

Religion Cult 'Brainwashing' Fact or Fiction?

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She has made a 180 degree turn-out, adopting exclusively the philosophy of her cult leader, relates a devotee of a cult convert. Her total dedication of love is for her spiritual father; she's become very, very cold toward the family.

An extreme shift in values is evident, as she no longer cares to debate important issues, he says. There is just a way, which she quotes from the books — no discussion necessary! Her own interests have been set aside — no more sewing, handicrafts, backpacking, and she no longer attends the family dinner. She cooks her own food. Her attire is different, her name is new, he claims.

She's a changed person — overnight!

It is this type of radical change in behavior that initially stirred up parental concern and resulted in the formation of what is now the Citizens Freedom

Foundation (CFR), an organization abouts are often attributed to "brainwashing." And it was on this phenomena that a discussion panel of four professionals and two ex-cult members met at the Greater Los Angeles Press Club recently.

For the most part, the group sponsored by the CFR set "brainwashing" aside as an imprecise term. However, all agreed that some sort of mind-control process is used by cults to snag youth into living and thinking patterns previously foreign to their behavior.

"Even the experts disagree on the exact meaning of the term (brainwashing)," said Dr. Ronald Enroth, professor of sociology at Westmont College, Santa Barbara, and author of "Youth, Brainwashing and the Extremist Cults."

"There are a lot of other words that are sometimes used — thought control, coercive persuasion, psychological kidnapping, mind control," Enroth said. "But I'm convinced on the basis

"They had an answer for everything."

— Dr. Edward Spencer

of my own research and the research of others . . . that there is a phenomena of whatever we call brainwashing. It does exist and it's very real."

Erica Heftmann, a former member of the Unification Church headed by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, said brainwashing began immediately in her initial confrontation with the Moonies. Within 72 hours, her life had been radically changed, she stated.

"We were told we were going to a college seminar," she recalls, a seminar which she chose to attend of her own free will. But the brainwashing tactics were implemented right away, she contends.

The group was taken into the mountains. "Once there, we were isolated from family. All mail, visitors and phone calls were either monitored or screened," Heftmann said. Deprivation of privacy and intense lectures that combats cult efforts.

These sudden behavioral turn-

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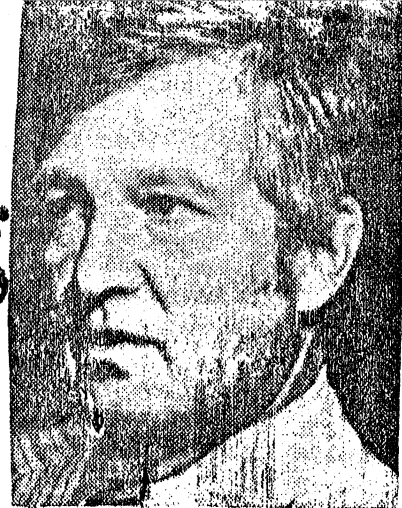
— Dr. Ronald Enroth

...a tremendous erosion in the meaning of life...

— Dr. Harry Seagal

CRIB test...a start towards objectivity...

— Dr. Paul Verdier



"(You) come into a situation voluntarily from which they do not let you out of," he said. "Essentially, I went there voluntarily, but I didn't stay there (voluntarily)."

At the feast, Liepmann said he met with extreme peer pressure in two hours of intense conversation. He describes being bombarded with confusion — rules, regulations, different food, clothing, music and atmosphere. "Everything they say is different," he explained.

Liepmann and Heftmann are just two of many American youths who demonstrate a susceptibility to a whole new foundation of thought after a very brief encounter.

Dr. Harry Seagal, a psychiatrist at Mt. Oliveview Hospital, Westwood, has a threefold explanation for this tendency to submit so quickly to a foreign philosophy.

First, he says there has been a tremendous erosion in the meaning of life, which is countered by a quest for religion on the part of America's youth. Secondly, we have guilt over the material things we do have, and thirdly, there is a universal phenomena which drives man to work toward his salvation, Seagal said.

He referred to a spiritual vacuum in human beings which he said must be filled, and Liepmann reaffirmed that he indeed was searching for religion when he was drawn into Hare Krishna.

Some panel members noted that cults frequently promote a religion of all answers and no questions. Dr. Edward Spencer, whose son followed the Hare Krishnas for a month, recalls, "They had an answer for everything. I have to admit I don't have an answer for everything."

Another significant draw factor, according to Enroth, is that many of the cult leaders are older individuals — primarily men.

"There are father figures who arise on the scene and fill certain needs for young people," he said. "A very real authority vacuum exists in society," he continued, and these men "fill that parental image."

Playing on human weaknesses, the cults are able to implement a number of tactics which eventually



were also used in the mind-bending process, she added.

The members come across as "super Americans, super straight and super good types," she continued. "Little did I know what they were doing."

Till Liepmann, a former member of Hare Krishna, said he too initially encountered the cult as a result of his own will. He and a friend went to a feast at the Los Angeles temple.

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***—Ex-Moon Church
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***—Ex-Hare Krishna
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"brainwash" their victims into submission, according to the panel. The primary techniques mentioned were hypnosis, group pressure, isolation, deprivation of sleep, food and privacy, constant sound (such as chanting) and intense lecture and repetition.

Dr. Paul Verdier, a clinical psychologist specializing in behavioral therapy, and author of "Brainwashing and the Cults," has devised a test which he says can measure whether a person has been brainwashed and to what extent. The CRIB test (Conditioned Response Index for Brainwashing) consists of questions based on 32 pressure factors.

Verdier hopes the test will eventually be accepted as valid for use in court cases. He considers it a start towards objectivity on the question of brainwashing, and if approved could be applied as a determinant in both programming and deprogramming cases.

The cults contend that the procedures used by deprogrammers on followers are in essence the very brainwashing techniques they are falsely accused of using.

Mukunda Das of the Hare Krishnas says cult members do practice mind control, but only over their own minds. "It's not possible to control someone else's," he claims. "You cannot force someone to do what they don't want to do."

Kathie Lowrey's response to the allegation that the Universal Church uses mind control was, "That's garbage. How can somebody just turn their mind over to someone else? It's ridiculous! American young people question everything."

Both she and Mukunda Das said that the former cult members making gross accusations against the cults are those who were deprogrammed, not those who left the cults of their own accord. "They almost start to sound like robots," Lowrey said, "whether they were members of the Unification Church or the Hare Krishnas, which couldn't be two more completely opposite groups."

Cult Mind Control Questioned

techniques. Liepmann described his deprogramming as a reversal of his Hare Krishna programming.

But he and Heftmann both emphasized that there were definite differences, also. There was no food or sleep deprivation during their deprogramming sessions, they said.

"Mom was cooking," Heftmann recalls, "and it was the first time I had slept over three hours in a year and a half. My every whim and wish was met."

"It is true I was held captive," she continued, "but there's no way you'd listen if you weren't. They won't tell you what to believe," she added. "They force you to think for yourself."

Liepmann, who was abducted on the way to a supposed dental appointment, says the only force applied in his deprogramming was the actual kidnapping, and the fact that his shika (braid) was cut off and he had to change clothes.

"It scared me very much," he said, until he was informed that they were just going to talk. He was asked such questions as — Why do you believe? Where does the money go? Would you really kill your parents if they told you to?

Liepmann also found he had to think for himself, and in about six hours he went through "an experience like waking up," he says.

Looking back on their experiences now, Heftmann and Liepmann say the prime motives behind the cults was money.

Heftmann said she spent about 20 hours a day raising \$100 or more for the Moonies during her year and a half in the Unification Church. Liepmann said he made \$100 a day, which he deposited in a slot at the Krishna temple.

"They're making lots of money, and they're using kids to do it," he said.

Both cults openly admit to fundraising, but insist that only a small population of their membership is so occupied. A good deal of their money goes to their outreach programs, according to cult spokesmen. For the

Krishnas it is book publishing, and for the Moonies it is outreach camps. Both contend that their money is used for good works.

Enroth stated that often the cults require that converts' material possessions be relinquished. To this, the Hare Krishnas and Moonies said, yes, they accept donations, but, no, they are not required.

"They frequently will disguise themselves . . . not overtly saying they are a religious group," Enroth said. "They will give the impression of sociability, let's get together, have fun, discuss important topics of the world," he said. They emphasize being a family, he added. "One does not know what one is getting into."

With a religious community, Enroth said, one knows in advance that it is in fact a church group they are voluntarily joining. One can examine other kinds of systems, then opt for Christianity," he said.

The Citizens Freedom Foundation feels an urgency to inform the public of cult recruiting techniques and alleged misuse of funds. At this time, they feel they can't make only head way legally, and so have chosen a preventative education approach. The first amendment freedom of religion is not the question, they say, but rather the freedom of thought.

Spencer kidnapped his son at his daughter's wedding, then put him through deprogramming.

"I had to make a decision in reference to him, whether legally right or not," he said. "I had mixed feelings about treating my 18-year-old son like a child, but chose the lesser of two evils." Spencer no longer cared what the legal consequences might have been.

"I told him — 'If after all the facts are presented, and we talk to you, and you want to go back, I will drive you back.'"

Larry was very grateful afterwards, Spencer said of his son who was successfully deprogrammed.