

Talking Up Orality

Your help is needed to put in a good word for orality, especially among the literate elite. Literates must take the responsibility of changing to relate to orals who cannot go the other way.

Those who fall in the top 13% of American readership control publishing houses and have for years influenced evangelism and discipleship in churches and missions organizations. It's fine with them if orality is an agent of compassion to the lowly or handicapped in society. Just fine. But mess with *the-way-we've-always-done-it* and expect a backlash, a turned head, chuckle, or outright dismissal. Jobs would be lost, we'll close our doors, Bible sales will tank, and you'll have fingers pointed at you among some of what they threaten. Winks, stifled snorts, and wave-offs are wicked tools of their biased persecution.

Elisabeth Noelle-Neuman published research on public opinion in 1984. She coined the phrase "**spiral of silence**." She tracked political campaigns where the majority got the votes for elected office and the minority lost power. The study was attractive to me when studying mass media effects. Her comments included things like "mass media can make the majority look like the minority," people want to "identify with a winner," and "fear of isolation drives the spiral of silence."

The Spiral of Silence is still pushing hard against the Orality Movement across the United States, the West in general, and among literate church leaders throughout the world. Phrases keep popping up such as "leaders are readers" and "Bible Storying is a Third World methodology." They are intended by those in power to position orality as a fringe element in the kingdom of God.

Fear makes laggards. Laggards are typically thought of as sluggish or dimwits. However, laggards form the core of a cultural norm. They're not seen as "shallow" like fad-hopping early adopters, a term attributed to the "Diffusion of Innovations" work of Everett M. Rogers. While early adopters are tiny 2.5% of a culture's experimenting wonders, the 16% comprising laggards are the boat-anchors of change. They hold the power—and they wield it. They won't change until some 86% adopt the new behaviors.

The Spiral of Silence is go-with-the-flow whirlwind that the change-resistant count on to keep them employed, elected, and educated. If they were to come off as odd, different, or cutting edge, then they can be fired by their superiors who put them there in the first place.

Despite crushing evidence to the contrary, people will continue to give in to peer pressure. **At least half of all people in America struggle with literacy.** Response? Not my people. Not my problem. An oral learning preference far outnumbers those with a literate learning preference. Response? Do they tithe? Probably not. Hey, if they want a better life, let them work harder like I did! They can attend classes. I did. They must assimilate; conform to my standards and then we'll all have unity despite that whole diversity thing.

The Spiral of Silence could move in another way, but only when you and I, that know better, take a stand, risk it all for the sake of the cross, and speak out in favor of those who will never know the saving Gospel unless literates adopt oral methods at work by a lost and dying world. In this case, it's a matter of becoming an active practitioner. Know what you're doing and why. Make disciple-makers using oral methods.

And ION serves as a great place to network with like-minded guys who are sold-out to doing it to the glory of God!

