



The Spiral of Silence Theory ...or how the Silent Majority Turns Into a Minority

Linz, Austria, May 28, 2018

By Mag Maria Pammer

The spiral of silence is based on the „public opinion theory” published in the 1970s by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann. According to that the readiness of many people to publicly express their opinions depends on an assessment of the general climate of the public discourse. Is the individual opinion in opposition to the prevailing opinion, there are inhibitions to express it in fact all the more the stronger the opposition is. Mass media can have a significant influence on the public opinion by presenting certain assertions as alleged majority views and hence urging individuals not to speak out to the contrary.

So called heretics, prophets, heroes, reformers as well as artists and scientists are often immune to the opinions of their contemporaries.

Research findings show that the majority of journalists favor left or liberal viewpoints and resources. But the public does not know the ideology of opinion leaders respectively the sources of the material used. Also, cameramen use certain techniques and thus convey their viewpoints automatically to the audience.

The result is a spiral making all these readers, listeners and viewers to establish the opinions of journalists as social standards.

The media turn into the fourth sovereign. Politicians failing can be voted out of office. But what happens to journalists spreading half-truths or lies thus doing damage?

Can the Spiral be Reversed?

The public opinion is first gaseous, next liquid and finally solid. In the first two phases individuals can still argue against it without being isolated. In the

solid phase the predominant opinion quickly gets established as a norm.

And so it is important to express one’s opinion without regard to the majority opinion and not to withdraw in case of opposition.

Wearing symbols, stickers, posting bills, starting a signature campaign, discussing with neighbors and peers, visiting events of opponents and speaking up there are possibilities to help form the public opinion

