

BRAINWASHING AND THE CULTS:

A STUDY

.by

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INTRODUCTION

In his Pulitzer-prize winning book, The Soul of a New Machine, Tracy Kidder followed the staff of a computer corporation's engineering department as they worked on a new computer design. The team spent many long hours on the project and often worked over 60 hours per week, with no overtime pay.

Kidder writes about a certain event:

One time Alsing stayed all night in a lab programming a batch of ROMs, or "read-only memory" chips. West found Alsing still at this work the next morning, and laughing, he cried out; Alsing! You're a ROM-driven man!

West was always inventing catchy expressions, and "ROM-driven" was Alsing's favorite. The contents of a ROM, once programmed into a chip, cannot be altered or erased; the information can only be "read." ROM-driven: it opens the ancient question of predestination and free will. 1

Can there be such a thing as a "ROM-driven" man? Many people today believe that a man can be programmed by others to believe and act certain ways. Books like The Manchurian Candidate and 1984, and movies like A Clockwork Orange have popularized the idea that a person's mind can be shaped and molded, or "brain-washed."

My interest in brainwashing came about from personal experience with members and ex-members of the Unification church, popularly known as the Moonies. In 1975 some Moonies moved in across the street from me, and I went over to talk with them once in a while. A few weeks later, I met three Moonies who had been deprogrammed three days before by Ted Patrick, the inventor of deprogramming. Since then I have met several members and ex-members, and had become somewhat confused by the differing views on the recruiting techniques and practices of the group. The ex-members, some of whom left on their own, insisted that mind-control was used on recruits and members, but the members I know are bright, intelligent, and betray no signs of mental disability or manipulation. They also insist that no unusual manipulative processes are used on members. I am doing this research to better understand why there are accusations against religious groups that they are using brainwashing techniques on their members.

Though we could probably begin the history of the concept of brainwashing with Machiavelli's The Prince, or even Plato's Laws, the first example of the results of brainwashing considered by the social sciences were the imprisoned Bolshevick leaders paraded in the Moscow Show Trials in the late 1930's. These prisoners confessed to all types of crimes that they probably never committed. But they also appeared to believe that they were as despicable as the Stalinists were trying to portray them. "It was not only confession which was so strange, it was repentance - the acceptance of the prosecution's view that the acts confessed to were appalling crimes..."²

Next came reports during the Korean War that British and American prisoners of war had actually collaborated with the enemy. Dr. Robert J. Lifton's book, Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism, published in 1963, added credence to the theory. It was the 1970's that made brainwashing a household word. Many new religious movements seemed to be making automatons out of their recruits. Patty Hearst was apparently brainwashed into becoming Tania, the gun-toting revolutionary. In 1975 the 25-year long CIA program to produce usable brainwashing techniques came to light.³ In 1978, 912 people died in revolutionary suicide in the jungle town of Jonestown, Guyana.

It is the new religious movements, or cults, that this paper will be dealing with. I will be turning to the practices of the cults, the testimony of those who have left these groups, scholarly research on the topic, and the practices of deprogrammers; people who attempt to undo whatever brainwashing has done to an individual's mind.

What I will be seeking to discover is whether there is such a thing as brainwashing, and if so, whether some religious groups do indeed gain converts by these methods. This will be done in four steps:

- 1) Comparison of two books with opposing viewpoints on the subject:
 - a) Snapping, by Flo Conway and Jkm Siegleman, which claims that "America has been gripped by an epidemic of sudden personality change."⁴
 - b) Strange Gods, by David Bromley and Anson D. Shupe, Jr., which states with emphasis, "There is no mysterious brainwashing process used to trap and enslave millions of young Americans."⁵

- 2) An overview of other research done on brainwashing in general, and in cults in particular.
- 3) Interviews with ex-cult members, deprogrammers, and a cult member.
- 4) Conclusions.

There are three words that will appear frequently that are all controversial and have slightly different connotations to different groups that I will define here to limit any ambiguity that might result. These are my definitions:

- 1) Brainwashing: The successful manipulation of an individual's mind in order to instill beliefs that that person would not otherwise hold.
- 2) Deprogramming: removal of the influence that brainwashing has placed on an individual.
- 3) Cult: An authoritarian group holding unorthodox beliefs which include that they are the repository of a Great or Ultimate Truth.

Other referenced works may have important differences to these definitions, and, if so, they will be pointed out where necessary.

SNAPPING

Flo Conway has a doctorate degree in Communication from the University of Oregon.⁶ Her co-author, Jim Siegleman, studied "philosophy, psychology, and literature at Harvard University, and later at Trinity College, Cambridge."⁷ They began their research into "sudden personality change" because of concern that the practices of many modern-day therapies and cults "posed a hidden threat to fundamental processes of the mind."⁸ Although these groups are diverse and sometimes even at odds with each other, "we came to the conclusion that America's cults and mass therapies should be viewed together because they use nearly identical techniques of manipulating the mind and because, in this decade, many of them have become impossible to categorize."⁹ They see this as an important concern for everyone because "each American is vulnerable," and "the techniques used by America's cults and therapies permeate every level of American society."¹⁰

The title of the book apparently comes from its frequent use by people they

interviewed in describing a unique event in their spiritual quest. It is defined as "the sudden, drastic alteration of personality in all its many forms." ¹¹ "Our research has confirmed that snapping is not merely an alteration of behavior or belief. It can bring about a much deeper and more comprehensive change in individual awareness and personality." ¹² These snapping moments often occur at conversion to a cult. Journalist Sally Kempton is quoted from an article she wrote after becoming a devotee of guru Muktananda. There are actually two moments in this quote that might be construed as a snapping experience; one when some advice given by Muktananda sank through her assumptions "like a kind of depth charge," ¹³ and the other when she got home that afternoon and had "the most intensely sensual feeling I had ever had." ¹⁴ I assume that the entire day's experience is considered a single snapping incident, since it is referred to in the singular.

Lawrence and Cathy Gordon were interviewed about their lives when they were Moonies. They spoke of "not just one but frequent peak moments." ¹⁵ After a description of one of these moments, the authors state, "Here again was the moment of snapping in its most intense physical form." ¹⁶

Ted Patrick, the original deprogrammer, described what happens during a deprogramming. He confronts the cult member with evidence contrary to the beliefs of his religion and "then there'll be a minute, a second, when the mind snaps, when the person realizes he's been lied to by the cult and he just snaps out of it." ¹⁷

I mention these examples to demonstrate that the idea behind the word "snapping" is somewhat ambiguous in this work. It isn't necessarily the moment of conversion (or unconversion), since the Gordons had several snapping moments. Does this mean they had several "personality changes"? There seem to be two definitions: 1) sudden personality change, and 2) a peak ecstatic experience. To avoid confusion, I will avoid the term "snapping" and will stick with the first definition.

Personality change is the actual subject of this book, and "America's growing fraternity of ex-cult members hold the key to the phenomenon."¹⁸ It is these people that their parents didn't recognize as their offspring, and it is these same people who are jolted out of their cult state of mind through deprogramming. Many of the "hundreds of individuals"¹⁹ interviewed for this book had been directly involved with Scientology, the Moonies, Hare Krishna, and other cults.

Initially, those interviewed were attracted to the cult in some fashion, usually from something they saw in the cult members. The members displayed serenity, self-assurance, and love for one another. During the initial contact the cult member uses certain ploys to induce and enhance this feeling of attraction. The potential convert is persuaded to stay with the group at least temporarily, and during this time "physiological stresses such as poor diet and exhaustion further weaken their resistance to suggestion and command."²⁰ Also, "each individual is given specific orders to refrain from doubt and told not to question the wisdom of cult doctrine."²¹ Now in their new surroundings and social setting, and under strong peer pressure, "the new cult member slides into a state of mind in which they are no longer capable of thinking for themselves."²² The convert is now a molded image of the cult. So long as he remains under their influence, he will most likely never leave on his own.

What can parents, who see a drastic and sudden change in the personality of their child, do to restore them to the real world? "A man named Ted Patrick has developed the only remedy currently available."²³ In the early seventies he developed a technique he called "deprogramming", a "nearly foolproof process for helping cult members regain their freedom of thought."²⁴ This process begins with kidnapping or otherwise gaining control over the cult member. He is taken to a safe and secure place where Ted Patrick can begin to talk the cultist out of his instilled beliefs. "the only thing I do is shoot them challenging questions. I hit them with things that they haven't been programmed

to respond to." ²⁵ "When the mind gets to a certain point, they can see through all the lies that they've been programmed to believe, and they realize that they've been duped and they come out of it. Their minds start working again." ²⁶

To see if the scientific community might support their ideas on sudden personality change, the authors sought out scientists who might shed some light as to how or why such changes can occur. They came upon two new theories that seemed to back up their conclusions. The first is the psychological theory of the "holographic mind," developed by Dr. Karl Pibram of Stanford University. Dr. Pibram suggests that the mind does not store information in filing-cabinet fashion, but rather in holographic fashion. A holograph is a picture taken with laser light that strikes the holographic plate from two directions. One is simply direct light from the laser, while the other is reflected off the object that you desire an image of. The "interference pattern" caused by the conjunction of these two light sources is stored on the plate, and preserves a 3-dimensional view of the object. Each point on the plate stores a complete picture of the object. The mind, then, stores bits of information not in individual cells that must be shuffled through but as complete packets that can be accessed instantaneously. Each part of the mind is a representation of the whole. Dr. Pibram states:

"All the information is there, from a slightly different window or viewpoint. Nonetheless, each part represents the whole, and that, of course, is Godlike, isn't it?"

Pibram let that idea sink in as well, as our minds raced to make connections. We thought about all the people we had talked to whose experiences with various cults, therapies, and drugs had given them overwhelming sensations of oneness with the universe or of stepping into other dimensions of reality in which they saw the world "through a different window." ²⁷

Conway and Siegleman integrated this theory with their own communication framework and concluded that "information alone... could have the power to shape and alter human awareness and personality." ²⁸ So long as the cults can

manage what information their members or recruits are receiving through their senses, they can mold those people.

Marjoe Gortner added strength to the theory that information alone can cause sudden personality change. Marjoe became an ordained minister in 1948 at the age of four,²⁹ and was a widely successful pentecostal evangelist, saving souls and healing bodies. Marjoe had been trained by his parents almost from birth to perform his role for the best results. He quit the circuit in his teens in disgust at the deception he was performing. He believes his ability to evoke frenzy in a crowd, to scare people into being "saved," or to heal is all due to the rhetorical and manipulative skills he learned. "It's the same whether you're a preacher, a lawyer, or a salesman," he told us. "You start off with a person's thought processes and then gradually sway him around to another way of thinking in a very short time."³⁰ "Marjoe demonstrated how words alone, artfully manipulated, may be used to influence groups and individuals, even to the point of evoking the overwhelming emotional response of being 'saved'.³¹"

The second scientific theory considered is the "catastrophe theory" developed by the French mathematician Rene' Thom. "Several scientists cautioned us that it was a highly technical and controversial innovation."³² Others, however, are applying it, such as Dr. Christopher Zeeman, who used it to design a successful program to rehabilitate anorexics.³³ Basically, catastrophe theory is described as a gradual buildup of pressure or energy between opposing forces, and a sudden, drastic break, or "catastrophe", that greatly alters what was under pressure.³⁴ This is applied to a cult member in this way; the inductee is constantly pressured to change and conform to the cult ideal until finally the inductee gives in and changes to a new personality. The change does not have to be sudden to fit into this theory. "Many cult members, in fact, talk of a gradual descent into their cult state of mind. During deprogramming as well, some cult members re-emerge in a smooth progression rather than a sudden

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snap."

From these theories and their previous research, the authors conclude that cult members are suffering from "information disease," defined as "an alteration through experience of a person's fundamental information-processing capacities." ³⁶ There are three distinct types of information disease:

1) The Sustained Altered State. This is a "state of narrowed or reduced awareness" ³⁷ which is "the first stage in the reorganization of personality." ³⁸ This state is what the new cult member may enter as a result of his sudden personality change, and it is at this time that the cults seek to remold the new member:

One of the most important factors in creating and maintaining this sustained altered state is the severing of the cult member's personal relationships outside the closed world of the cult. By cutting off contacts with parents, friends, and other social connections, the cult strips the convert of his most vital sources of information, an individual may easily be remade by the cult in their own tightly controlled image. Then, once firmly established, this new state of mind becomes self-sustaining. ³⁹

2) The Delusional Phase. The person in this state cannot distinguish between reality and fantasy. The experiences of Karla Kraus while she was in Scientology were used as an example of this phase. During her auditing sessions, which are used to erase personal problems, she described a regression to a prenatal experience where she heard her mother say, "I don't want babies." ⁴⁰ Howard Davenport, an ex-Scientologist, claimed that fantasy was a natural part of the teachings of the church: "People would remember experiences on other planets, or marriages from 3 or 4 lifetimes ago... They'd talk about people from Xerkeson who flew down to earth in doll-bodies... when you use the techniques, finally you start seeing these things, too." ⁴¹

3) Not Thinking. "In America today, aware, intelligent individuals of all ages are being persuaded to stop thinking voluntarily." ⁴² This type of infor-

mation disease arises from meditation and chanting techniques taught by groups such as Transcendental Meditation and Hare Krishna. This seems to be the hardest of the three to recover from. Some examples:

A former Hare Krishna devotee; "The chanting puts your mind on hold."⁴³

"It took me a long time to get back to using my mind."

It took me 6 months to get back to studying."⁴⁴

A former Divine Light Mission premie; "I found myself becoming increasingly dependent on other people's judgement."⁴⁵

"It took this former Divine Light Missionary months to rebuild his capacity of thought."⁴⁶

A recent EST graduate; "'Thinking is the enemy,' he said flatly. 'Thinking is absolutely the enemy to me because it is a barrier to experience.'"⁴⁷

Information disease can eventually lead to total breakdown. For example, an ex-Hare Krishna explained how some members in his group slowly deteriorated to the point that they could no longer manage to get through their daily chanting. "they would become slower, and we couldn't get them to work or do anything. They were basket cases."⁴⁸

And yet, sudden personality change can occur simply from the pressures and other experiences of daily life at home and at work. Some small thing may set off a "drastic reaction" in a man, and he may "undergo a complete and inexplicable transformation of lifestyle and personality." "A housewife may do likewise, sinking into depression, running away from home, or timidly embarking on a personal search for a higher level of existence."⁴⁹ Other forces threaten our mental abilities: "television also may be a potent neutralizing force of human thought and feeling."⁵⁰ There is even the possibility that "America as a nation may be snapping collectively, for despite the ominous statistics and dire pre-

dictions, many Americans now seem incapable of long-range thinking and planning." 51

All is not lost, however, since "it remains an impossible task to turn a human being into a robot," ⁵² and even if someone falls into a destructive cult, "there is always the possibility that they will snap out of it." ⁵³ The scientific field could help out by conducting research "aimed at providing the American people with detailed criteria that would go beyond the scope of what we have been able to present here for distinguishing between a valid religion and a cult and between a sound mental health therapy and a potentially dangerous form of physical and emotional abuse." And legislation could be passed declaring that "no individual or organization may, by means of physical stress or any subtle or covert techniques, impair, make captive, or destroy an individual's freedom of thought." ⁵⁴

CRITICISM

I find a few faults with this book. First, they never give any consideration to opposing viewpoints to their theories. Secondly, the idea of snapping should have been simply a side issue to this work, since they never developed the idea, and it seems that it is not important to their conclusions on information disease. Thirdly, they use two new theories to support their new theory, which is a tenuous task at best. Finally, I think they stretched their imaginations a bit when they suggested that the entire nation is "snapping collectively," and also that "As we come to better understand the natural power of our human communication abilities, it is very likely that the psychic skills formerly viewed as parlor tricks and miracles will become readily available to us all." ⁵⁵

STRANGE GODS

Dr. David G. Bromley and Dr. Anson D. Shupe, Jr. both professors of sociology, spent six years in research before writing Strange Gods: The Great American Cult Scare.⁵⁶ Almost immediately the authors assert in italics that "There is no mysterious brainwashing process used to trap and enslave millions of young Americans," and "there is no bona fide mental health therapy called deprogramming that works as its practitioners and promoters claim."⁵⁷

They begin by pointing out that religions which are respected and considered orthodox today were violently persecuted in their early stages of growth in this country. The Mennonites, Shakers, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and even Roman Catholics, have been persecuted and maligned for many years by neighbor and government alike. The Catholics, so well accepted today that it is a shock when someone speaks out against them, in the early 1800's were considered unpatriotic, deceptive, doctrinally corrupt, sexually perverted, politically subversive, and financially exploitive.⁵⁸ "Escaped" nuns wrote and spoke about the true inner workings of the church (although two of the most famous cases turned out to have never really been nuns).⁵⁹ Anti-Catholic groups were formed, and Protestant preachers "warned their parishoners of the spiritual dangers posed by the new religions and tried to discredit their teachings."⁶⁰

In essence, then, what is happening to the new religious movements of today is just what happened in the beginnings of today's "legitimate" religious groups. So either the anti-group teachings were found to be false, the group altered its unacceptable practices, or the teachings of the group became socially acceptable or at least tolerated. We must now ask whether the controversy stirred up by today's groups is a similar phenomenon, to which the authors state; "much of the controversy surrounding new religions is really based on a hoax, a mythology of misinformation. The purpose of this book is to document that claim. We repeat our view: if we are to grasp the real meaning

of the present controversy, it will be more helpful to view it in terms of conflicts of interest rather than as a conspiratorial plot against Christianity, America, or innocent youth."⁶¹

Bromley and Shupe selected six new religious movements generally considered to be cults (a term they dislike because of its ambiguity) to use as examples. These are the Children of God, the Unification Church (the Moonies), Hare Krishna, the Divine Light Mission, Scientology, and the People's Temple.⁶² Each is shown to be diverse from the others in size of membership, strength, lifestyle, doctrine, organization, history, and recruitment techniques. The number of members in the U.S. ranges from a few hundred in the children of God and the Divine Light Mission,⁶⁴ to "several tens of thousands"⁶⁵ in Scientology. The differences of these groups should serve to demonstrate that "any decision by reasonable people as to how to react to the new religions must take into account the facts that these groups are not the same in how they live, or in what they believe, or in what they have set out to accomplish."⁶⁶ The only reason the groups have been lumped together is that they have "unconventional attitudes and practices"⁶⁷ and because those who do the lumping "do not wish to complicate the issue by recognizing the important differences."⁶⁸

Building on the idea that the problems which arise from cult practices are "conflicts of interest", three institutions that are in conflict with them are named: government,⁶⁹ church, and family. Of these three groups with an interest in opposing cults, "family members, primarily parents, form the core of what has come to be called the anticult movement."⁷⁰ The fears that these groups hold are not caused just by the conjurings of sensationalists. The Hare Krishnas in 1980 were discovered to be storing large quantities of rifles and shotguns,⁷¹ although this is certainly not a practice unique to religious cults. Congressman Leo Ryan was brutally murdered by some of the heavily-armed members of Jonestown, Guyana.⁷² A group called Synanon put a rattlesnake in the mailbox of one of their enemies, almost killing him.⁷³ The Church of Sci-

entology, in a drive dubbed "Operation Freakout," began an attack on Paulette Cooper, who wrote a book critical of the church. The goal was to get her "incarcerated in a mental institution or jail or at least hit her so hard that she drops her attacks."⁷⁴ In another area of intrigue, "Eleven members of Scientology were brought to trial in Washington, D.C., and nine, including Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard's wife, Mary Sue, were convicted of charges stemming from the infiltration of federal offices and the pilfering of government documents."⁷⁵

Established churches have three areas of contention with cults: "(1) competition for youth, (2) violation of traditional church-state boundaries, (3) 'heretical' theology."⁷⁶ The last is the most important, since other contrary beliefs "could influence the loyalty of church members and the authority of clergy."⁷⁷

It is the families that are the most directly effected by the cults, and not surprisingly it is the families of cult members that are the most active opponents to the cults. The conflict between parent and offspring is caused because:

Young adults have left the paths that would lead them eventually to conventional careers and families, choosing instead bizarre groups that their families see as pure waste. The resulting conflict and misunderstanding between generations is a classic illustration of a clash of interests in which there probably is no right or wrong. There is, however, passionate disagreement and at times even hatred- but of a kind that can only occur between people who have loved, and in most cases still love, one another very deeply.⁷⁸

The convert is excited about his new surroundings, goals, and relationships, and zealously delves into his new lifestyle, while at the same time the parents are shocked and dismayed at the sudden change of personality they see. They see this as a threat to the family in two ways: "(1) undermining parents' efforts to prepare their children for future careers and marriages and (2) undermining parental authority and family loyalty."⁷⁹ Parents feel that they

have "lost" their son or daughter to the cult. The parents certainly have a legitimate reason for concern, but "the converts are quite correct in their contention that they are adults, however inexperienced in long-range decision-making, and therefore possess the right to chart their own courses in life."⁸⁰

But are these people making the decision to join freely, or are they "brainwashed" into it? The word "brainwashing" came from the Chinese re-education camps of the 1940's and 1950's. The Communists took advantage of their legitimate discovery that it is easier to change people by altering their social group than to change them individually.⁸¹ This is also what not only Communists, but also the cults, military academies, convents and monasteries do. This didn't seem to work too well for the Communists; "of over 3500 American POW's captured during the Korean War only about 50 ever made procommunist statements and only about 25 refused to be repatriated when the war ended."⁸² This brainwashing, "which requires imprisonment and a high degree of coercion,"⁸³ is generally ineffective on individuals. Thought reform, which works through social pressures, requires voluntary participation and is more common.

The anti-cultists claim that the cults use deceptive recruiting techniques that misrepresent what the effects of joining will be. Of the six groups under consideration, five are generally straightforward about who they are when recruiting. The Hare Krishnas, for example, are often in public with their shaved heads and flowing robes,⁸⁴ and certainly they wouldn't be mistaken for Baptists. "The Moonies... have usually been singled out as the representatives of the deceptive cult."⁸⁵ This is basically because of the practices of the Oakland, California wing, which do indeed hide their association with the Moonies (interestingly, the Oakland group is the most successful in recruiting).⁸⁶ So only one small portion of one of the six groups actually uses deception. It is true that these groups are not completely open about what sacrifices must be made, but "religious conversion cannot be handled like purchasing a washer and

dryer, complete with limited warranties for parts and labor and money-back guarantee." ⁸⁷

Concerning mind-control techniques, anti-cultists attempt to show a parallel between what happened with Chinese prisoners and the cult recruit by claiming that there exists "psychological coercion or subtle group pressure equivalent to physical restraint as the force prohibiting young adults from simply walking away from religious indoctrination sessions." ⁸⁸ The evidence for such practices unique in religion to the cults is hard to find (even Billy Graham uses deception ⁸⁹). But concerning "more ruthless manipulation," "researchers have found processes similar to what Lifton termed thought reform." ⁹⁰ "But new religions do not want to produce robots or zombies. Rather, they want members with newly committed view-points, values, and preferences." ⁹¹

The deception and mind-control techniques of the groups don't appear to be that successful. The Moonies Oakland wing, which is considered to be the most adept at these practices, had poor results: "our research... revealed that about one person in a hundred approached... made it as far as the weekend retreat where intensive indoctrination efforts resembling thought reform were made." "Of those who went through the... weekend activities, only about half stayed for the week-long seminar that generally led to membership." ⁹² This works out to one half of one percent of all people contacted. Of those who do join the cults, there is a high turnover rate, and this is recognized enough in the Hare Krishna group that they have "a six-month preconversion probationary period now mandatory for those interested in joining." ⁹³

In looking at the recruiting methods of the Oakland wing of the Unification church, the techniques appear to be sociologically sophisticated tools with proven potency. The first is the "hook." "Hooks are the 'angles' or 'openings' that attract customers, convince patients to discuss their problems frankly, or interest voters in a political platform." ⁹⁴ The Oakland group seeks the proper "hook" for each potential convert by engaging in probing but friendly conversa-

tion. "These hooks are discovered and cultivated deliberately to build rapport and break down suspicions."⁹⁵

Second is the "plant." Plants appear to be ordinary members of an audience but in reality are working for a speaker."⁹⁶ The plant's job is to show great enthusiasm for the speaker and the product, thereby encouraging others to be more open. at the Oakland lectures guests have "no idea how many of the other young adults milling around the center before and after dinner are members," but the general ratio is at least one member per guest.⁹⁷ Quite a few plants.

The third recruiting technique is "love-bombing." "love-bombing means showing a person with flattery, attention, kindness, and expression of concern and love." "It is this feeling of being smothered with affection and kindness that produces in some guests a feeling that what the group has to offer is unique and valuable."⁹⁸

I would like to interject a fourth technique described but not pointed out by the authors. This is environmental control. After the first visit to the Oakland center, guests are invited to a weekend retreat at a farm in Booneville. Here the guest is plunged into a fast-paced, group-oriented schedule that he has no control over. "The individual is suddenly involved with the group on a twenty-four-hour basis, privacy disappears, and even acts normally considered private become group-supervised."⁹⁹ "All the familial elements of thought reform... are present in this indoctrination setting."¹⁰⁰

Despite this last statement, the authors conclude: "Mind control is more in the mind of the perceiver than some individual, identifiable practice."¹⁰¹

After a cult makes a convert, how does it keep him in? Five of the six groups are communal, which again allows for environmental control:

Members of such groups often are taught that leaving the group will result in their spiritual (and sometimes physical) death. To the extent that members really believe that the group possesses ultimate truth and power (and this varies just as degree of belief in

conventional churches does), they may be afraid to leave. Cutting off ties with outsiders may create feelings of vulnerability and dependence. Members who have openly denounced and rejected friends and family may feel compelled to stay. The longer individuals remain in a communally organized new religion, the more completely their lives are tied to the group. All of their friends, marriage partners, church, careers, and children are intimately tied to the communal group. 102

If what is called brainwashing is just techniques used by good salesmen or normal, socially acceptable groups, then deprogramming is a myth. After all, you can't undo what hasn't been done. There are two types of deprogramming; "coercive deprogramming" involves physically incarcerating the individual, 103 while "reevaluation" is when the cult member voluntarily talks with someone about the pros and cons of the cult. But, "simply talking someone into leaving a group casts serious doubts on claims of unilateral brainwashing and zombie-like obedience," 104 since members are supposedly trained to never doubt their beliefs. It is the coercive deprogramming, then, that must be explained.

Generally, the parents initiate a deprogramming, from fear for their child's (now a legal adult) well-being, and it is this that helps answer why deprogrammings sometimes work. Aside from the fact that some cult members are already growing tired of or disillusioned with their group, and therefore don't take much persuading anyway, 105 deprogrammings are often times of confrontation and resolution between parents and offspring. "The offspring's new religious membership carries with it an embarrassing, grating stigma, or shame, that is scarcely bearable but which can be mercifully erased by claiming that their children are brainwashed." 106 The son or daughter could not have voluntarily joined such a "strange" religion unless she herself was "strange." Therefore, she is in the group involuntarily. During a deprogramming the parents are almost always present. Emotions are high and strained on both sides, and 107 "latent family problems... come out in the open."

It is a classic example of "catharsis": the strains, gripes, and concerns

of both sides are aired, perhaps for the first time ever. When the air is cleared, the relief felt by everyone can set up the same conditions for dialogue as a reevaluation does. It is for this same reason that ex-members speak out against their former group. "After the reconciliation of the family, therefore, pressure on a young person to reinforce the parents for what they did is strong."¹⁰⁸ So the ex-member publicly declares that the group brainwashed him.

"Deprogrammers are self-serving illegal, and fundamentally immoral."¹⁰⁹ Since there is no such thing as brainwashing, the service deprogrammers offer is simple quackery: "Modern deprogrammers remind us of renegade doctors and midwives running backroom abortion clinics before such operations became legal..."¹¹⁰

In essence, cults aren't that bad, they're just different in the same way acceptable religions of today once were. "Most Americans seem unlikely to be duped by the new religions" anyway.¹¹¹ Besides, some people even benefit from cult membership: a cult can take people "who are not visibly gifted and instill or bring out in them abilities they did not know they had."¹¹² Cult membership¹¹³ has gotten many people off drugs and increased religious commitment. Also, the general trend for cults that survive into a second generation is for them to mellow out their extreme practices and doctrines.¹¹⁴

CRITICISM

I have a few remarks to make about this book. First, the authors seem to ignore the detrimental teachings of some of the cults. Whether a person is in voluntarily or not, if violence, self-immolation, and other harmful doctrines are taught, then membership is certainly detrimental. Secondly, it is a sweeping statement to say that ex-cult members say they were brainwashed simply to avoid having to say they made a mistake. Since people are generally young when they join these groups, it could easily be passed off as naivete, or

ex-members could even claim to be wiser in the ways of social interaction from their experiences, rather than timidly hiding behind mind control to avoid responsibility. Finally, the authors generalize deprogrammers into being all creeps and swindlers. As in any profession, there are good and bad deprogrammers, and the fact that deprogrammers get the bulk of their jobs from word-of-mouth from happy customers would tend to indicate that the bad ones would eventually fall out of favor.

SUMMARY OF BOTH POSITIONS

I will show here a short summary of the opposing viewpoints on whether today's cults use brainwashing on their members and recruits, and whether the cults are dangerous.

SNAPPING

1. There is a process known as brainwashing (or mind control, or thought reform).
2. Cults use brainwashing techniques on recruits and members.
3. Deprogramming is a successful process used to release a cult member from his or her brainwashed state of mind.
4. Cults are dangerous and deceptive groups that seek members in order to exploit them.
5. Cults do use manipulative techniques.

STRANGE GODS

1. There is no such thing as brainwashing.
2. Cults utilize only techniques used by Christian evangelists and salesmen, not brainwashing.
3. Deprogramming is a phony practice that sometimes manages to produce results by causing a resolution of conflict between parent and child.
4. Cults are considered dangerous simply because they are unorthodox and small, and therefore vulnerable.
5. Cults do use manipulative techniques.

Keep in mind that the cult issue is far from being black and white, and there are many variations of opinion from both sides of this topic. There is a clear distinction noticeable in the conclusions of different social scientists as well as members and ex-members along these lines. Few fall in between.

I will now review other scholarly research done on brainwashing and cults.

PART 2

RESEARCH FROM THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

CHINESE PRISONS AND CULTS

Robert J. Lifton's Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism,¹ is used by deprogrammers and anti-cultists to demonstrate how cults use coercion and thought reform techniques on their members. This, and the striking similarities found in the book with practices and techniques that anti-cultists and social scientists claim the cults use, make it worthwhile to take a brief look at this study.

The book contains research done in the 1950's. Twenty-five westerners² who had been held in Chinese re-education camps were interviewed by Dr. Lifton to learn the methods and effects of Chinese thought reform (or brainwashing) methods. The experiences of several subjects are covered in detail, and then an analysis is given. I will be pointing out areas of similarity between Lifton's findings and alleged processes used in the cults, rather than giving a complete review of the book. I should say ahead of time that there is an obvious difference between the experiences of Lifton's subjects and cult members; his subjects went through their ordeals entirely involuntarily, or at least were given the alternative of death, while cult members had the chance to decline involvement with their group.

The basic strategy of Chinese thought reform is milieu or environmental control. If an individual is kept in a completely controlled environment, the individual will be influenced by his milieu. "This penetration by the psychological forces of the environment into the inner emotions of the individual person is perhaps the outstanding psychiatric fact of thought reform."³ But, "such milieu control never succeeds in becoming absolute,"⁴ so the task of the reformer is to make this control as air-tight as possible. Contact with the outside world is prohibited or even made impossible, since "the one-sided visions of thought reform are always threatened by the world without."⁵

To keep their inmates from considering ideas outside the created milieu, the reformers elevated their views and denegated everything else. The refor-

mers apparently did indeed believe that their view was the only correct one; "At the center of this self-justification is their assumption of omniscience, their conviction that reality is their exclusive possession."⁶ The inmate "is called upon to make an absolute polarization of the real (the prevailing ideology) and the unreal (everything else)."⁷ The person is told to renounce his past,⁸ is forbidden to discuss any doubts he may have,⁹ and is made to feel guilty if he thinks "wrong" thoughts or performs "wrong" actions.¹⁰

After milieu control comes "extensive personal manipulation."¹¹ This manipulation "seeks to provoke specific patterns of behavior and emotion in such a way that these will appear to have arisen spontaneously from within the environment," or, in other words, "planned spontaneity."¹² The inmate is asked to trust the reformers and go along with their ways, but when this is not successful:

The individual then responds to the manipulation through what I shall call the psychology of the pawn. Feeling himself unable to escape from forces more powerful than himself, he subordinates everything to adapting himself to them. He becomes sensitive to all kinds of cues, expert at anticipating environmental pressures, and skillful in riding them in such a way that his psychological energies merge with the tide rather than turn painfully against himself. This requires that he participate actively in the manipulation of others, as well as in the endless round of betrayals and self-betrayals which are required.¹³

This manipulation of others is justified because the purity of the ideology is above any other, and so "anything done to anyone in the name of this purity is ultimately moral."¹⁴

Language in the milieu is simplified and rid of controversy or ambiguity. "The most far-reaching and complex of human problems are compressed into brief, highly reductive, definitive-sounding phrases, easily memorized and easily expressed."¹⁵ This is done to the extreme in the re-education camps, causing one subject to remark, "'you feel chained.' Actually, not everyone exposed feels chained, but in effect everyone is profoundly confined by these verbal

fetters."¹⁶ The effect of this restriction of language is that the person's imagination "becomes increasingly dissociated from his actual life experiences and may even tend to atrophy from disuse."¹⁷

When inmates were released from their re-education, "all prisoners experienced profound struggles about their integrity, their ability to trust, and their search for wholeness."¹⁸ The effects of their incarceration were naturally profound. Some became avid anti-Communists, preaching against the tyranny they were influenced by. Others became "apparent" converts, but these had "unusually great susceptibility to guilt."¹⁹ Most simply sought to adjust to their lives outside a controlled milieu. Generally, then, most of the subjects were not converted to their reformers' doctrines, and once out of their restricted environment they sought to reintegrate themselves in a world they were taught was evil.

Another worthwhile section of this work is a summary of conversion methods. Dr. Lifton lists four general approaches to changing people: coercion, exhortation, therapy, and realization.²⁰ All four were used by the Chinese. Individually, they are used by many legitimate groups, including religions. 1.) Coercion demands that the person change, or else dire consequences may occur. This is simply a bald use of fear tactics. 2.) Exhortation seeks converts by stating, "you should change - if you are a moral man - and become what we (in the name of a higher moral authority) tell you to become."²¹ Shame and guilt, and the desire to improve oneself are the motivating forces behind this method. 3.) Therapy suggests that the person needs to become physically and emotionally healthier, and that you can change "if you are willing to follow my (or our) method and guidance."²² Thought reformers using this method put themselves in the role of "social physician." 4.) Realization uses the message that you can reach your full potential "if you are willing to confront yourself with ideas and approaches which challenge your present ways of knowing and acting."²³ This approach is the most difficult to maintain, since there is really no

pressure placed on the individual.

So far, we have looked at what the "seller" of the cult has been doing. We need now to consider what is going on with the "buyer", the potential convert. Why is he interested in and susceptible to the movement? How much of a role does he actually play in the conversion process? Are there certain patterns to the type of people that become converts? I will now review research on conversion to better understand what is happening with the potential convert.

CONVERSION

We can get a standard view of conversion from A.D. Nock's study of pre-Christian and early Christian conversions. Nock defines conversion as;

The reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right. It is seen at its fullest in the positive response of a man to the choice set before him by the prophetic religions.²⁴

By the term prophet we mean a man who experiences a sudden and profound dissatisfaction with things as they are, is fired with a new idea, and launches out on a new path in a sincere conviction that he has been led by something external and objective.²⁵

The old established religions generally demand little from the member and are less profound to an individual who has grown up in its traditions.²⁶ The prophet demands swift decision on subjects of ultimate importance for the individual as well as mankind. Some who hear the prophet "are prepared to stake all on the truth and fundamental importance of his preaching."²⁷ Some of these converts gain the zeal of the prophet and seek to convert others, and it is from these beginnings that a new religion is born.

The prophet manages to convert people by utilizing religious ideas that are acceptable at that time, and molding something new out of them. "The original-

ity of a prophet lies commonly in his ability to fuse into a white heat combustible material which is there, to express and to appear to meet the half-formed prayers of some at least of his contemporaries."²⁸ He is fulfilling needs already present in people.

In the chapter entitled "The Appeal of These Cults", I see four points that influenced people toward conversion to a prophetic religion. First is the breaking of "old ties and associations,"²⁹ caused by political and military intrusions. Secondly, "a vast uncertainty had come into men's lives"³⁰ which caused them to seek security in some form or other. Third is the desire to become a better person, or "to become possessed of a nature like god."³¹ Finally, curiosity leads men to become seekers, instilling "an eagerness to penetrate the mysteries of the universe."³²

Although this study was based on evidence from thousands of years ago, the model seems quite apt for our time as well. Many people today fit this description, and certainly if they came across a prophet who was fusing "into a white heat" their own "combustible material," they would be ripe for conversion.

I will now review modern research on conversion.

THE LOFLAND-STARK MODEL

It seems that most, if not all, of the recent research on conversion has been done from studies of the new religious movements. The most widely used model of conversion today is from the Lofland-Stark study (1965)³³ of members of the Unification church. James T. Richardson and Mary Stewart note that this interest in the new religious movements is caused by the modern pattern of large numbers of people changing their allegiance from one group to another, and often to several groups per lifetime. "Traditionally, conversion has been viewed as something that happens once in a lifetime," but "such a view of conversion has been made problematic by the events of the past few years."³⁴ There is, unfortunately, an "inadequacy of available conversion or commitment

models,"³⁵ but "the most potentially valuable model" is that of Lofland and Stark.

In the Lofland-Stark study, conversion is defined as "when a person gives up one such perspective or ordered view of the world for another."³⁶ There is "verbal" conversion, which is a verbal affirmation of the group's teachings, and there is "total" conversion, which exhibits commitment through deeds as well as words. There are seven factors that lead to conversion. "All seven factors seem necessary for conversion, and together they appear to be sufficient conditions."³⁷ These seven are divided into "predisposing conditions," those attributes of people before contact with the group, and "situational contingencies" which result from direct contact with the group.

1.) Tension: This predisposing condition is the felt discrepancy between the actual circumstances a person finds himself in and the desired state of affairs. Tension "creates some disposition to act,"³⁸ and of course there are many courses of action to choose from. The converts studied generally had no more tension than the average person would, however.

2.) Type of Problem-solving Perspective: There are generally three types of solution available; psychiatric, political, and religious. "All pre-converts were surprisingly uninformed about conventional psychiatric and political perspectives for defining their problems,"³⁹ and thus leaned toward a religious perspective. None of the subjects had successfully resolved their difficulties.

3.) Seekership:

All pre-converts found conventional religious institutions inadequate as a source of solutions. Subsequently, each came to define himself as a religious seeker, a person searching for some satisfactory system of religious meaning to interpret and resolve his discontent.⁴⁰

4.) The Turning Point: This is the first of the situational factors. "Shortly before, and concurrently with, their encounter with the D.P. [i.e., the Unification church], all pre-converts had reached or were about to reach what they perceived as a 'turning-point' in their lives."⁴¹ This was such things as a

move to a strange town, quitting school, or sudden illness. These were important times because they "increased the convert's awareness of and desire to take some action about his problems, at the same time giving him a new opportunity to do so."⁴²

5.) Cult Affective Bonds: There must be an affective bond between the potential convert and a group member for conversion to take place. Often the convert accepted the friendship and bond with the group before intellectually consenting to the doctrines. Lofland and Stark note that their subjects had often known their contact prior to his conversion.

6.) Extra-Cult Affective Bonds: Most converts had no "external affiliations close enough to permit informal control over beliefs."⁴³ Of those that did, there was "intense emotional strain" in deciding which affiliation to maintain when they were in opposition to one another.

7.) Intensive Interaction: This step separates "verbal" converts from "total" converts. The basic topic of discussion among "total" converts between themselves and "verbal" converts was "the necessity of supporting the cause in every way,"⁴⁴ and the "verbal" converts were constantly pressured to move into the group commune. In the communal setting it was easier to support those who might begin to waver in their faith, as well as to maintain the group's goals in prominence.

Lofland and Stark do not claim that this model is applicable to all groups where conversion occurs, but they do claim their conclusions are general enough "to provide a reasonable starting point for the study of conversion to other types of groups and perspectives."⁴⁵

CONVERSION MOTIFS

CHART 1
CONVERSION MOTIFS

		Conversion Motifs					
		1. Intellectual	2. Mystical	3. Experimental	4. Affectional	5. Revivalist	6. Coercive
Major Variations	1. Degree of Social Pressure	low or none	none or little	low	medium	high	high
	2. Temporal Duration	medium	short	long	long	short	long
	3. Level of Affective Arousal	medium	high	low	medium	high	high
	4. Affective Content	illumination	awe, love, fear	curiosity	affection	love (& fear)	fear (& love)
	5. Belief-Participation Sequence	belief-participation	belief-participation	participation-belief	participation-belief	participation-belief	participation-belief

John Lofland (of the Lofland-Stark team) and Norman Skovod in their paper, "Conversion Motifs," see several types of conversion motifs working in the conversions of different people. The motif experience is defined as, "those aspects of a conversion which are most memorable and orienting to the person 'doing' or 'undergoing' personal transformation."⁴⁶ The definition for conversion is taken from Richard Travisano (1970:594) as, "a radical reorganization of identity, meaning, life."

There are six broad types of conversion motifs (although the authors don't mention the possibility of overlap between types, I assume that there is a possibility of this at least). These are:

1.) Intellectual: This is the individual study of a group without any contact with or pressure from the group itself. The person reads books, watches TV programs, listens to cassettes, etc., until he is convinced that the group is compatible with his criteria. "A reasonably high level of belief occurs prior to actual participation"⁴⁷ in the group. This motif, while "as yet relatively uncommon,"⁴⁸ is probably on the increase due to easier access of information of groups apart from their physical locations.

- 2.) Mystical: The main model for this is St. Paul's sudden conversion on the road to Damascus in Acts chapter 9. This is a dramatic, sudden experience of such intensity that it "cannot be expressed in logical and coherent terms."⁴⁹ This experience is wrought upon the subject not by him, and causes him to convert to whatever the experience directs him to. In this motif, "there is little or no social pressure, the convert is even likely alone at the time of the actual event,"⁵⁰ while the emotional level is extremely high.
- 3.) Experimental: Some people join a group in order to try it out before deciding to commit to it. This type of conversion occurs gradually and with the person's full knowledge of the transformation taking place. This method "resembles the ubiquitous manner in which people learn new social roles and are more ordinarily assimilated into groups."⁵¹ Intense involvement with the group is the culminating factor in this type of conversion.
- 4.) Affectional: This motif derives from the Lofland-Stark conversion model, wherein "cult-affective bonds" between a group member and the potential convert are the motivating factors to conversion: "personal attachments or strong liking for practicing believers is central to the conversion process."⁵² Intellectual consideration is de-emphasized.
- 5.) Revivalist: This method's effectiveness has been played down in recent literature, but "conversion whose central feature consists of profound experiences which occur within the context of an emotionally aroused crowd is far from absent in most societies throughout the world."⁵³ While this type of conversion seems to be on the decline, "crowds can be brought to ecstatic arousals having a critically transforming effect on some people."⁵⁴
- 6.) Coercive: This is "brainwashing." It "takes place only in extremely rare special circumstances."⁵⁵ Brainwashing involves "(1) the compulsion of an individual (2) sincerely to confess guilt or embrace an ideological system."⁵⁶ There are seven measures which make up brainwashing: (1) "total control" of the milieu, (2) uncertainty, (3) "isolation from the outside world," (4) mental

and physical torture, (5) "physical debilitation and exhaustion," (6) "personal humiliation," and (7) "certainty of the captive's guilt" on the part of the captors.⁵⁷

This type of conversion has two serious drawbacks; "first, if allowed to return to a more or less normal society, subjects 'back slide',"⁵⁸ and second, it takes an "inordinate amount" of resources and manpower to accomplish.

These motifs are not concrete: "we suspect conversion motifs differ significantly from one historical epoch to another, across societal boundaries, and even across subcultures within a single society."⁵⁹

RECRUITMENT IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

This article, "Social Networks and Social Movements: A Microstructural Approach to Differential Recruitment",⁶⁰ seeks to demonstrate that different recruiting techniques play a large part in the success or failure of membership drives among social movements. The data used comes from ten previous studies "with quantitative data bearing directly on the recruitment process,"⁶¹ which involved a total of over 1,200 participants, and an examination of the Nicherin Shoshu Buddhist movement (345 sample cases) and Hare Krishna (25 informal interviews) recruitments. Also, a sample of 550 college students were given questionnaires about their experiences with social movements.

Recruiting by the groups was attempted in four different ways; through face-to-face public dissemination (done in public areas), face-to-face private recruiting (door-to-door, or other "private" places), public media (TV, radio, etc.), and private media (phone or mail). These are all basically aimed at strangers. How about the extramovement networks of friends of existing members? "Examination of the movement literature strongly suggests that the network channel is the richest source of movement recruits."⁶² In fact, the average percentage of recruits drawn through social networks in nine of the studies (excluding the Hare Krishna study which will be discussed in a moment) is

84.7%.⁶³ The student sample indicated that 63% of those in a social movement were recruited this way as well. In summary:

Proposition 1: Those outsiders who are linked to one or more movement members through pre-existing extramovement networks will have a greater probability of being contacted and recruited into that particular movement than will those individuals who are outside of members' extramovement networks.⁶⁴

Among this network of contacts, why do some of them join and not others? The studies suggest that "the reason for participating or not participating in movement activities once invited is largely contingent on the extent to which extramovement networks function as countervailing influences."⁶⁵ In other words, those with fewer ties to outside interests, such as a family or membership in other movements, have more time and less distraction to membership. Interestingly, of the student sample that indicated they were sympathizers but not members, when asked why they did not actively participate, "nearly two-thirds indicated that they did not have enough time to participate."⁶⁶ This brings us to:

Proposition 2A: The fewer and the weaker the social ties to alternative networks, the greater the structural availability for movement participation.
 Proposition 2B: The greater the structural availability for participation, the greater the probability of accepting the recruitment "invitation."⁶⁷

Returning to the study of the Hare Krishnas; 97% of members were recruited outside of any social networks, which is almost the opposite of the other studies.⁶⁸ The Hare Krishnas do not maintain extramovement networks, and in fact are discouraged from having them, so this method of recruitment is essentially blocked for them. Thus:

Proposition 3A: Movements requiring exclusive participation by their members in movement activities will attract members primarily from public places rather than from among extramovement interpersonal associations and networks.

Proposition 3B: Movements which do not require exclusive participation by their members in movement activities will attract members primarily from among extramovement interpersonal associations and networks, rather than from public places.⁶⁹

Do these different techniques for recruiting produce different success rates? Yes. In comparing Hare Krishna and Nichiren Shoshu recruiting success (both came to this country at roughly the same time), Hare Krishna has about 4,000 members, while Nichiren Shoshu has around 100,000.⁷⁰ Certainly there are other factors involved, but the evidence indicates a marked difference in success of these recruiting methods.

Proposition 4A: The success of movement recruitment efforts measured by the numbers of outsiders actually recruited, will vary with the extent to which movements are linked to other groups and networks via members' extramovement interpersonal ties, such that:
Proposition 4B: Movements which are linked to other groups and networks will normally grow at a more rapid rate and normally attain a larger membership than will movements which are structurally more isolated and closed.⁷¹

When there is conflict between recruiting goals and organizational structure, "the organizational structure will function as the more important determinant of recruitment patterns."⁷²

COMMENTS ON THESE STUDIES

Each of these studies (except for Lifton) is concerned with what is happening to the recruit. Each suggests that there are certain factors in a person's life that make him more or less susceptible to conversion. This indicates, then, that it is not just the recruiting techniques of the group that are important, but it is also the background of the potential convert that plays a crucial role in whether a person joins the group or not.

This points to who is most susceptible to becoming interested enough to consider joining (the 1/2 percent of those invited who actually attended the first Moonie lecture, for example), but to understand the brainwashing controversy, we must look beyond the point where the interest of the person is captured to see just what it is that makes him decide to join.

"Conversion Motifs" does this. It demonstrates that coercion, or brainwashing, is only one of several types of conversion, and that such a conversion is not at a very deep level, since leaving the influence of the group usually results in a dropping of its teachings (hence a possible clue to the success of deprogramming).

I am still, however, left with two questions about some claims made by the anti-cultists:

1.) Can a person, say, one who fits Lofland's seven factors and Snow's four propositions, be made, through coercive techniques, ^{to} believe a certain way without that person's knowledge that he was manipulated (as Lofland suggests in "Conversion Motifs")?

2.) Is cult membership dangerous or detrimental?

I will consider the second question next, and will answer the first in the conclusion of this study. I will be reviewing three studies on the effects of cult membership.

CLINICAL PROFILES OF HARE KRISHNA DEVOTEES

This study by Dr. Michael W. Ross is of the 42 members of a Hare Krishna commune in Melbourne, Australia.⁷³ He begins by reviewing previous studies and statements on cults; Dr. J.C. Clark on the one hand declaring that 52% of cult converts are mentally deficient while the other 42% became that way from their cult membership, and on the other hand other authors who found no evidence of psychological disorder.

Dr. Ross administered several standard tests and questionnaires on the members. He gave the results to "blind" assessors who "found no clear evidence of pathology."⁷⁴ He compared those who had been in 1 1/2 years with those who had been 3 years. "The longer the individuals had been in the movement the less anxious they were (Pi scale), the less alienated they felt from their external environment (Sc scale), the less expansive and outgoing they were (this last result is similar to the findings on the 1 1/2 year split)."⁷⁵ Six randomly-selected members were given the Present State Examination, and the result was that "these devotees appeared extremely well adjusted."⁷⁶ In general, then, the findings refute the idea that cult membership is detrimental, although "these findings on Hare Krishna members cannot be generalized to members of other so-called cults."⁷⁷

A CLINICAL STUDY OF FOUR UNIFICATION CHURCH MEMBERS

This study was done with members "who had no obvious emotional disturbances,"⁷⁸ one of whom left the church during the course of this research. Another had been deprogrammed several years before this study.

Each subject was interviewed in several 2-3 hour sessions for a total of 20 or more hours. A battery of psychological tests was also administered. Significant personality trends were discovered among all four subjects, and it is these that the author concentrates on.

All four women felt that their mothers had been unaffectionate toward them,

and had had difficulties in family relationships. "All four women had considerable difficulty in their sexual adjustment, and none had maintained a satisfactory relationship with a man before joining the church."⁷⁹ They saw the strict sexual regulations and Moon's propensity for arranging marriages as positive aspects of the church. Other attributes they shared were the desire to help, unify, or serve people, occult and mystical propensities, and dealing with threatening stimuli by giving benign or cheery responses. Each of these aspects have a corresponding doctrine in Unification theology.

The important point of the study for my research is this: "No subject evidenced psychosis at the time of the clinical interviews or met DSM-111 criteria for specific disorders. None had major affective disorder."⁸⁰ Also, "no record was suggestive of psychosis."

The authors warn that "we cannot say how representative these women are of the Unification church membership or to what extent the feature described would be found in other populations."⁸¹ "These considerations lend support to the view that psychiatrists who deal with a cult member should not merely assume that brainwashing has occurred, but rather they should try to understand what the individual derives from membership."⁸²

UNIFICATION CHURCH ("MOONIE") DROPOUTS: PSYCHOLOGICAL READJUSTMENT AFTER LEAVING A CHARISMATIC RELIGIOUS GROUP

This study⁸³ examines the readjustment into society of 66 ex-Moonies, ten of whom had been deprogrammed. Several tests were administered to determine the subjects' general well-being and current religious outlook.

On the "General Well-Being Schedule... their mean scores now were no different from those of the matched sample from the general population,"⁸⁴ and they also scored higher than church members from a previous study.

Nonetheless, certain problems had been experienced. For example, 36% of the respondents indicated the emergence of "serious emotional problems" at some time after leav-

ing the church; 24% had "sought out professional help for emotional problems" after leaving; and 3% (i.e. two respondents) had been hospitalized for such problems during this interval.⁸⁵

On the scales used to judge "religious commitment and social affiliation," there was "an overall decline in religious commitment,"⁸⁶ 89% felt that they "got some positive things" from membership, and only 53% agreed that "current members should leave the Unification Church."

In conclusion, there were no scars left from church membership, but there is a troublesome time of adjustment: "The patient may also have symptoms such as paranoia, depression, and dissociative phenomena that in another context might reflect enduring pathology. These often abate with time."⁸⁷ In order to help manage this difficult readjustment phase, "social support networks with a clear-cut cognitive framework may be important contributors to individual's psychological health."⁸⁸

COMMENTS ON THE CLINICAL STUDIES

These studies suggest that there is little if any psychological harm from cult membership. The finding that 36% of the ex-members had difficult readjustment periods indicates to me that the cults are training their members in social methods that are not compatible with society at large. This would indicate that the cost of membership in a cult, especially over an extended period of time, may be much higher than a new recruit would suspect, if he later decides to leave the group.

A point that somewhat clouds the accuracy of these studies is the reports of two ex-cult members. The first states that while he was a Hare Krishna member, he stayed at one of their communal farms in West Virginia. "A meeting place for Krishna leaders, from his description, it appears that it may also house members who are among the cult's worst casualties. 'There are people

cracking all the time,' he said. 'Either they become vegetables or crack violently.'" ⁸⁹

The second is an ex-Moonie, who states something similar:

He had worked for three months in a special center whose chief function was to take care of those who had emotionally collapsed. During this interval he "processed" 140 such cases, individuals who were in such a dire state of emotional distress that they could function in only the most menial, routine kind of tasks, received no other assistance for their problems. ⁹⁰

Thus, it could be that, like our society, those who display mental disorders are sent to special places to be looked after. If this is true, then it would be difficult to ascertain how many members of a group are harmed by their membership without access to these special cases.

I conclude, then, that there are an unknown number of cult members who are harmed psychologically by their membership, and that those who decide to leave the group are at a great disadvantage in society at large because of their cult experience, and they must go through a difficult period of readjustment that may take years.

I will conclude this chapter by reviewing two other articles that have interesting perspectives on the issue at hand.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

In "Looking Behind the Scenes in a Religious Cult: Implications for the Study of Conversion", Robert W. Balch studied the UFO cult of Bo and Peep as a participant-observer. ⁹¹ He makes two interesting points from this research.

First, he points out that,

The first step in conversion to cults is learning to act like a convert by outwardly conforming to a narrowly prescribed set of role expectations. Genuine conviction develops later during the course of the typical member's career. Many cult members never became true believers, but their questioning

may be effectively hidden from everyone but their closest associates.⁹²

Those members who had doubts either suppressed them or simply hid them, and played the role of a zealous convert. This poses a problem for researchers because these people "looked tuned in, appeared committed, but were simply playing a role that concealed their real feelings, even from other members of the cult."

Secondly is Balch's solution to this problem of concealed doubters:

This research convinced me that much of the current writing about conversion is misleading because writers don't know enough about the routine features of everyday life in cults. The private reality of life in a religious cult usually remains hidden beneath a public facade of religious fanaticism.⁹³

The lesson is simple: Don't be deceived by appearances. I believe that social scientists need to adopt the model of investigative reporting to discover what cult members say and do when they are not "on-stage" in front of the public or, if possible, even their peers. Only when we can penetrate the wall of secrecy, that normally separates the nature of the psychological and behavioral changes that occur when someone joins a religious cult.⁹⁴

EVIL EYES AND RELIGIOUS CHOICES

This study by Barbara Hargrove⁹⁵ considers the social background of cult members, and suggests that the present-day standards of our society contribute toward making people vulnerable to cult recruiting. She offers two major points about our society as an alternative explanation for conversion.

1.) In times past, society had taught people how to distinguish between "right" and "wrong" religion. But in our secular society, "where religion is not taken seriously, neither is serious attention given to the development of skills in making religious choices."⁹⁶ People without these skills are open prey for religious hucksters.

2.) Our modern notion that religion is a private matter done in one's leisure time also contribute to susceptibility to the cults. Cultists view their religion as the most important thing in the world, and when they seek to instill their world-view on society, "no one takes the claim seriously enough to ask what the public consequences of that doctrine might be."⁹⁷ Those who decide to join the cults have never been taught to "carefully weigh" the consequences of these doctrines. What they saw when they joined was a zealous, caring group, and questions on doctrine or public consequences "were never even considered until group reinforcement had already made the doctrine seem reasonable and the consequences right."⁹⁸ Without any training on how to scrutinize the cults, "they join it out of felt needs, out of hungers which have not been satisfied in their lives outside the group."⁹⁹

Thus, the brainwashing model of conversion is not sufficient because it does not take into account why people are attracted and open to such groups in the first place.

PART 3
3 INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW #1

Interview on 6/30/84 with Pam Hill (not her real name), a high-ranking member of the Unification Church (edited):

Q. What is your educational background?

A. I went through four years of college and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Art, and got a teacher's certificate to teach art. Several years later I went to the Unification Theological Seminary where I took two years and got a certificate in a Master's of Religious Education.

Q. How long have you been in the Unification Church?

A. Twelve years.

Q. What was your previous religious background?

A. Presbyterian.

Q. How did you come to join the [Unification] church... to show whether you were manipulated somehow when you were joining...

A. The spring of my senior year, I began to write letters to religious groups all over America, saying that it was my goal to spend that summer in my religious growth, and that I didn't have any money, but I would like to work for them and study with them. I wrote to all different groups. I received letters back from different ones, mostly applications for seminars. But I received one letter back from a Unification Church member in Washington, D.C., and he began to explain to me a little about the background of the church and some of the theology, which I laughed at, because I didn't believe that Adam and Eve were two real figures in history. So I was trying to plan for my summer ahead of time. Then when my mother came for my graduation she asked me what I was going to do that summer, and I told her what I had wanted to do, and I showed her the responses I had gotten, and I showed her the letter from the Unification Church, and I sort of laughed at some of what it said, but she said every religion has some explanation for why the world is not the way it should be, and maybe they're not meaning that literally. She encouraged me to visit at

least some or another community and see what it was like. I had written back to the Unification church a couple of times and [they] wrote back and forth to me. I said I didn't think it was for me, that they were different than me, and I might feel pressured since they were all into the same thing and I would be the only one who wasn't, and I didn't want to put myself in that situation where I was the only one. He said why didn't I just come and visit, so when I went home that summer, I called him up and said I'd like to come and visit for a couple of days. So they met me at the bus station. I went there, and that night, the first thing I noticed when I got to the center (there were about 150 people there)...I was really amazed and intrigued by the fact that there were so many different types of people there with different backgrounds; obviously people that wouldn't normally get along. There were some lawyers and street people. It was like, how was this so harmonious? The people were very interested in me as a person. That night they had a meeting and I couldn't go to the meeting, and I thought they must have a teaching. I asked the person who invited me, Is there something you all know that I could find out about; do you have some teaching? And he said, well, yes. And I said I'd like to hear it. He said, OK, tomorrow you can hear it. So the next day he went through (he didn't know how to lecture) the book [a slim version of the Divine Principle] and he just page-by-page brought out the main points to me.

There were some mystical experiences that contributed very much to my joining. One was, I had a dream: after the first chapter I rested. I dreamed that I climbed a mountain and the top of the mountain was pure white snow. The feeling was just like heaven. I was completely in awe. Someone was climbing up the mountain I could see with something on his back. He arrived at the top and handed what was on his back to me, and it was a baby. I looked at the baby. I looked at [the man] and he said to me, "So. You're ready to meet God now." And then I woke up. I hadn't believed in God for about four years. Since I

had gone to college I had started to question, and had gotten involved in Marxism.

He went through the whole book. I don't remember so much except the mention of angels. I hadn't ever believed in angels, but as he mentioned angels, I just sort of said, "Angels. Oh, Ok. Angels exist." My mind did that. And I thought, wow, that's funny, you're just accepting it. I had argued with my Catholic friend growing up that... angels didn't exist, but here I was, just accepting it. I was known to be gullible and naive, and I knew it. So when he started to talk about the Messiah is on the earth, I said, OK now, don't get excited. Just be skeptical, and let's investigate this. I said I'm going to be really objective about this, so I said I'd just like to investigate it more. He told me I should pray about whether God existed. "Pray for three days," he said. I decided to try that, and I took the red book and some questions and answers that they studied themselves, and a speech that was given by Rev. Moon. I went home [and] prayed for three days. (These mystical experiences are important in my conversion). The third day I just said, "Heavenly Father," and it was like a wave of love came around me, and I heard my name. I said, "Father." And he said, "Where have you been? It's been so long." I had told God that if you show me that you exist it has to be in such a way that for the rest of my life I could never doubt. I told him that because I didn't trust my own mind, because I had heard about other people who had come to believe through praying for three days. One person it was because in those three days he woke up and lightening flashed, and he felt God. I thought, he really construed that one. He just wanted to believe in God. I have never doubted God since. That [her experience] was so powerful and so real.

Q. That converted you to belief in God. What's the connection with the church?

A. OK. When I went home, I decided I'd read this book three chapters a night.

While I was reading, I was writing questions in the margins. Most of my questions would be answered in the next few pages. Also, I was trying to find contradictions. It seemed to all fit together. It was kind of intellect and heart both were working, and later experience with it proved itself to me. All of a sudden it just hit me, wow! This is not just an idea. If this is put into practice in your life, it works. It's actually true. And then I said, The whole thing is true! I felt like "my cup runneth over." It had just been filling up, and it just reached the brim, and that was it. And I slid off my bed, and got onto the floor, and said, "Heavenly Father, I'm yours from now on. Do what ever you want with me." But it wasn't necessarily join the church. That was my next question.

I said, the bringer of this truth must be the messiah, because the messiah brings the truth, and this is definitely the truth. So I said, what do you want me to do? Do you want me to do my three more months to get my teacher's certificate? Or, should I just go to Washington and join the church? If he's the messiah, then I want to follow him. I really had this big question about my education, because of my parents' values, and I knew how they'd respond if I did not get my certificate. They always impressed on me you can't graduate with something you can't do.

So I went out to the mountains of western Maryland for three days. I practically fasted for three days (I didn't know anything about fasting, but I just was in a hurry to get out there). I took the Bible, the Divine Principle, and the questions and answers. I wanted to make sure I understood this. I found a kind of clearing in the woods, way off from civilization. I finished reading first the Divine Principle, and I answered all the questions. I prayed. I prayed for hours. The answer I received after three days very clearly in a way that to me was very real was that I should just go and join the church. I read the speech that Rev. Moon had given about all the people

that God had called didn't hesitate and dropped everything. And I prayed about it, and how it would make my parents feel. I weighed the pros and cons in my mind, and then as I began to get an answer, sort of from nature: every time I would think, finish your school, you can wait three months, it seemed like everything died down- the wind stopped, the leaves stopped rustling, the birds stopped chirping. And then I would pray on the other side to go to Washington right away, everything would go up, and the leaves seemed to be clapping and the birds started chirping and I said, "Wait a minute!" Is this for real? I went back and forth three times, and it got stronger each time. So I said, alright, that's it. I'm just going to go to Washington. So I went home and told my parents, and they really absolutely could not understand why God couldn't wait, and why God would want me to be a burden on society rather than have a job and do something for society. So I said I'd go to Philadelphia, where I was going to do my student teaching, I will talk to the president of the church who was there at the time, and I'll be ready to do either way. And he told me, why didn't I finish my student teaching and live in the center there? So that's what I did. I didn't have much to do with the center there except eating and sleeping. Those were my first four months. When that was over I really wanted to go back to Washington, because it seemed like the hub of activity, and when I was there it was much more exciting. Anyway, that's how I joined.

Q. They told you right away, then, before your even joined, that Moon was the messiah?

A. Yes. We don't necessarily do that now.

Q. How important were the doctrines of the church to your decision to join?

A. Actually, the doctrines were more important, it seems. The truth is what I was looking for. I didn't think it would lead me into relationships with other people, because I had gotten a little bit into eastern thought. Actually

our church is kind of a social thing. I was very much a loner in the church for a few years. All I cared was making my relationship with God.

Q. What do you think is the main attraction for other people who join the church?

A. A lot of people these days are looking for love. That's sort of more the trend in society. Different years it seems to go in phases. These days a lot of people that are joining are people who one way or another have been starved of love. They're not necessarily in the beginning when they join looking to serve the world, they're more looking to be served. If they don't change that goal at some point within the first few months, they'll leave. We've had quite a few people leave. It's very taxing on everyone asking them to live for God, so less is expected when you first join, but eventually it comes to be expected more and more to share the responsibility.

Q. How do your parents feel now about your membership?

A. It's changed. When I joined the church was unheard of. They've been to a couple of his [Moon's] speeches, my father's been to a week workshop, and I've taught my mother a couple of lectures. They've come from the point of believing everything the media says and totally disagreeing with what I'm doing to believing in me. It doesn't matter what I'm doing, and they're willing to allow me to be me.

Q. What is your view of what people mean by brainwashing?

A. That we are duped, manipulated, we're like a puppet. That we don't make our own decisions or think our own thoughts. We don't have our own opinions about any issue. When they ask us a question we're giving the answer we've been told to give. Whatever Rev. Moon's opinion is, we just put it on. We just don't have our own mind.

Q. How do you think people think you got that way?

A. We met someone on the street who was very nice, and we were brought over

to a house. Some people think our food was drugged. Everyone showed so much love to us that we were just captivated. Through being loved a lot and through being told the beliefs over and over again, we just accepted it.

Q. Have you read very much on this subject? You said you had seen "Ticket to Heaven" [a thinly disguised Moonie's quest from conversion to deprogramming]?

A. I haven't read a lot. I have seen other shows where deprogrammers explain their point of view. I've talked to people about the book Snapping.

Q. Why do you think the idea that Moonies are brainwashed comes up in the first place?

A. That idea originated with the communists in Korea, who arrested Rev. Moon for being a zealous Christian preacher, and started the rumor that he brainwashed, and put that into their media, and that got passed on through the media from Korea to America.

Q. Do you think brainwashing could occur anywhere in the field of religion?

A. Only under a very controlled situation, where people actually are not physically free, and over a long period of time under force and under pressure.

Q. Do you think the zeal of the members toward their faith is what makes people think some religious people are brainwashed?

A. I think that some people think that if you're really religious, and really zealous, you must be brainwashed.

Q. That makes me think of priests and nuns. Isn't what you do similar to them in that a priest is stationed by the higher-ups...

A. Well, nuns have been deprogrammed, too, whose parents didn't want them to be nuns. But I think that's less frequent because it's more accepted by society.

Q. In the book, Strange Gods, they say deprogramming is a [resolution of] a conflict between parents and the church member. Do you see any viability to that?

A. No. If parents and children have a mature relationship where they respect one another's integrity... the majority of the members do not have that kind of conflict with their parents. If you think of the numbers that are in the church, and how many have actually tried to deprogram their children, it's very slight. The people I know whose parents tried to do that have never had a good relationship with their parents. I know I'm close to my parents now, and that's why we've never had that problem.

Q. Does the church have an official position on brainwashing?

A. No.

Q. What do you think deprogramming is?

A. Faith-breaking. I think it's a process of making someone believe that what they had faith in doesn't exist. People who've gotten away from deprogramming have felt that while they were in the situation that the people were trying to brainwash them. My best friend went through it. They didn't feed her for a day and a half or something, and then they gave her licorice. They had the windows boarded and she had no idea whether it was day or night. Being insulting and totally humiliated as a person. If it has an effect, once they get out in the world, there they are again as an individual with choices to make, so then you can't say that they are still brainwashed, because they can always be objective again. In order for brainwashing to stick, it's got to be in a controlled situation, but many people have come back once they got out.

Q. What do you think makes some who have left the group, either voluntarily or through deprogramming, turn against the church?

A. Some of them are asked to, initially to prove that they have been deprogrammed, so that they can be given their freedom. Others may get into it step by step or by writing a book. I think people can have a sense of importance, just like they were idealistic about helping the world in the Unification Church, they may idealistically think they are helping the world by

keeping people out of the church. I think they are guided into it by deprogrammers, at least initially. People who've left the church without being deprogrammed don't fight the church like that.

Q. What do you think upsets parents of members so much that they try deprogramming?

A. I think it's because the parent does not have enough trust in the way he raised his child, and he thinks he has to keep raising his child. His child is now 23, 24, or 30, and he hasn't let go of his responsibility and he has not reached a relationship with the child where he respects that child's rights to make his own decisions, or trusts the decisions that that child will make.

Q. Do you have to sacrifice your individual freedom for the group?

A. You do, but you sacrifice it with understanding that the whole takes pre-eminence over the individual, and the whole serves the individual, and this is a way of experiencing individual fulfillment. When it comes from the whole, it is true fulfillment. But that sacrifice has to be an individual decision.

INTERVIEW #2: AN EX-CULTIST

Interview on July 7, 1984, of Leslie Jones (not her real name), an ex-Sri Chinmoy member who was deprogrammed in May, 1983 after four years of membership. (Edited)

Q. What is your educational background?

A. I have a bachelor's degree from the University of California at Davis in Physical Education, a master's degree in Physical Education from the University of Oregon with a certification as an athletic trainer, and a certification as a P.E. teacher in high school.

Q. What is your religious background?

A. I went to a Presbyterian church until I was about seven, and then we didn't go after that.

Q. Explain what the teachings and basic practices of the Sri Chinmoy group are.

A. It's basically a Hindu philosophy. You're trying to gain oneness with God through meditation and service and devotional love.

Q. What led you to this group in the first place?

A. I thought that if I learned how to meditate I would be able to keep my life together more and it seemed like people were saying that this will get you closer to yourself. They were the first people I went to to try to learn something about it. They also had a big emphasis on sports, which I liked. I just got more and more involved.

Q. How long were you a member?

A. Almost four years.

Q. Did you have a conversion experience in this group, or was it just gradual?

A. Gradual. They just reel you in a little bit at a time, because they don't lay everything out at once. So they just break it to you gently.

Q. So if they told you right off all the things you would have to give up, you probably wouldn't have joined?

A. No.

Q. Do you feel that you were manipulated, then?

A. Yes. My definition of manipulation is when somebody doesn't give you the whole program ahead of time, because you can take all the information at once and make a decision, but if they give this A or B choice, and you keep choosing B, you wind up in a cult. You have to come to meditation at least once a week, so you do that. Now you have to read Sri Chinmoy's books twenty minutes a day. You just keep choosing B, and you wind up this totally devoted slave.

Q. Would you call that brainwashing?

A. Yes.

Q. What is your definition of brainwashing?

A. In the first place, I don't like that word, but most people don't. I usually talk about mind control, and I see it as a real continuum. In any human relationship, human beings all have the same type of mind that functions the same way. At different points in your life, you are more vulnerable to different kinds of pressures. If you smile at someone, you're manipulating them, but it's not harmful to the person, because they don't have to do anything- it's not putting any bind on them. But when you get to a person so that they think that you are helping them when in fact it's really taking something away from them, and they didn't have the choice in the first place to evaluate it. People can give things up on their own, like somebody could choose to be celibate, but when that information is only presented to you after a series of steps where you are already under their control... it's a process. There's no way anybody can say they wanted me for my own good. They wanted me as a resource in that group to work on projects, to bring in new people. They get you to think that it's for your own good, when in fact I really lost a lot from my association with that group. I lost myself. Basically, I wasn't even

the same person at all.

Q. Which of these phrases would best describe brainwashing to you:

- a.) It reduces the ability and capacity of the mind to think normally.
- b.) It restricts what the person thinks about, and therefore what the person does.

A. Both. I think those questions are not an "either, or". I couldn't think normally because in our group and in most groups they restrict where you can get information from. They nullify information coming from most sources outside the group, and when you only get information from one place, that's not any way to make any kind of decision, so that is affecting the ability of your mind. Also, as an aside, I really lost a lot of vocabulary when I was in that group. The groups have very specific ways that they talk, and [there are] words that they use that are "in" words. I used to have a big vocabulary, and it was funny that when I was deprogrammed I started getting all these words back that I hadn't even remembered in years.

When we were in the group, the only thing we were supposed to think about was the guru and God and bliss. We weren't supposed to think. Thinking was denigrated to the point where it was... the act of thinking was not even upheld and so you just kind of go along day to day and do what they tell you to do, and you don't think.

Q. So you were taught specifically not to question the group's teachings?

A. Absolutely. Doubt was the worst thing. He [Sri Chinmoy] called it spiritual poison, and if you doubted, you were poisoning your own true self. You lose the ability to think when you do that, if you can't question something, you can't think about it.

Q. What did you see the benefits of belonging were while you were in?

A. The main thing was that it was going to speed up my ability to become closer with God to the point that I could realize that I wasn't any different from God. The human part of me- there's a lot of companionship, but it's not a real friendship, which you see once you get out, because the Guru told us not

to talk about our problems with other people in the group because it was a negative thing and it would bring them down spiritually. If you can't talk about your problems with somebody, then you're not really their friend.

Q. Did you meet the Guru?

A. Yes.

Q. Were you taught specifically by him?

A. No. He has writings and he talks sometimes at group gatherings. It's not a one-on-one thing.

Q. Now that you are out, do you think that any of the experiences you had while you were in the group were helpful to you?

A. I think I learned a lot about myself, and what happens when I push myself to the limit. That was something he was always stressing. We used to get really tired and stay up late for days on end working on projects for him. The effects of sleep deprivation really helps get you under somebody's control. Your conscious mind doesn't have the ability to screen anything anymore.

There are a lot of things that I've learned about that I think you would learn following any religious path; that you can never give of yourself too much. Traditional spiritual values are still involved, but they're just driven to an absolute extreme where the human being is lost in the pursuit of divinity.

Q. Do you think the group could be beneficial to some people?

A. There are definitely people in that group that are crazy, seriously schizophrenic. I don't know if through the group or what, they've lost their ability to relate to reality, and they're totally insulated by the group. For those people, it's their crutch. I think a lot of people in that group would have committed suicide without it. That kind of group drives you to desperation a lot of times, because you are given this great opportunity (supposedly) to realize God, and you stay in it for years and years and you are still the same. You try harder, and you're just not getting any better at your human weaknesses.

People get very desperate, and they would commit suicide, except that the Guru has explicit instructions that you can't do that, or your karma will be ruined for a million years. There are people that can't live without a very strong framework to support them and guide them, but it doesn't have to be a cult. The army is like that.

Q. So you would say for normal people, it's not good?

A. No. I lost so much. I'm so delighted to be myself again. It's hard for me to express how grateful I am to my parents for getting me out. When I was in the cult, I never sewed, and that's a big hobby of mine. I'm a dancer; I never danced. I rarely got to play sports, like once a year. The emphasis is on running to the exclusion almost of everything else. I had a career, which I lost. The guru told me to quit because I was working with handicapped children and he said these are people who have had extremely bad karma in the past or some sort of demon has invaded their life, and that's why it's supposed to be very bad for you spiritually to hang around these kinds of people, and that is a load of crock. They were lovely people that had had a tragedy in their life. The guru told me to be a janitor.

Q. How much did you meditate?

A. We were supposed to meditate at least twenty minutes in the morning before 7, at least five minutes at lunch time. I used to meditate in my car at lunch time, which also alienated me from anybody else I was working with. I'd meditate in the evening for another twenty minutes. We'd have group meditations several times a week, usually either for half-an-hour, or on Sunday we had an hour in the morning and an hour at night.

Q. While you were in the group, what did you think would happen to you if you left?

A. I thought that my soul would punish me forever, because I was with my true guru, the one who could lead me on the fastest path towards God. I thought I'd be punished for centuries, that my life would be ruined, because we believed

in lifetimes of work towards God. I could not have left on my own, I would never have done it. No matter how hard it was, I thought it was the best thing for me.

Q. Did you ever have doubts?

A. I was pretty good at weeding them out. We had all kinds of ways to stop doubting, all kinds of exercises to do. I didn't really doubt. I really believed he was a personal manifestation of God so I believed everything that he said, no matter how weird it was.

Q. So, the teachings to you were like an ultimate truth?

A. Yes.

Q. What was the overall effect of this group on you?

A. I feel that I lost most of the unique aspects of my personality that make me a special creation. I was trying to obey implicitly everything he said, and in doing so I lost my ability to think, to question, to use my mind, which is a very valuable tool to me now, but at that point I could have easily done without it.

Q. Do you believe you were a different person when you were in the group?

A. Yes. My personality was very different.

Q. And when you left, you reverted back to being your old self?

A. No. I don't think you ever go back like that. It was more like my old self. The main problem I have right now is I'm very passive, and it is almost impossible for me to tell someone when I'm angry with them, because in the cult you try to weed out emotions like that- all those emotions like that are labelled as bad. You just don't deal with the emotions you have, and so when I came out it was so hard for me to deal with my emotions. A thing I still can't deal with is anger. In the cult, the way they manipulated you... first of all, you couldn't talk about any of your problems. Secondly, with a male-female conversation, you weren't allowed to look at them in the eye, because it would harm yourself or them. The conversation was just about mundane things, like,

did you get the cups ready for the race? Otherwise, you were only supposed to talk to members of your own sex.

Q. When you saw new converts come in, did you see a change in their personality as they went along?

A. Yeah. It was like putting a corset on somebody and squeezing them. Their faces look so different after they've been in for awhile. They just lose a lot of personality in their face.

Q. What did your parents think of your membership?

A. They didn't like it, but for years they were trying to... they believed I was able to make my own decisions, and they didn't understand the situation I was in. They thought, if that's what she really wants, we'll just have to go along with it. When I got to the point where I quit all the jobs I was trained to do, and started being a full-time janitor, they just couldn't handle that. They knew me. They had raised me, and they knew that was not the kind of work I should be doing, that I would never have chosen that on my own. They started researching into deprogramming.

Q. At least in the beginning then your relationship didn't change drastically?

A. No. I was in Oregon, and they were living in California, so there wasn't so much contact anyway, so they didn't see the changes that I was going through.

Q. And then you were deprogrammed.

A. Yes.

Q. I assume your parents hired the deprogrammer?

A. Yes.

Q. And it was because they saw a drastic change in...

A. Personality, and my everyday life.

Q. Explain your deprogramming.

A. I was visiting my parents in Phoenix, which was a very rare thing, but my brother had been in an accident, with a head injury. He was recuperating in

their home. They had the deprogramming set up ahead of time. I came to Phoenix and spent the night with them, and the next morning they said let's go shopping. I got into the car and we backed out of the driveway, then my father got out and went into the house like he forgot something, and these three guys jumped in the car from next door, two in the back seat with me and one up in the front. We drove down to Tucson, which is a very long drive when you're extremely pissed off. My mother was in the car with me and these three guys, and it was terrible because we weren't even allowed to drive in cars with guys; it was very segregated. We got to the house, and they put you into a room and send shifts of people in to talk to you. The way they deprogrammed me was just talking about the different groups that most people consider to be destructive and they did comparisons between the different groups and their methods, and their end products. If you listen (fortunately I had enough of my own brain left and a little bit of courage to be able to listen)... they just said, listen, and we'll present this information, and you can choose to go back to the cult, but you have to listen first. We want to give you an opportunity to step out if that's what you want. I was out after a matter of 2 1/2 days or so. I just said I really don't want to go back. It's very, very scary. It's the hardest thing I ever did, because you have nothing left anymore. That's why they make sure your family is very supportive, because you lose your trust in yourself because you think you're a fool, when you're really not; it happens to a lot of people. You just don't know how to think about the world anymore. You have to reevaluate everything.

But mostly it was just talking. They showed me some videotapes of some of the different movies that were out, of Jim Jones and things. It just clicks into place, it just seems very obvious if you can listen.

Q. The book that I'm using that disagrees that there is anything like brain-washing ask the question, how can a deprogrammer use rational questions to someone and at the same time claim that they can't think rationally. Could

you talk about that?

A. The way I see it is that you can't totally take someone's mind from them without driving them insane. The people that are in cults just have a veneer of cult; the cult information, the cult world, the cult words, the cult friends. But their brain is still there. It can still function, it's just a matter of getting through to it. It's a mind control situation in the deprogramming. You have severe sensory restrictions. You can't go out of that room, except to go to the bathroom. You have to concentrate on what they're saying. That's the only way you get out. So they use mind control. Their justification for it is that they don't have anything in store for them. They don't need your body to run the restaurant or anything like that, they just want you to be who you are.

Q. So you think deprogramming is actually a form of brainwashing?

A. It definitely uses mind control. You can't get around it. That's part of their thing, you restrict the amount of information that the person is receiving, and that's mind control right there.

Q. Was there any particular point that the deprogrammer brought up that effected you the most?

A. When they showed me how severely my ability to communicate with other people had changed and decreased, I really recognized that that was wrong. That got through to me I think first. That's not how I was supposed to be. That's when I started listening to them.

Q. Do you think the goal of Deprogramming is to restore the mind?

A. The goal is to give somebody a choice, to get them to the point where they can make a choice. Sometimes that depends on how brainwashed the person is; there are definitely different levels. As far as I can tell, it's not to get the person out, because you can't make them, you can't keep them there for six months (I think the longest deprogramming that was attempted was thirty days). It's to get the person to listen and to evaluate, and get them to choose, to

make a decision based on what they see is right.

I was in a deprogramming once. We didn't get the girl out, and it wasn't because we failed in our goals. I believe we accomplished our goals as deprogrammers. We got her to listen, to think about it, and she chose to go back. It was based on her own... I think she was a very fearful, dependent person, one who perhaps is better off in a cult – I don't think so. I don't believe it, I knew her personally and had been in the same cult as her. She just didn't have the courage to come out.

Q. During the deprogramming, was there a sudden moment when you kind of snapped out of your cult state of mind?

A. No.

Q. The book, *Strange Gods*, claims that deprogramming is a resolution of conflict between the member and his or her parents. Do you agree with that?

A. That's what I accused my mother of when we were driving from [] to []. I kept going, "Mother, this is just between you and I. If you think I have a problem, let's just talk about it." I was scared about what these people might do to me. That's what I kept hammering at, but it wasn't. It didn't have anything to do with them except that they love me and they saw that I wasn't being me anymore. I was trying to be something that I wasn't. I had still kept in contact with them, it wasn't like I had cut them off or anything.

Q. Did you have a rough transition period from your cult state of mind to your present one?

A. I think I had it really good. I don't think it's ever easy for anyone, but I went to Unbound, Inc. [a rehabilitation center for ex-cultists in Iowa City, Iowa] for three weeks, and they helped me a lot, just giving me space away from my family for a while. That's what they try to do in rehab is not put the person in the clutches of the family and not say that the family has the right to decide what the person will be like, which is what that other person is saying about conflict, your parents want you to be one way and you want to be another way.

That's a conflict, but at Unbound they make it very clear that their goal is not to get you to be the way your parents want you to be. Their goal is to help you realize how you can learn to think again for yourself. I can see where it might lead to a situation where you just think your parents are taking over your life again, and that would be worse, because you'd just feel like, I can't do anything. Here I am, I'm dependent again. I was there till the end of May. I came up to [] and I ended up getting a job, and I've been making friends, which is about the best thing you can do, is develop a network again because you feel so alone when you get out of a cult. That's one of the hardest things about leaving a cult, is you leave all your friends behind that you love.

Q. What happened at the rehab center?

A. First of all, they make sure that you know that you are free to go if you want, because they have to operate as a legal business, and they can't have people there under some kind of constraints. They get you to make up a schedule of what you want to do from a selection of workshops. Again, it's something of your own volition, they don't allow you to be dependent for one second, which is really a bitch when you're used to being dependent, which is how the cult is. I got to cook a couple of nights, we went to a ballet, I went on some walks, I talked about poetry, about cults some, we talked about the uses of language in controlling the mind. One of the books we studied was The Structure of Magic, which talks about how you can use words to affect the way a person thinks without them even knowing that you're doing it. We learned about communication skills, something I needed very desperately at that point. the people there were very sensitive to my needs. Like I was having problems sleeping, because I wasn't meditating anymore (you can meditate there. You can do anything that you want), so I would wake up in the middle of the night, and there was always somebody there to talk to. It was a really good time for just consolidating myself.

Q. Did you have trouble stopping meditating?

A. No. We used to meditate also every time you got in a car to drive anywhere we were supposed to meditate for two minutes. Do you know how long two minutes is when you're thinking about going someplace? That was the only problem I had with "floating", was I'd get in the car and go, "Wo!"

Q. As far as you know, and as far as happened to you, is there any violence or degrading method used in deprogramming?

A. No. One time Joe [her deprogrammer] yelled, but he didn't yell at me. He was yelling at the guru, because he was reading something that made him really angry, an emotion I hadn't felt in years. The guru was saying, "No matter how hard you work, I'll never be satisfied. Nothing you can do can please me." He just blew up and said, "These guys, they're all the same! No matter how hard these people work.." and I was going, wow! And it was great, because it sort of started a spark of emotion in me; yeah, that's a pretty bad thing to say, because I knew how hard I was working.

Q. Did they regulate how much sleep you had?

A. No, I could sleep when I wanted to, which I really appreciated.

Q. Have you studied much about brainwashing since your deprogramming?

A. No. I haven't even done anything. I thought I might do some public speaking. I'm not fired up about fighting it or anything.

Q. Do you think everyone is susceptible to joining a cult, or just some type of person?

A. I think everyone is at a vulnerable point in their life. There are times in your life when you are more vulnerable to those kinds of suggestions of how you should be and what you should do. Any time when you have a major transition in your life, this is what I've been told anyway, and that's pretty much at the time when I got in.

Q. Is it possible that some people could be in cults and not be brainwashed?

A. The people that I know that weren't brainwashed in our cult were not dedi-

cated. When you become dedicated, it means that you have accepted the goals of the organization, which are false, and that's the problem with it. If they could really give you God-realization and that's what you wanted, that's fine. But they can't give you that, but that's the only reason you're dedicated is because you believe. There are people there who aren't brainwashed, but they are just there for the social things. They're just kind of fringe people.

Q. Was the social aspect of the group more important to you, or was the doctrine?

A. The doctrine. We were in a really small group, so the social was important because that's the only people you associated with really.

INTERVIEW #3: A DEPROGRAMMER

Interview on July 9, 1984 with Mark [], a deprogrammer. (Edited.)

Q. Can you define what you consider brainwashing to be?

A. The most definitive study, or criteria for what brainwashing is, is Robert J. Lifton's, Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism. When you talk brainwashing or mind control or thought reform, I prefer thought reform, because brainwashing is a loaded term. It's an accurate description, but I think people associate it with too many things. Thought reform is exactly what it is. It's the reformation, through a systematic process of a person's thought process. First the group has got to get them [the potential converts] to their environment, or at least on some neutral ground. What proceeds after that is that there is a systematic process (and I think that's the key word, systematic) that is already developed; they know what they are doing and you don't. You're going into it quite innocently, they're going into the situation knowing quite well what they intend to do with you. First they have to gain your trust [and then] they take the person's thought processes, get the person to expose their own thinking, and once they can see how the person thinks, then they can start manipulating them, to convince them that their current way of thinking is not valid. They have to get you to deny you and adopt this new standard.

When you're talking about mind control, you're talking about certain things. First, you have to gain control of the environment. Secondly is mystical manipulation, where a person is brought into an environment where things to them appear to be happening spontaneously but in actuality it's all set up to look spontaneous. To the individual that's experiencing it, it seem to have a very mystical or profound context. And they have to get the individual into a black-and-white mentality, where they polarize everything; that we are good, the outside world is bad, so consequently, if you leave the group you become evil.

Q. Would you say a cult, then, is a religious group that uses mind control methods on people?

A. Cult by its traditional sense is a harmless word, but in the sense that it's used today I think it's important to preface that with pseudo-religious cults, or destructive cults. [These types] are employing mind control, and that's why I think it's important to distinguish them because there are other cults that are harmless.

Q. What is deprogramming, then, as opposed to mind control?

A. Not too many people really know what deprogramming is. With mind control, what the group is doing is locking the person into a way of thinking that to even question that way is to be evil, which induces a lot of guilt (I think those are the three main characteristics of mind control: guilt, fear, and shame). They start thinking in very narrow terms, and there is only a certain amount of information or alternative ideas that they can consider. In the deprogramming process, what you are doing is actually encouraging that individual to question certain basic assumptions; not to negate them, but to just hold them up to inspection. We don't impose upon them a certain belief, because on one case you might have a christian, you might have a hindu, you might have an agnostic, or whatever. We're presenting them with a lot of information about the group that they have not been exposed to, or they have been exposed to it, but because of the mechanisms that are at work in mind control, they have not allowed themselves to actually consider the information as valid. Basically, we're trying to get the individual to trust in his own thought processes again. You try to instill in that person questions, and that's when deprogramming really becomes successful, when the individual starts considering other alternative ideas. In mind control they are telling you to stop your thinking processes, whereas in deprogramming you are presenting them with a variety of different choices and... you're trying to break that hold that that guilt and fear has on a person. A lot of people in groups will consider leaving, and all of a sudden they think, Oh my God, if I do that, God will strike me down, my family will die, and seven generations past, present, and

future will be condemned to hell. In deprogramming, it's healthy to question, especially when there is documented evidence that is directly opposed to what you've been told.

When a person goes into a group, they're not making an informed decision. They are joining something totally different than what they think they are joining. What you're doing in deprogramming is showing them all sides to what they are involved in, so they can literally make a choice.

Q. So a successful deprogramming might not necessarily not bring the results that you want, but it would get them to question, at least.

A. Any deprogramming that's carried out that's not on this premise is questionable. The premise is that once the person has been given a choice, and has made an informed decision, if that person at that point decides to go back, I think we have to honor that decision. I put it to the people in the deprogramming that they have to deal with the information honestly. It's not just a matter of dumping the material in front of them and letting them go through it, but you have to challenge their reasoning, point out fallacies and illogic, and all these things. I've taken somebody back to a group, because at that point I really felt that that person had all the information, and still chose, in spite of all the proof that this group was a destructive organization, she wasn't going to come out, and we aren't going to strong-arm them out. That has to be explained to every parent. There are no guarantees. I think that people that choose to go back choose to go back because they don't want to deal with the harsh reality that we are presenting [to] them. I feel it's just a matter of their integrity being undermined to a degree that they have only integrity to the group, or they become institutionalized.

Q. Have you ever had personal experience with a cult?

A. Yes, but not a religious cult.

Q. How did you get involved in deprogramming?

A. Through my involvement in this particular group, called the Family Tree, in

Ohio, it was a therapy group. I was involved with this for two years, and I was a leader. After about thirteen months I started questioning certain aspects, but in spite of my doubts, I was still locked in by the fear and guilt. I sought out consultation with a number of people, and everybody advised me that they had done so much good for me that maybe I should listen to them. I had some friends, ironically, who were involved in deprogramming people in religious cults (I wasn't in anything religious). Finally I sought these people out, not because I knew that was what I needed, but out of desperation. I started telling them about the doubts and conflicts, and they basically helped me get it together in about two hours. I left two weeks later. They got me on a plane to Tucson to a rehab. I spent a month at the rehab, and about three weeks after my stay, they offered me a job as a counselor for other people coming out. I started going out on cases working security, doing assistant deprogramming, [and then] to lead deprogrammer.

Q. Basically, your training was on the job.

A. Personal experience as well as on the job.

Q. Approximately how many people have you deprogrammed?

A. Probably in the 90-95 range.

Q. What are the main groups these people are from?

A. We've dealt mainly with Hare Krishna, Divine Light Mission, Children of God, The Way International, the Moonies.

Q. What is your success rate, meaning where you feel that they've gotten away from this mind control?

A. I'd say about a 92%. The first couple years I was probably running 85-90%, but the last couple of years we've been running close to 100%. I think that's due to a lot more experience. We've only had one person return in two years, and that's probably out of 35 cases.

Q. Which group is the most difficult?

A. Hare Krishnas are difficult, and the reason is because of the type of people

they attract. They attract people that generally have some abstract type of thinking already, into mystical things, had a lot of drug experiences, and so forth. And two, coupling that with the mind control techniques that they use, I think they come the closest to stopping the thought processes through the chanting, and through chanting, you block out all thoughts. I've seen the most destruction in Hare Krishnas.

Q. How do you tell whether a person is brainwashed or not? Do you assume it by membership in a group?

A. If, for instance, a parent calls me and says, my child is in the Moonies, I don't have any problem with that because I know they are brainwashed. You can not be in a thought reform environment and not be brainwashed. People say that is awful presumptuous, but we know; we've studied, we've researched, we keep up on these groups, and they're employing the same methods. You may not be affected to the degree others are, but you are still going to be brought under control to a degree.

Q. In your case, your deprogramming was voluntary...

A. Oh, yeah, and some are. I've been involved on voluntary deprogrammings, and that's nice because at that point they want to know what has gone on with them. Why are they experiencing all these conflicts? Whereas in an involuntary deprogramming, you are taking someone that is resisting.

Q. What do you think is the difference between people who are willing to leave on their own with people that stay in?

A. I think that has to do largely from two parts, one being the strength of their former identity. Or circumstances, maybe a chain of events that they just cannot rationalize, or they will stumble on to something to where all of a sudden, they lose trust.

Q. Are there degrees of being brainwashed?

A. It's all a matter of degree. Some people have stated to me after deprogramming that they never questioned. Other people constantly were struggling

with doubts, trying to maintain faith. I think it depends on the vulnerability of the individual at the time they come in contact with the group, the strength of former identity, and circumstances. But yes, there are degrees. It's reflected in deprogramming, because you get some people that are real tough nuts.

Q. Parents are generally the people that initialize a deprogramming?

A. Always. Or family.

Q. The book, Strange Gods, claims that deprogramming is basically a resolution of conflict between parents and offspring. Is there any credence to that?

A. Hopefully, in the aftermath there would be some validity to that, but I don't think that is the purpose of deprogramming. Otherwise, what the cults are saying is right; the parents just want their kids back.

Q. Is there a "snapping" moment during deprogramming?

A. I think that's a misconception. I think that Snapping has been way overdone. Maybe in 15-20% of the cases have I actually seen a snapping moment. Usually it's more of a gradual process. You can start seeing the person thinking, you actually see their mind start to work.

Q. Explain how deprogramming works, step by step.

A. First off, a parent recognizes the fact that there is something wrong with their kid. Mothers are the first to suspect that something is wrong. Once their kid says, hey, I'm in the Moonies, they've already heard that they're cults- boom, they know right off. The parents usually contact their parish, or the police, and through a process of elimination they usually get in contact with a parent group. The parent group then starts giving them information about the group that their son or daughter is in. In these parent groups, there are a number of parents that have had their kids deprogrammed. Individual parents will maybe tell a person, this is who I used. And then, those parents will put them in touch with me, or another deprogrammer. At that point, for the most part, they've made up their mind. They

want to get their kid out, and what they want to know at that point is, what's it going to cost, what's involved, how do we do it? I really try to educate the parents. I'll tell them, this is what's involved, but before you make a decision, I think you owe it to yourself to talk with other parents I've worked with, just to get a parent's viewpoint rather than mine. When they decide to do it, I think it's important that I don't persuade them. Once that's done, there's a number of different scenarios that I could develop. Do you want just a general one?

Q. Yes.

A. First, we've got to locate the individual. We try to get the parents to initiate some type of contact with them, and set up a meeting under the guise of going to dinner, a visit, whatever. Or, the son or daughter comes home and visits. At that stage, we've already prearranged it. There's usually six people involved in a deprogramming, three security men, and three deprogrammers. The parents are always present. Once we have gotten to location, we meet with the parents, we tell them, this is our plan. They come home. They're in the house. One of the parents will take the person out of the house to go to the store, or whatever. We'll go in the house. They come back, walk in the house, there's four of us standing there, and all exits are blocked. It's a real awkward moment. The parents- we've instructed them to try to alleviate their fear, that we're not going to hurt them. We tell them [the cultist] at that point that we are going to go to another location, and all we're going to do is talk. Of course, very few people think it's that simple, because the cults have told them horror stories about deprogramming; that we're going to beat them up, torture them, with vegetarian groups we're going to make them eat meat, in groups that are celibate, we're going to make them have sex, we'll keep them up all night. These are all fear tactics, and I've never used one of them. I don't know how it could work that way. I think a person has to be brought out in a way that they feel they made the decision.

So, at that point, we escort them out to the car. Usually, without any problem, they'll walk right into the car. An hour later, they realize, Damn! I shouldn't have done that! We always tell them, we don't want to lay a hand on you. But we are prepared to keep you from getting away. The only thing I've had to do is restrain somebody, or keep them from hurting us, or one of their parents. From there, we go to a safe house that we had prearranged. At that point, there are three deprogrammers, a lead and two assistant deprogrammers. Out of those, it is usually a good idea to have one of them be from out of the particular group that you're dealing with. We put the person in a room, and we just sit down and (I've never boarded up the windows or anything) we just explain to them what is going on, we start describing to them what a cult is, start pointing out fallacies to what they've been told. There are a number of responses. Some people shut down and won't talk to us for two or three days. Others are very eager, because they feel very confident and they think they're going to win us over. That may go on for twelve hours, fifteen hours. If the person wants to take a nap, we tell them, if you're really tired, if you want to take a nap, let us know, and we'll let you. Anything that's reasonable, we will try to make the best of a bad situation. The reason is we want to show them that we'll meet you half way. I know you don't agree with this, but we're not going to do all these horrible things to you. We've usually suggested that the mother or father is in the room at this stage. It's a good idea to leave the door open to the room and at least one of the parents in the house, so if there are any accusations that physical violence was used... the deprogramming is just communication really, a sharing. We start sharing our experiences, sharing documentation about certain facts about the group that maybe they're not aware of. At some point it may get argumentative, and sometimes it can get loud. We're just as human as they are. You're telling them, listen, you went into this group. Why did you believe what they said? Because you liked the people, because they gained your trust.

We tell them, here's some facts about this group. We'll say, make us prove what we have to say. If we can get them to start making us accountable, the process will start developing where they'll start making the group accountable. It's just hours of this stuff. At some point in the deprogramming, they start considering. That's the point that's commonly referred to as the "snapping" moment. They usually start asking us questions. They're more inquisitive. There is a dramatic change in the whole atmosphere, because the person starts feeling that we're all working as a team, and we're working mutually for their benefit. We usually do a couple of days of follow-up once the person... just to answer their questions, share with them, support them. They want our help at that point. Then we propose the idea of rehabilitation to them, and more likely than not they will accept. Rehab, all it is is taking a couple weeks putting some time and distance between the group, the deprogrammers, the family, and being with some other people that can relate to what they're going through.

Q. Which of these two statements would best describe what happens to a person under mind control:

- a.) It reduces the ability and capacity of the mind to function normally, or
- b.) It restricts what the person thinks about, and therefore, what the person does.

A. In the beginning, you're restricting a person's thought processes, which over a period of time, if that continues, it's going to decrease the capability of the mind to function. It's like a muscle that atrophies from disuse. If it reaches a certain point, it's going to be much more difficult to bring it back.

Q. Would you say that during deprogramming, what you are doing is restoring the person's own mind to them?

A. Yeah. I'd say that you are giving them back what's been taken away, and that is their ability to think and trust in themselves.

Q. Who is susceptible to brainwashing?

A. Anybody and everyone. It just depends on time.

Q. Do you see mind control methods being used elsewhere besides in cults?

A. I think you are going to see elements. Only when they [the elements] are all used together does it constitute mind control. In drug rehabilitation, behavior modification techniques are applied to an individual. These techniques are used with the express intent... but a drug rehab will give you at some point an opportunity to leave. A cult convinces you that you are either committed to them for life or you are condemned to hell. Most people that have been through a mind control experience, when they are given the opportunity to leave, they benefit from it. But the only time they can develop that is if they are given the opportunity to leave and integrate that experience with many other ideas and situations.

Q. How is the scientific community dealing with mind control and deprogramming?

A. It's still a very controversial subject, although today many more people are not just accepting but involving themselves in it. I feel that if Patty Hearst were tried today, I think she would be acquitted. You have much more credible professionals in the field. Although, a lot of mental health professionals will dismiss it as a fantasy, in my opinion because in their education it does not fit the model in which they were taught.

Q. Would you say there are some deprogrammers that shouldn't be in the field?

A. Definitely. That's maybe the biggest problem in deprogramming is there's no way to regulate it, and you're going to get people that are unprofessional and unethical. It depends on who you learned it from and where, and what's your motivation.

Q. Do you think it takes a certain type of personality to be a deprogrammer?

A. For one, it takes personality. Some deprogrammers lack the ability to be personal with an individual. It's an intimate experience, You're really sharing a lot.

Q. What do you see in the future? Do you see your type of work becoming acceptable?

A. I don't think it will ever be accepted across the board. It will never be legal. It's always going to remain controversial. The whole foundation of our country is based on the first amendment, and as long as these groups hide behind religion it's going to remain controversial. But I don't see it as a religious issue. I think it's organized crime that hides under the guise of religion.

PART 4
CONCLUSIONS

REVIEW

The question I have been seeking to answer in this study is: Is there such a technique as brainwashing that is being used by some of the new religious movements to coercively convert people to their group? I defined brainwashing as "The successful manipulation of an individual's mind in order to instill beliefs that that person would not otherwise hold, that produces a noticeable alteration in his or her personality." I first presented two opposing studies concerning this question. The book, Snapping, declares that coercive techniques are used by some cults, and that they produce "sudden personality change". These coercive processes produce an individual that is trained not to question or doubt his group, and often the only way out is through deprogramming. "Sudden personality change" caused by the cults is harmful and is occurring in epidemic proportions in this country.

Strange Gods, opposes this view and asserts that what is called brainwashing is simply common manipulative techniques used in other areas of our society. Deprogramming is a sham, since there is no "programming" going on in the first place. Cult membership is not harmful in any unique way, and the number of cult members is very small and certainly not epidemic.

I looked at Robert J. Lifton's study on Chinese thought reform methods, pointing out his findings that seem to match some of the cult practices.

I then reviewed four studies on conversion, which looked at the "buyer" of the new religious movements rather than the techniques of the "seller". These studies showed that there are certain predisposing qualities and experiences of a person that are necessary for that person to be open to the message of a cult. The article, "Conversion Motifs", demonstrates that, once that person comes in contact with the group or its teachings, there are six possible processes by which he may become a convert (brainwashing being one of them).

Next, I looked at three studies on the psychological effects of cult membership. The clinical studies generally indicated that no psychological

harm was produced from cult membership. However, if a person left the group and returned to society, this transition could be highly traumatic and could leave psychological scars. I disputed the findings that there was no harm from membership by pointing to evidence that some groups apparently ship their problem cases to specific locations, thus distorting any study that did not include these cases.

The final two studies I reviewed brought up unusual but pertinent points on the topic at hand. Robert W. Balch pointed out that there are some cult members that act like converts, when in reality they are doubting Thomases. He says that this distorts any studies being done on cults, since the observer views these doubting Thomases as actual converts. He suggests participant observation as a method to circumvent this problem.

Barbara Hargrove in her study argues that our society is not training people how to intelligently scrutinize the claims of religious groups. People join cults because they appear to be good on the surface, and they accept the group without delving any farther.

Lastly, three people intimately involved in cults were interviewed. Pam, a cult member, explained her conversion as a mystical and intellectual event, rather than as a coercive one. Leslie, a deprogrammed ex-cultist, claims that her conversion came about from brainwashing. Her membership was detrimental to her personality and mental abilities. Mark, a deprogrammer, claims a 92% success rate, and assumes that anyone in a "destructive" cult is brainwashed.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SUGGESTS

In my remarks on the studies of conversion, I asked: "Can a person... be made to believe a certain way, through coercive techniques, without that person's knowledge that he was manipulated?" I believe the answer is yes, but with conditions. Leslie's testimony of her conversion, Mark's experiences

with over 90 cult members, and the evidence from the book Snapping all demonstrate that people are joining cults through a process of deliberate manipulation. Even Strange Gods, which seeks to refute the brainwashing model, admits that there are manipulative techniques used on the potential converts, at least in some groups.

The conditions are that the potential convert must have a predispositional attraction to what the group is offering. These pre-contact characteristics give the cult a draw that they can utilize on the person to bring them into their sphere of influence, and begin the recruiting process. As can be seen from the 1/2% recruiting success of the Oakland Moonies (p.15) and the small size of cult membership, most people are not attracted to the cults.

Of those that are drawn to the cults, an unknown number are converted through coercive techniques. Mark asserts that Robert J. Lifton's model of Chinese thought reform is applicable to the methods the cults use to convert people. Leslie's experience, and the examples from Snapping and Strange Gods back this up. Environmental control, lessening or ending contact with the "outside world", the conviction that the group possesses the ultimate truth, fear of doubting or questioning the group, an "insider's" language, and the extreme difficulty in readjusting to the "outside world" after quitting; all these are common both to Lifton's study and cult practices.

Through the studies on predispositions, however, it seems that the cults have an enormous advantage over the Chinese examples, that being that the subjects want and are perhaps even searching for what the cults offer people. When a person enters the milieu of the cult, sees the assuredness of the members, observes the "planned spontaneity" around him, is told of the marvelous benefits of membership, and is pampered and flattered, surely it is not unusual that he would be positively persuaded toward the group.

And here is where Barbara Hargrove's study is applicable. As Pam and Leslie's conversions demonstrate, our society has not trained us how to critic-

ally evaluate religions. Pam, for instance, apparently studied only the evidence that the cult provided for her, and did not actively consider opposing viewpoints. Leslie joined Sri Chinmoy without asking what the full cost of membership might be. The cults take advantage of this situation and hide the more difficult doctrines or commitments until the person has expressed some loyalty to the cult. I am not suggesting here that only the cults use deceptive techniques, rather I am suggesting that WHOEVER uses these tactics is wrong.

But if this is the case, why don't people leave after the "deeper truths" are made known? Actually, many do. Pam says there is a high turnover rate in her group. The Hare Krishnas have a probationary period for this reason. Of those that do stay, doubting is held to be a sin and is diligently avoided. As Mark and Leslie pointed out, there is a fear that you will harm your soul, damn your family, etc., if you ever leave the group.

I would like to know the unknown number or percentage of how many people are converted to cults through brainwashing as opposed to the other five methods listed in "Conversion Motifs." Is, as Mark claims, every Moonie brainwashed? Or were many converted in other ways, like Pam? Mark's 92% success-rate claim suggests a high number of coercive conversions, as does the fact that he is being kept busy at his job at this time (I planned to interview another deprogrammer, but he has been too busy also for me to catch him). But I think this is tempered by the fact that Mark only gets cases that are extreme enough to cause the parents to spend an enormous amount of money and at times even break the law in order to rescue their offspring from what they see as a radical change for the worse in their child. This seems to be a ripe but difficult area for study.

Concerning the clinical studies of cult members, I think we now have even more evidence to view their findings with suspicion. Leslie stated that there were several people in her group that seemed to have psychological problems,

although she could not tell whether this was caused by membership. Mark indicated that the Hare Krishnas seem to be the most destructive group on an individual's psychological abilities. And I think Balch's study suggesting participant observation is applicable here as well. Without observation from the "inside" there is no way to verify these studies as representative of the group they studied. As was noted before, the members who were in dire straits may have been shipped off to some unknown holding facility. It is also logically possible (and consistent with other manipulative practices) that the samples, such as the Melbourne Hare Krishna commune, may have been selected at least partially by the groups themselves.

In essence, the evidence shows that some cults do use coercive techniques to "brainwash" (a loaded but useful term) people into joining their group. Brainwashing is the concentrated use of known social and psychological methods of manipulation in order to instill a particular belief system into a person or group. Those who do join through this method have predispositional qualities that make them susceptible to the cult conversion methods. Once they are in, they stay in because of fear that what the cult says will happen to them if they leave is true.

However, it is not clear how many converts become converts through brainwashing. There are at least five other conversion methods by which people join, and there are (as Balch says) those who appear to be converts but in fact are only playing a role.

Since there is a "programming" of sorts, deprogramming is a legitimate (but unregulated) method of taking away the effects of brainwashing. Deprogramming, while utilizing manipulative techniques, seeks not to gain control of the individual, but rather to expand the choices that the individual has.

While I have concluded that brainwashing is being used by some cults, I am left wondering about several things. Why weren't the doctrines of these groups given any more attention by the researchers? Can't psychological

and even physical harm come from, say, the "flirty-fishing" doctrine of the Children of God, where members prostitute themselves in order to gain converts? Scientology doctrines have been scrutinized by Stark and Bainbridge (Sociological Analysis 1980, 41,2:128,136), but my choice of studies generally ignored the issue.

How much of a role did the doctrines play in the conversion process? Both Pam and Leslie placed a high value on the doctrines over the social aspects as reasons for joining. Was it only those beliefs that they were predisposed toward?

What would happen if a deprogrammer tried to deprogram someone like Pam, who apparently was not coercively converted? Is it the coercive conversion that makes people susceptible to deprogramming, or is it that the person never really critically evaluated the group before or since his conversion? Interviews with people who have withstood deprogrammings would yield interesting results.

Where did the cults learn these manipulative techniques in the first place? Did they all read Lifton's book on thought reform?

The subject of conversion is a fascinating one, and the sub-field of coercive conversion is especially so. It is hard to imagine that within a few days a person could become a devoted cult member, and then just as quickly drop that devotion in a deprogramming. I believe there is plenty of room left for research in this field, such as in the areas my questions above bring up. It seems to me that the deprogrammers hold a big key as to what is happening in coercive conversion. It seems rather amazing that they can consistently do in a few days what the torture chambers of the Inquisition often could never accomplish. From my conversations and observations, deprogrammers are often more knowledgeable about the cults' doctrines and practices than the cult member is. Also, they are in a good position to make comparisons between

the cults.

Along with learning from the deprogrammers, I believe Balch's method of participant observer holds great potential for gathering information. One drawback I see to it is that since the observer is not really converted, he may not be able to pass as a committed member, and thus might be left out of full participation.

As is fitting, I have answered some questions and inherited others. This field is an important one for the health of those in our society who may be or have already been attracted to the cults that utilize brainwashing. Society needs to educate people on intelligent religion-choosing, and it also needs to assist those who have returned to the "outside world". This study has helped me see the reality of this problem, and I hope it is helpful to others as well.

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