



BRAINWASHING--WHAT IS IT?
#5 LOADING THE LANGUAGE
A Series on Lifton's Eight Points of Thought Reform

Another of the eight points of mind control is **Loading the Language**. It involves the use of thought-terminating clichés. Society does this to some extent as well. For instance, when you hear the terms “serial murderer” or “rapist,” you immediately associate violent behavior to the person so labeled. In a cult, the words are used routinely to evoke specific reactions and everyone parrots the exact same vocabulary. In a cult, words are used not just to define some behavior or person but to control and manipulate the members into *how* they process information.

The word “apostate” is an example of Loading the Language. Jehovah’s Witnesses use this phrase the world over to refer to those who speak out against their organization. The word creates an instant fear (i.e., that the non-Jehovah’s Witness defector is dishonest, dangerous and cunning, on the same par as Satan the Devil). I would be considered an apostate by Jehovah’s Witnesses simply because I wrote this article.

Other terminology such as “disfellowshipped,” “judicial committee,” “Armageddon,” “Elder,” “ministerial servant,” “anointed,” and “in the truth” induce sorrow, fear, awe and an elitist attitude. Referring to your peers in the cult as “The friends” creates a false illusion that everyone in your circle is righteous and pure of heart, incapable of doing harm to you, when in reality the opposite usually holds true.

“Active in the field service” is good; “inactive” is bad. “Where else can you go?” grinds to a screeching halt any exploration of spiritual alternatives, as though there is no point in looking. “Honest hearted individuals would agree” steers the reader into agreeing with the cult leader(s)’ beliefs, because who wouldn’t want to be considered honest-hearted?

I remember hearing a lot of Loaded Language in our Kingdom Hall (church) after my mother started studying with Jehovah’s Witnesses. I was nine years old at the time and had a hard time absorbing the “lingo” because their words seemed so foreign to me. I reasoned that I must be very immature (i.e., unscholarly) and surely that’s why I didn’t “get it.” Today, after studying thought reform I understand that it wasn’t *me* who was so unscholarly.

Robert J. Lifton says on p. 430 of his book *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism—A Study of Brainwashing in China*:

For an individual person, the effect of the language of ideological totalism can be summed up in one word: Constriction. He is, so to speak, linguistically deprived and since language is so central to all human experience, his capacities for thinking and feeling are immensely narrowed.

Put simply, loading the language constricts independent thought. And, using the Watchtower’s loaded language: all *honest-hearted* persons would agree!