



Mind Control Used by the Watchtower

Lifton's Eight Points Examined

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When an organization is employing the use of mind control techniques, it is said that it has a hidden agenda and is known as a cult. The book *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism—A Study of Brainwashing in China*, authored by Robert Jay Lifton, has been used over thirty years to analyze organizations and groups to see if mind control is employed.

In chapter 22 of Lifton's book, he lists eight psychological techniques used in a thought reform environment to control members. In this paper, I will discuss how the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society uses all eight techniques and the devastating effects on its members.

1) **Milieu Control**: Total control of the individual's environment and communication with the outside world and with himself.

Total control is enacted over all forms of communication, expression and experience — even to the level of communication with one's self (inner reflection and consideration). The environment contains "The Truth" itself and the balance between the self and the outside world becomes disrupted. Deprived of all combinations of external information and inner reflection necessary for reality testing, the individual generally loses his unique identity separate from the controlled environment. The prevailing ideology is considered good and is polarized against everything else which is considered evil or unreal.

From the moment the Jehovah's Witness knocks at your door, you are bombarded with concepts such as "The churches are wrong" and "God only works through our organization." The new convert is told to seek "Bible Study" that is dependant on the organization's publications, not independent Bible study.¹ Members are told to avoid independent thinking.² Don't talk to outsiders that are negative. Don't talk to apostates. Don't read outside information.³ No independent research,⁴ and avoid all internet websites other than their own.⁵

*"[The new convert] is called upon to make an absolute polarization of the real (the prevailing ideology) and the unreal (everything else). To the extent he does this, he undergoes a personal closure. If he considers other realities outside the closed ideological system he may resist these as not legitimate—until the milieu control is sufficiently diminished."*⁶

2) **Mystical Manipulation**: Manipulation of group members to fulfill the "higher purpose."

This means that: 1) Total involvement of one's entire being in the cult is mandatory. Nominal commitment is either impossible or seen as only a short-term step to full-time membership. 2) Anything done in order to attain complete involvement in the group is morally permissible in view of the "higher purpose" or "mission" of the cult. Creating a narrow world of guilt, shame and fear, continuous reform is demanded to strive for higher levels of purity or "perfection" that can never actually be achieved. Leaders use guilt and fear as effective forms of communication and manipulation of cult members.

In order to save the world and prepare for Armageddon, Jehovah's Witnesses believe that they are justified in using "Theocratic War Strategy"—lying in order to protect the organization.⁷ They believe that it is not wrong to lie to people who are not "entitled" to know the truth.⁸ The Watchtower has "The Truth" and is not to be questioned. Questioning it is tantamount to questioning God.⁹ Because Witnesses must study long hours and go door to door, outside activities are either wrong or no longer important. The Watchtower Society justifies



shielding new converts from the complete list of ordinances and organizational stipulations until they have dedicated their lives for the Society.

When members do not understand why doctrines keep changing, why life-dependent blood transfusions are denied and why they are told to “hate” and avoid communication with outsiders, apostates and disfellowshipped family members, they are told to “Wait on Jehovah.” Because Jehovah is considered the member’s “Father” and the Organization is his “mother,”¹⁰ he is asked to accept these manipulations on the basis of faith as a child in the arms of its mother.

“Whether he is cheerful in the face of being manipulated, deeply resentful, or feels a combination of both, —he has been deprived of the opportunity to exercise his capabilities for self expression and independent action.”¹¹

3) **Demand for Purity:** The experiential world is sharply divided into the pure and the impure, the absolutely good and the absolutely evil.

Cult manipulation is justified on account of the “higher purpose” given by God Himself through the group leaders. This “higher purpose” supercedes any “lower” considerations of morality or ethics. Any thought or action that questions the “higher purpose” is condemned as selfish, evil and petty in comparison to the “mission” of the group. The individual is asked to accept this manipulation on the basis of “faith” or “trust.” These standards are difficult to maintain. The individual is trained to respond to cues, environmental pressures, and group pressure to remain submerged in the group environment. He must therefore actively manipulate others and become part of a great cycle of manipulation.

Every thought must be brought under subjection to the organization. Elders must be obeyed explicitly. No Independent thinking is allowed.¹² There is a strict dress code. Men must have short hair and no beards. All time is spent reading and preparing for meetings. Personal time is not allowed. If you do not have the correct answer you will be shamed publicly. Members’ names connected with crimes against the organization are made public to the congregation. Some individuals are “marked” by members and ignored until they submit to authority or leave the organization.¹³ Members are pressured to be baptized and to stop questioning. All ties with non-group friends and apostates must be severed. All apostate reading material must be destroyed.¹⁴ Members are encouraged not to read the Bible apart from Watchtower literature or read letters with Bible verses from non-Jehovah’s Witnesses.¹⁵ Members must use Theocratic War Strategy to defend the organization¹⁶ and fully accept the Watchtower’s authority and rules in each area of life. All wrongdoers must be turned in.¹⁷ Members are told that their “lives and others depend upon our obedience.”¹⁸ If you don’t go door-to-door and work hard you won’t make it through Armageddon and be resurrected.

For a complete list of rules and regulations used by this organization, see the following website:
<http://www.jwfiles.com/jw-cant.htm>

“The individual thus comes to apply the same totalist polarization of good and evil to his judgments of his own character...’ He must also look upon his impunities as originating from outside influences—that is, from the ever threatening world beyond the closed, totalist ken. Therefore, one of the best ways to relieve himself of some of his burden of guilt is to denounce, continuously and hostilely, these same outside influences.”

“The more guilty he feels, the greater his hatred, and the more threatening they seem. In this manner, the universal psychological tendency toward ‘projection’ is nourished and institutionalized, leading to mass hatreds, purges of heretics, and to political and religious holy



wars. Moreover, once an individual person has experienced the totalist polarizations of good and evil, he has great difficulty in regaining a more balanced inner sensitivity to the complexities of human morality.”¹⁹

4) **The Cult of Confession:** One must confess actual or imagined crimes, sinfulness is artificially induced to attain a cure arbitrarily imposed.

A form of symbolic self-surrender, often called “humility” or “having a humble spirit,” merges the individual with the mind-control environment. Total exposure gives the cult complete ownership of each individual within it. A sense of “oneness” and intimacy with fellow confessors aids in the dissolution of the self into the flow of the movement. A reasonable balance between worth and humility is impossible.

All members must report sins against the organization and its rules to the elders for disciplinary procedures. If the member does not turn himself in within a reasonable period of time, someone else will do it for him. Members are instructed to turn each other in.²⁰ This action also cuts across the professional lines of ethics. Patient and Client confidentiality can be violated for the protection of the congregation.

“I... practice the profession of penitent to be able to end up as a judge...the more I accuse myself, the more I have a right to judge you. The identity of the ‘judge – penitent’ thus becomes a vehicle for taking on some of the environments arrogance and sense of omnipotence.”²¹

People must confess to crimes, ranging from independent thinking, to talking to ex-members, etc. Elders keep updated files on all members and a record of everything they do.

“...it is a means of maintaining an ethos of total exposure – a policy of making public (or at least known to the organization) everything possible about the life experiences, thoughts, and passions of each individual, and especially those elements which might be regarded as derogatory.”²²

The biggest problem with confessing so much about yourself to others is that now the cult “owns” you, and they can do whatever they want with that information.

5) **The Sacred Science:** An aura of sacredness is created about the basic dogma.

The cult’s dogma becomes the absolute moral vision for the ordering of human existence. Questioning of basic assumptions is prohibited. The sacredness revolves around the cult word itself, its originators and its bearers. While transcending ordinary patterns of logic, it claims for itself airtight logic and precision. Man’s ideas become God even if man cannot. The concept offers comfort and security. All thoughts and actions become related to the dogma or doctrine.

Anyone who questions the Watchtower is an “apostate.” If you think independently, find fault with something the Watchtower says, then you are like Satan. “From the very outset of his rebellion Satan called into question God’s way of doing things. He promoted independent thinking....To this day, it has been Satan’s subtle design to infect God’s people with this type of thinking.”²³ Questioning the organization, the Elders, the doctrine and rules is strictly prohibited. “Theocratic ones will appreciate the Lord’s visible organization and not be so foolish as to pit against Jehovah’s channel their own human reasoning and sentiment and personal feelings.”²⁴ If a member rejects the organization, he is viewed as rejecting God. “Only this organization functions for Jehovah’s purpose and to his praise. To it alone God’s Sacred Word, the Bible, is not a sealed book.”²⁵



*“Yet so strong a hold can the sacred science achieve over his mental processes that if one begins to feel himself attracted to ideas which either contradict or ignore it, he may become guilty and afraid. His quest for knowledge is consequently hampered, since in the name of science he is prevented from engaging in the receptive search for truth which characterizes the genuinely scientific approach.”*²⁶

6) **Loading the Language:** The language of the Totalist environment is characterized by the thought-terminating clichés.

The human problems, no matter how far reaching or complex, are compressed into brief, highly reductive, definitive sounding phrases that are easily memorized and expressed. Cult language becomes repetitiously centered on all-encompassing jargon and terminology that is abstract and highly categorical, a language of non-thought. The jargon expresses the certitudes of cult dogma and is owned and operated by the Movement itself. Eventually the individual gravitates to the point where he simply shouts the jargon to prove his conformity.

Loaded language abounds from the Watchtower. The language becomes loaded with key phrases that cue certain psychological responses and emotions such as “Apostates,” “Armageddon,” “The Arrangement,” “Channel of Communication,” “The Organization,” “Disfellowshipped,” “The Truth,” “The friends,” etc. (For a more complete list, see the end of this article.)

*“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.”*²⁷

The biggest problem with loaded language and thought terminating clichés is that the language does not expand your thoughts but tends to narrow them or thought terminates. Also, the clichés can be used as reentry clues back into the altered states of consciousness characteristic of all cult members. Even after the cult member has departed from the group, hearing any of the loaded language can trigger him back in.

7) **Doctrine Over Persons:** Human experience and the individual’s perception of reality are subordinated to the claims of cult doctrine.

Feelings and experiences are interpreted only in the light of the cult doctrine. Myth becomes infused with the “sacred science” and the resulting logic is so highly compelling it replaces the realities of human experience. Even the facts of history are altered, rewritten or ignored to make them fit doctrinal logic. The underlying assumption is that the doctrine—including its mythological elements—is ultimately more valid, true and real than is any aspect of actual human character or human experience.

The Watchtower rewrites church history, their own history and reinterprets the members’ personal experiences. The Society proclaims that there has always been someone throughout the ages that has taught their doctrinal belief that Jesus is not God, but church history proves otherwise. A heretic, known as Arius of Alexandria, started “Arianism” in the third century of the church age. This theory taught that Jesus was not one substance with the Father but was a created being. When the church declared this doctrine to be heresy at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD,²⁸ this doctrine continued to be debated furiously until the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD when the Creed of Athanasius was codified into church doctrine. From this point on, Arius’ doctrine has been successfully refuted and excluded from “Christianity.” It wasn’t until the eighteenth century when cults (such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses) began to surface, that it has resurfaced in various forms of heretical “Christianity.” In addition to redefining Church history to support its viewpoint, the Watchtower Society



continues to change their doctrinal views and make predictions that never come true. See, for example, their false prophecy of 1975²⁹ as a date for the end of the world.

The Watchtower organization proclaims that if someone violated the no blood law of the Old Testament, it was God's law for them to be "cut-off" from the congregation by death. Today, Jehovah's Witnesses believe that if they accept a blood transfusion, they are automatically doomed to die at Armageddon. This myth is so compelling that Witnesses would rather die physically than to accept a life-saving blood transfusion that (in their minds) would doom them to spiritual death. To them, it is better to risk physical death and be assured of spiritual life, than to risk spiritual death for temporary physical life. However, the blood law — to which Jehovah's Witnesses refer in Leviticus 17— speaks specifically of a person partaking of animal blood through the digestive system and has nothing to do with a blood transfusion that merely replaces (as in an organ transplant) the blood tissue lost. Furthermore, while Leviticus 17 states that one who knowingly eats blood with animal meat shall be "cut off" from the congregation, the penalty was much less severe in that "He should take a bath and wash his clothes...then shall he be clean."³⁰

Members' personal experiences are reinterpreted to fit the rigid contours of the doctrinal mold. This occurs when they are told outsiders, former friends, and apostates are not to be trusted. Non-believing family members, mates and siblings are considered evil because they will not comply with the organization. If members do not comply with the rigid contours of the doctrinal mold, they are said to be "spiritually weak."

*"The individual person who finds himself under such doctrinal dominated pressure to change is thrust into an intense struggle with his own sense of integrity, a struggle which takes place in relation to polarized feeling of sincerity and insincerity. In a totalist environment, absolute 'sincerity' is demanded, and the major criterion for sincerity is likely to be one's degree of doctrine compliance."*³¹

8) **The Dispensing of Existence** The totalist environment draws a sharp line between those whose right to existence can be recognized and those who possess no such right.

There are only two camps for the cultist, "we" and "they". Everyone outside of the cult is to some degree under the control of Satan. Only those in "the faith" possess and benefit from "the Truth", out-side of the cult is only darkness. The implication is that there is but one path to true existence—one valid mode of being—hence, all others are invalid and false.

Witnesses who submit to Watchtower teachings are in "the Truth" and will live on the earth during the millennium. All outsiders are said to be Satan's world and must be hated. The Society states: "Haters of God and his people are to be hated. . . . We must hate in the truest sense, which is to regard with extreme and active aversion, to consider as loathsome, odious, filthy, to detest. Surely any haters of God are not fit to live on his beautiful earth. . . ."³² Any group members that do not comply with all the rules or are guilty of "independent" or "critical" thinking must be shunned, disfellowshipped and hated.

Members are told that through indoctrination and being "humble," they can unlearn old apostate doctrines and learn "the Truth" as defined by "Jehovah's Organization."

*"...the thought reform process is one means by which non-people are permitted, through a change in attitude and personal character, to make themselves over into people."*³³



Many people join the organization because they are led to believe this is the only way they can live in God's Kingdom on Earth and avoid annihilation. But even the most dedicated and hardest working members know if they don't keep all the rules and avoid independent thinking they too can be disfellowshipped and annihilated.

“For the individual, the polar emotional conflict is the ultimate existential one of ‘being verses nothingness.’ He is likely to be drawn to a conversion experience, which he sees as the only means of attaining a path of existence for the future...The totalist environment- even when it does not resort to physical abuse—thus stimulus in everyone a fear of extinction or annihilation...” ³⁴

“The more clearly an environment expresses these eight psychological themes, the greater its resemblance to ideological totalism, and the more it utilizes such totalist devices to change people, the greater its resemblance to thought reform (or ‘brainwashing’).” ³⁵

When we strip away the religiosity of the Watchtower, what we have left is the same thought reform techniques used in Communist China. Those same techniques are currently being used here in the United States and around the world by thousands of religious cults.

Extended List of Loaded Language used by the Watchtower:

Jehovah
Watchtower
Apostates
Sheep/Goats
Witnesses
Elder
Shepherd Call
Spiritually Strong
Kingdom Hall
Field Service
Ministerial Servant
Overseer
New Light
The Great Crowd
Little flock
Armageddon
The Arrangement
Theocracy
Anointed Class
Publisher
Active/Inactive
Auxiliary Pioneer
Channel of Communication
The Committee
The Organization
Disfellowship
Hate
The Truth
The Friends
Where else can you go?

Footnotes:

- ¹ *Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*; 9/15/1911 p. 4885; *Watchtower* 8-15-81, pp. 28-29
- ² *Watchtower*, 1/15/1983 p. 27
- ³ *Watchtower*; 3/15/1986 p. 12
- ⁴ *Watchtower*; 6/1/1967 p. 338
- ⁵ *Awake*; 1/8/1998 p. 12
- ⁶ Lifton, *Thought Reform*, p.421
- ⁷ *Watchtower*; 5/1/1957, p. 285
- ⁸ *Watchtower*, 6/1/1960, p. 352; *Aid Bible Understanding*, 1971, p. 1060
- ⁹ *Watchtower*; 10/1/1967 p. 531
- ¹⁰ *Watchtower*; 5/1/1957 p. 274
- ¹¹ Lifton, *Thought Reform*, p. 423
- ¹² *Watchtower*; 1/15/1983 p. 22
- ¹³ *Pay Attention To Yourselves And To All The Flock*, p. 100
- ¹⁴ *Watchtower*; 3/15/1986, pp. 12-15
- ¹⁵ *Watchtower*, 8/15/1981, pp. 28-29
- ¹⁶ *Watchtower*; 6/1/1960 p. 352
- ¹⁷ *Pay Attention To Yourselves And To All The Flock*, p. 97
- ¹⁸ *Watchtower*; 3/15/1991 p. 15
- ¹⁹ Lifton, *Thought Reform*, p.425
- ²⁰ *Pay Attention To Yourselves And To All The Flock*, p. 97
- ²¹ Lifton, *Thought Reform*, p.427
- ²² Lifton, *Thought Reform*, p.426
- ²³ *Watchtower*; 1/15/1983, p. 22
- ²⁴ *Watchtower*; 2/1/1952, p. 80
- ²⁵ *Watchtower*; 7/1/1973 p. 402
- ²⁶ Lifton, *Thought Reform*, p.429
- ²⁷ Lifton, *Thought Reform*, p.430
- ²⁸ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, pp. 618-632
- ²⁹ *Watchtower*; 8/1/1968, p. 494
- ³⁰ Leviticus 17:16
- ³¹ Lifton, *Thought Reform*, p.432
- ³² *Watchtower*; 10/1/1952, pp. 599
- ³³ Lifton, *Thought Reform*, p.433
- ³⁴ Lifton, *Thought Reform*, p.434
- ³⁵ Lifton, *Thought Reform*, p.435