But for those who believe that they are entitled to a life of full potential, a different propaganda theme should serve as a guiding light and beacon of hope. (See Caprara, G. V., Barbaranelli,

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C., & Zimbardo, P. G. (1999). Personality profiles and political parties. *Political Psychology*, 20, 175-197; Harvey, J. A., & Hansen, C. E. (1999). Gender role of male therapists in both professional and personal life. *Sex Roles*, 41, 105-113; Jostes, A., Pook, M., & Florin, I. (1999). Public and private self-consciousness as specific psychopathological features. *Personality & Individual Differences*, 27, 1285-1295; Lasswell, H. (1930). *Psychopathology and politics*. University of Chicago Press; Zietkiewicz, E., & Long, C. (1999). Speaking for a change: Strategies for a transgressive praxis. *Feminism & Psychology*, 9, 142-151.) (Keywords: Feminism, Personal, Politics, Private, Propaganda, Public.)