

UPF Linz, Austria lecture: How the Silent Majority Turns into a Minority

Maria Pammer
May 28, 2018



Linz, Austria -- A UPF event focused on the difficulty that many people have in voicing unpopular opinions.

The lecture titled "The Spiral of Silence Theory ... or How the Silent Majority Turns into a Minority" was presented on May 28, 2018, in the Linz office of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), an organization affiliated with UPF.

Mag. Barbara Grabner presented the talk based on the "public opinion theory" published in the 1970s by the German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann.

Some individuals -- the so-called heretics, prophets, heroes, reformers as well as artists and scientists -- may be immune to the opinions of their contemporaries. But most people, according to the "public opinion theory," feel inhibited about publicly expressing an opinion that goes against the prevailing opinion.

When the mass media present certain assertions as majority views, it is difficult for individuals to speak out to the contrary.

Research shows that the majority of journalists favor left or liberal viewpoints and resources. But the public does not realize this. Even television cameramen can influence viewers' opinions by how they use certain techniques.

The result is a spiral in which readers, listeners and viewers accept the opinions of journalists as social standards.

The news media are known as the Fourth Estate. Politicians can be voted out of office if they perform poorly. But who holds journalists accountable if they spread half-truths or lies, with harmful results?

To use a metaphor, 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, putting up posters, starting a signature campaign, discussing issues with neighbors and peers, and speaking up at events of opponents can all help form public opinion.