THE POLICY SCIENCES CENTER, INC.

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July 21, 2003

Dr. Thomas R. Insel, MD – Chairperson
National Advisory Mental Health Council
National Institute of Mental Health
6001 Executive Blvd.
Bethesda, MD 20892-9669

Dear Dr. Insel:

I am writing to you in your capacity as Chair of the National Advisory Mental Health Council and as Director of NIMH. The enclosed paper provides a background to my letter of July 17, 2003.

My earlier letter discussed a 2 x 3 integrated framework to portray how vivid hierarchical images could induce, or be part of, important types of emotion-charged behavior that seem resistant to rational dialogue or learning.

I am forwarding the enclosed background paper because I wanted to assure you that the pages in the review chapter were not an impressionistic exercise. For example, the enclosed paper expands the analysis of cell 2B (liberal activism) with an analysis and explanation of 55+ features. The roller-coaster emotional life of liberal activists (e.g., varying from elation and the search for charismatic rescue to despair) had a bipolar character. It might be easy to use psychological terms like "bipolar" for clinical pathology and political behavior simply to indicate a surface similarity, but if the evidence in your field suggests a detailed mapping of many of these 55+ features between hierarchical dramas in the political realm and the clinical bipolar syndrome, perhaps this is a good initial test of whether the framework is worth your time as a contribution to the theory of mental illness.

Early in my career, when I was teaching an interdisciplinary course in human behavior at MIT and writing these exploratory papers, my intuition was that a wide range of strong and "higher" images, although with different

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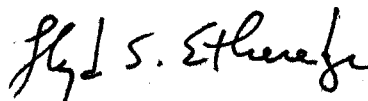www.policyscience.net

cognitive labels, might induce similar behavior: the ideal-self image (and the gap between the self image and the ideal-self image), government, God, maternal images, the image of the Presidency of a company (to the ambitious for high office). It is possible that the stress and health effects of social status, one of the current research interests at NIH, might be partly understood as a result of primitive physiological syndromes triggered and permanently internalized by such dramas. The model will require a lot of work, but may make it possible to add a similar, clarifying chapter to textbooks in several fields someday.

Twenty years ago, I recall somebody telling me that visual stimuli were processed in the brain directly to the limbic system, bypassing the neo-cortex. I am sure that the true story is much more complex - and I have no idea whether vivid images operate via the same physiology as actual vision. But the suggestion makes a degree of sense to me - i.e., that a model of mental illness with a focus on strong hierarchical images could explain both arousal and inhibition that can be partly independent of rational thought and language.

Also: motivational programs typically use vivid imagery to create and sustain motivation. Certainly, many organizational processes and pathologies involve hierarchical encoding and augmented effects in arousing (inspirational leadership) or inhibition (authority) of emotion. The fact of hierarchy itself can have an enervating effect on motivation - i.e., in liberal arts education we believe there must be initial structure, but the best research is done by a combination of self-starting researchers and a shift from hierarchy to open space.

All of these connected research ideas, and their implications, are beyond the realm of what a simple social scientist could possibly undertake in many lifetimes. But perhaps NIMH has a research engine for fast discovery science that can make use of these ideas?

Sincerely,

(Dr.) Lloyd S. Etheredge, Director
Government Learning Project

FIGURE 1

A MODEL OF LARGER-THAN-LIFE DRAMA

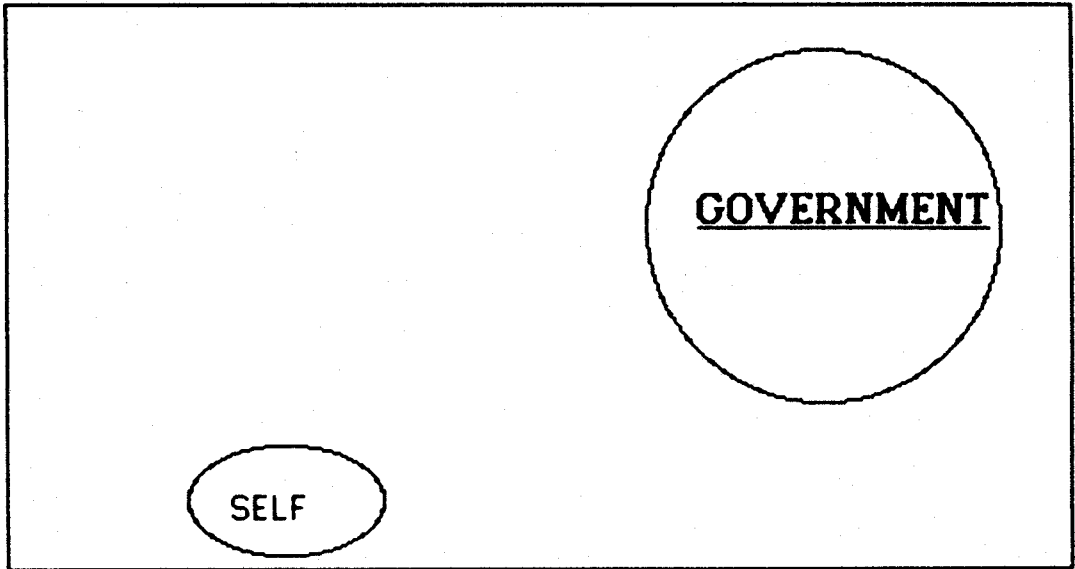**SELF**

Table 1

Specifications of Personal Psychology of Liberal Activists

I. High Salience Vertical Dramatization of Reality   LA

    1. Government animistic, metaphysically elevated   Yes

    2. Self, objects of solicitude, imagined below   Yes

    3. Personally unsatisfactory, uncomfortable, relation of self
        to higher presences   Yes

    4. Solicitude sought from government, higher presences (e.g.
        freedom, commitment, caring)   Yes

    5. "Upward"mobility sought for lower, deprived groups (e.g.
        equality, equal opportunity)   Yes

    6. Experience/faith higher presences are essentially good   Yes

    7. Well-being of self and society believed to depend primarily
        on leadership, action by and relation to, higher presences   Yes

II. Underlying Despair, Alienation

    8. Alienation of some forms, not anomie   Yes

    9. Episodic despair   Yes

    10. Episodic fear of catastrophe   Yes

    11. Individuation anxiety   Yes

    12. Self-restorative quest for salvation through realized blessing of
         ideals   Yes

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III. Tendencies to Symbolic Politics and Magical Thought   LA

    13. Words and symbols above sense of self   Yes

    14. Special faith in "upward" metaphysical transformations
          through knowledge, education   Yes

    15. Special attractions to talking, writing, ideas   Yes

    16. Symbolic politics   Yes

    17. Wishful enthusiasms for novelty   Yes

    18. Selective perceptions, misperception   Yes

    19. High confidence (bipolar)   Yes

IV. Search for Creation of Overarching Empathetic Mirroring
       Via Animistic Symbols

    20. Quest for self-therapy through empathetic mirroring   Yes

    21. Quest for self-integration from self-reflective
         intellectual/verbal integrations   Yes

    22. Quest for aliveness of self through recognition and
         symbolization from creative arts   Yes

    23. Desire to be understood by theory   Yes

    24. Tendency to over simple theoretical structures   Yes

    25. Identity sorting and construction via creative work Yes

V. <u>Guilt Aggression</u>   <u>LA</u>

    26. Tendency to self-criticism, introspection   Yes

    27. Sense of personal guilt, responsibility   Yes

    28. Need to retain virtuous, non-aggressive self-image   Yes

    29. Aggression when masked in a good cause   Yes

    30. Aggression inhibited by identification with victims   Yes

    31. Self-defensive identification with victims   Yes

    32. Retributive efforts (see 3, above) to make higher presences
        uncomfortable, esp. for shortfalls of ideals   ?

    33. Dependent complaining and criticism of imperfect
        government   Yes

    34. Splitting-off of aggressive impulses (e.g., into images of
        businessmen)   Sometimes

    35. Low direct aggression, low hostility; tolerance   Yes

VI. <u>Hyperactivity</u>

    36. Bipolar (manic-depressive type switching)   Yes

    37. Absence of self-reflection in activist phase   Yes

    38. High faith and sense of efficacy alternating with despair,
        self-doubt   Yes

    39. Hyperactive in service of progress   Yes

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VII. <u>Other</u>

    40. Inhibited need for affection   Yes

    41. Bid for affection <u>from</u> distant, low status,
          "safe" groups   Yes

    42. Hypnotic entrapment love of power & politics   Probable

    43. Maternal quality to solicitous government action   For men?

    44. Inner personal reserve; privacy   Yes

    45. Inner need for autonomy, freedom from hierarchical
          contexts   Yes

    46. Inner-directed moral reasoning   ?

    47. Idealistic   Yes

    48. Introvert   ?

    49. Creative   Yes

    50. Low Machiavellianism   Maybe

    51. Trust in human nature   Yes

    52. Obsessive   ?

    53. Ego defensive   ?

    54. Low priority to conventional duties   No

    55. High moral character   -

    56. Resistance to full equality & power sharing (desires to
          be the overmind/architect of the socialist state, etc.)   ?

    57. Courage   Yes

    58. Physiological predisposition to syndrome   ?