Factionalism, Group Defection, and Schism in the Hare Krishna Movement*

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This paper attempts to further empirical and conceptual understanding of *collective* forms of disengagement from new religious movements. I describe empirically the events and social forces giving rise to factionalism, group defection, and schism within the Los Angeles Hare Krishna community following the death of the movement's founder. I also describe the emergence, mobilization efforts, and ultimate failure of an incipient sectarian organization founded by dissident Hare Krishna members. Social psychological and structural approaches are analytically integrated to account for differing modes of collective disengagement and the fate of "movements of exit" (Hirschman, 1970). The paper concludes with a number of theoretical implications suggested by this ethnographic study.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades there has been an enormous amount of scholarly research addressing questions of recruitment and conversion to religious movements (Beckford & Richardson, 1983; Rambo, 1982; Snow & Machalek, 1984). Much of this research centers on the expansion efforts of a variety of new religious movements in America and worldwide (Barker, 1984; Beckford, 1985; Bromley & Shupe, 1979a; Downton, 1979; Rochford, 1985; Wallis, 1977). This outpouring of research has only recently been accompanied by investigations of the other side of the membership and conversion issue: how and why some previously committed adherents of new religions defect from their respective religious groups.

Studies of disengagement from new religions have largely turned traditional psychofunctional frameworks of recruitment and conversion on their heads.[1] Defection is treated as an individual experience involving a breakdown in the ideological and/or cognitive linkage between a convert's values and beliefs, and the religious doctrines and practices

1. There are exceptions in the literature. Role theory, for example, does not posit a direct or necessary congruence between an individual's pre-existing beliefs and values, and the doctrines of a particular religious group, as the basis for joining (Bromley & Shupe, 1979b, 1986). Lofland's and Stark's (1965) model of conversion blends both individual predispositions and structural factors to account for choices to become a religious adherent. Lofland's and Skonovd's (1981) treatment of conversion motifs suggests how a variety of social psychological and structural factors influence different types of conversion.

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of the group. Defection is thus characterized as a process of "falling from the faith" (Brinkerhoff & Burke, 1980; Bromley, 1988), or as an outcome of dissonance problems leading to "deconversion" (Jacobs, 1984, 1987; Skonovd, 1983; Wright, 1983a, 1984).

In recent years, new religious groups have experienced organizational change involving institutionalization, on the one hand, and decline and failure, on the other (Bromley & Hammond, 1987; Robbins, 1988: 100-33). Internal conflict and factionalism have also grown as members have sought to challenge policies and practices initiated by leaders (Balch & Cohig, 1985, cited in Wright, 1988; Ofshe, 1980; Rochford, 1985; Wallis, 1982; Wallis & Bruce, 1986). In turn, this conflict has produced more visible, if not new, forms of disengagement from new religions. On an individual level there are fringe members, dissidents, and apostates; on a group level, oppositional factions, schismatics, and ex-member support groups. Despite the existence of both individual and collective forms of disengagement from new religions, we know much less empirically and theoretically about the latter. For example, two recent classification schemes of disaffiliation by Richardson *et al.* (1986) and Robbins (1988: 88-99) do not consider collective forms of disengagement.

This paper attempts to further empirical and conceptual understanding of *collective* forms of disengagement from new religious movements. Following a number of recent calls for an integration of traditional and resource mobilization approaches (Ferree & Miller, 1985; Jenkins, 1983: Zurcher & Snow, 1981), I focus on the dual role of ideology and structure in the development of the Hare Krishna movement.[2] As we move empirically from individual to collective forms of disengagement, psychofunctional theories of defection need to be integrated with conceptual frameworks which bring structural and organizational factors to the forefront. While structural/organizational influences have been considered in some work on defection (Jacobs, 1984, 1987; Skonovd, 1981, 1983; Wright, 1983b), they have been largely reduced to factors promoting individual decisions to exit, such as the creation of dissonance problems for the convert.

This paper describes empirically the events and social forces giving rise to factionalism, group defection, and schism in the aftermath of the death of ISKCON's founding charismatic leader. My analysis of factionalism demonstrates how conflict emerged within the context of long-standing cleavages. My analysis of group defection and schism points to the influence of infrastructural supports and deficits (McCarthy, 1987; Zald & Berger, 1978) in determining modes of exit from exclusive and deviant religious organizations like ISKCON. This analysis also demonstrates the ways in which both structural and ideological concerns can interact to undermine micromobilization in schismatic religious organizations, leaving them vulnerable to failure. In the broadest sense, this case study looks at the sources of insurgency and the fate of "movements of exit" (Hirschman, 1970) as they seek to establish themselves as independent sectarian organizations.

After clarifying the setting and methods used for this research, I divide the remainder of the paper into three main sections. The first section discusses the succession crises

2. Throughout the paper I intend to distinguish between the Hare Krishna movement and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Until the death of the movement's founding guru in 1977, the Hare Krishna movement and ISKCON could reasonably be considered one and the same. As described here and elsewhere (Rochford, 1985), ISKCON faced factionalism and schism in the late 1970s, resulting in the emergence of a number of social movement organizations within the broader Hare Krishna movement. The analytic importance of this distinction will become apparent later in the paper.

arising within ISKCON's Los Angeles community following the death of the movement's founder, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in 1977. The second details the developments which culminated in factionalism and group defection from the Los Angeles ISKCON community. The third section focuses on the emergence, mobilization efforts, and ultimate failure of the Kirtan Hall, an incipient sectarian organization founded in Los Angeles by a group of ex-ISKCON members in 1979. The paper concludes with a number of theoretical implications suggested by this field study.

SETTING AND METHOD

Data for this paper were collected over a five-year period (1975-1981). While I have visited and conducted research in 10 ISKCON communities throughout the United States, the major part of my data comes from the Krishna community in Los Angeles. In conducting the research, I observed and participated in the Krishna lifestyle and religious practices, lived within the community for days at a time, and worked in the community's school as an assistant *gurukula* teacher.[3] (For a more detailed account of the methods used in this portion of the research see Rochford, 1985: 6-9, 21-42; 1988). Participant observation was also carried out with a group of former ISKCON members who defected in Los Angeles after the death of ISKCON's founding guru. It is this portion of the research which comprises the major data source for the present paper.

In June of 1980, I became reacquainted with a former ISKCON devotee whom I had known over a three-year period before his defection in 1978. He invited me to become a charter member of an organization which he and a handful of other ex-ISKCON members were starting in Los Angeles. The Kirtan Hall, he explained, would serve as an alternative organization, both for the growing number of ex-ISKCON members residing in Los Angeles, and for others developing an interest in Krishna Consciousness.

I participated in the activities of the Kirtan Hall throughout the summer and autumn of 1980, attending virtually all of the group's twice-weekly meetings. During this period, I was able to interview formally and informally the leaders of the organization as well as most of its other members. All of the approximately 20 members of the group had been ISKCON adherents for six years or longer. Several had been involved in ISKCON as many as 10 or 12 years. One of the leaders was among the first 12 disciples initiated into Krishna Consciousness by Prabhupada in New York City. In the autumn of 1980, the Kirtan Hall disintegrated because of declining interest, an inability to recruit new members, and the move of one of the group's three founders to another state.

PRABHUPADA'S DEATH: CRISIS AND POLITICIZATION

In November of 1977, ISKCON's founding guru died in Vrndavana, India, after a long illness. Prabhupada's death proved to be a major turning point in the development of ISKCON in America and worldwide. Just prior to his death, Prabhupada appointed 11 of his closest disciples to serve as gurus responsible for initiating new members into Krishna Consciousness and for helping to oversee the affairs of ISKCON's communities

worldwide. Within months after ISKCON's spiritual and political reorganization, the movement began to experience the first of what would prove to be a series of succession problems culminating in factionalism, growing numbers of defections, and schism. Challenging groups, made up of former ISKCON members and dissident devotees who remained within ISKCON, combined against the new leaders. In 1980, four of ISKCON's new gurus were sanctioned by the movement's Governing Body Commission (GBC). One of the four broke with ISKCON, taking along as many as 100 of his disciples. By the end of 1980, ISKCON faced a level of internal conflict which threatened its viability as a movement-organization. (For more details on ISKCON's succession problems see Rochford, 1985: 221-55).[4]

The succession crises following Prabhupada's death were not uniformly felt throughout ISKCON (Shinn, 1987a: 129). Although all of ISKCON's communities were somewhat adversely affected, a handful (e.g., Los Angeles, New York, Berkeley) experienced serious and ongoing social conflict. As one of ISKCON's leaders from the east coast described it, the Los Angeles ISKCON community was at the center of the political controversy during the late 1970s.

> I remember devotees coming from LA and it was like Chicken Little, 'The sky is falling.' We [devotees in the East] would say, 'Wait a minute, it's not that bad.' They were surprised to find that things here were not that polarized. We came to think of that kind of talk as the LA doomsday philosophy. . . . LA had the most political reactions of anywhere in our whole society worldwide (Philadelphia member, 1982).

The reason for the intensity of conflict in Los Angeles related most strongly to issues of power. Between 1978 and 1980, there was ongoing and sometimes bitter conflict between the local leadership and various factions of community members. The community witnessed numerous defections, and the purging of a number of devotees who refused to submit to the policies of the leadership, leading ultimately to the formation of conflict groups (Rochford, 1982, 1985). The depth of the anti-leadership feeling was expressed in a 1980 letter written by unidentified members of the Los Angeles community to Ramesvara Swami, the spiritual and administrative head of ISKCON's communities in the western United States.

> As you are well aware, a body of community members has been meeting for the past few weeks for the purposes of attempting to address some of the fundamental problems which face the New Dwarka community and the Movement in general. . . . We are very much desirous of seeing some of the long standing problems of the community solved through progressive dialogue. The breakdown in adequate communication is one of the principal difficulties. . . . If you do not take good advice on how to solve the problems of the community your opulence and reputation will decrease. Why? Because so many qualified men . . . will go away. After all, you have given so many invitations to good men from time to time to leave the community. Many more will gradually follow that path, feeling there is no scope for change here. . . .

4. It should be noted that ISKCON's succession problems continue. Since 1986, four more appointed gurus have left ISKCON. Of the 11 originally appointed to serve as guru, six have either exited ISKCON voluntarily or been excommunicated (Rochford, forthcoming). In a recently publicized case, an ISKCON guru in West Virginia was excommunicated because of various legal problems involving members of his community (Gruson, 1986, 1987a, 1987b; Hubner & Gruson, 1987). Although it is still too early to predict the likely course of events, there are already initial signs of conflict between ISKCON and the excommunicated leader and his followers: Upon his excommunication, Kirtanananda Bhaktipada threatened legal action against ISKCON.

As Stark and Bainbridge have noted, conflict resulting in factionalism and schism tends to occur in the context of "subnetworks that existed prior to the outbreak of dispute" (1985: 101). Such was the case in the politicization of the Los Angeles ISKCON community following Prabhupada's death: Pre-existing interest groups mobilized in an effort to reform the community's economic infrastructure. At issue was ISKCON's long-standing practice of combining money-making with missionary work through the distribution of the movement's religious texts in public places, a process called *sankirtana*. By 1977, revenues from book distribution had begun to decline, while the public backlash against ISKCON's public-place strategies was peaking (Rochford, 1985: 171-89, 1987a, 1987b).

In the years preceding Prabhupada's death, some ISKCON members in Los Angeles sought to diversify the community's economic base in hopes of raising more revenue, on the one hand, and restoring *sankirtana* to its traditional missionary function, on the other. These efforts were largely unsuccessful, however, because Prabhupada steadfastly believed that book distribution would continue to provide for ISKCON's financial needs. In fact, Prabhupada actively discouraged efforts to develop business enterprises in Los Angeles because he thought they would undermine book distribution (Rochford, 1985: 295). With Prabhupada's death, deepening economic problems, and growing public opposition, two challenging groups in Los Angeles again mobilized to push for economic reform in 1978.

The Bhaktivedanta Fellowship comprised approximately 20 male businessmen. Several of the group's members were independent entrepreneurs, although the majority held management positions within ISKCON-owned businesses such as Spiritual Sky Scented Products and Bhaktivedanta Book Trust. The group was led by an ISKCON member who owned a successful travel agency. The fellowship became progressively political and strategically confrontational when its economic policy recommendations were rebuffed by the local ISKCON leadership. Within less than a year, the majority of the Fellowship's members abandoned ISKCON. Some defected, but most joined forces with the Fellowship's leader to begin an independent Krishna conscious community. Twenty to 25 families from the Los Angeles ISKCON community purchased 300 acres of land in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada in central California. The group lived in trailers, experimented with alternative forms of technology, and by all accounts continued to live a Krishna conscious lifestyle.[5]

The second challenging group was known as the Conch Club. This group was made up of eight to 10 male "householders" (i.e., married devotees with families), most of whom had previously worked on the staff of ISKCON's *Back to Godhead* magazine. During the previous year, the president of the Conch Club, and one other member of the group, had been dismissed from the editorial staff of the magazine in the face of charges that their recent articles had treated the movement's theology in an overly liberal fashion. After their dismissal from the magazine's staff, neither was offered gainful employment within the community.

The Conch Club, like the Bhaktivedanta Fellowship, met with opposition from local leaders. Unlike the Fellowship, however, the Conch Club altered its initial objectives and began laying plans for defection. One year after their defection members of the Conch Club organized themselves and other ex-ISKCON members into an incipient sectarian organization. The remainder of the paper traces the development of the Conch Club, both

within ISKCON and beyond, as its members sought to establish themselves in conventional society while still preserving portions of their Krishna beliefs and lifestyle. Studying the career of this group allows for understanding empirically and theoretically the processes promoting group defection and the problems faced by schismatics as they seek to build a sectarian organization.

CONFLICT GROUP FORMATION AND DEFECTION

The initial purpose of the Conch Club was to develop economic strategies to alleviate ISKCON's deepening financial problems. Members shared the opinion that the financial future of ISKCON rested on diversifying the movement's economic base. As the president of the Conch Club explained:

> So the [Conch] Club was developed out of people who had similar business interests. In the beginning it was a pretty straight kind of rotary club, very much in connection with ISKCON. We were *vaisnava* businessmen interested in helping the movement (Los Angeles member, 1980).

Despite its initial alignment with ISKCON, the Conch Club soon came into conflict with the local ISKCON leadership. Ramesvara Swami, a long-time advocate of book distribution, continued to see ISKCON's financial future as directly tied to the distribution of Prabhupada's religious texts (Rochford, 1985: 225; Shinn, 1987a: 111). These differences in economic policy placed the members of the Conch Club in political conflict with Ramesvara Swami. Rather than push for its economic policies, the group chose instead to back away from its initial objectives. As the following statement by the Conch Club's founder suggests, the group's purpose changed rather dramatically.

> We got less and less concerned with our initial purpose and more and more concerned with just developing our psychological strength. . . . We just started to get together as friends. We went through a thing that I suppose a lot of devotees do when they first move out [defect from ISKCON]; they start remembering the old rock-and-roll. You know, we started in the '50s and took a month or two or three right up to the music of the present. Just feeding ourselves again with those lovely passionate sounds that meant so much to us and gave us so much energy and inspiration and was part of the development that brought us to Krishna Consciousness. . . . We started sitting down together playing chess and watching basketball on TV for hours on end. It was just a way of affirming once again a continuity in time, a continuity in history, a personal development which started long long ago was now continuing . . . (Los Angeles member, 1980).

While the Conch Club served as a structure where members could bridge or reframe their cognitive orientations to their past lives in the conventional society (Goffman, 1974; Snow *et al.*, 1986),[6] the group also allowed its members an opportunity to discuss personal issues which cast doubt on ISKCON, if not on Krishna Consciousness itself. One major issue had to do with ISKCON's strict prohibitions against sexual relations.

6. Goffman defines a primary framework as a "schemata of interpretation" (1974: 21) which renders aspects of the social world understandable and meaningful. By providing the basis of meaning, frames "organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective" (Snow *et al.*, 1986: 464). As others have noted (Gonos, 1977), Goffman's analysis of "frames" and "framework" represents a structuralist approach to micro-sociology. Goffman's frame analytic approach thus lends itself to linking traditional and resource mobilization perspectives to the study of movement participation. For an application of Goffman's frame analytic approach

> [In the Conch Club] we could talk as friends talk. Not like devotees talk. There is a big difference between saying, 'Oh Prabhu, I have such sex desires. I am lower than the lowest. I'm a straw in the street.' There is a big difference between that and saying, 'Oh man, look at that piece of ass. . . ." I mean you can't say that in the [ISKCON] community. You'll shock the *shikas* off the *bramacharies*. And you can't quite admit it to yourself either. . . . We learned an enormous amount about ourselves . . . (Los Angeles member, 1980).

Members of the Conch Club also spoke at length about issues of independence and how their lives within ISKCON had not allowed for making individual judgments and decisions. ISKCON's exclusive structure and centralization of power had limited their ability to maintain a sense of control over their personal and spiritual lives. As the president of the Conch Club described it, it was this desire for personal independence which most concerned him and other members of the group.

> I realized that my life within the *ashram* was of no more use to me spiritually. . . . It was very apparent that the further development of my spiritual life depended on my ability to choose my behavior. In order to have the ability, I had to gain economic independence from ISKCON. I knew that the kind of choices I wanted to make required making money, drawing a paycheck each week. I had to have money so I could have a car. . . . To live in an apartment I had to have money to pay for it. I wanted to work, to be responsible in terms of that work and my own life. So this was a big issue for all of us in the Conch Club. This was the only way we were going to gain independence from ISKCON, independence from the *swamis* (Los Angeles member, 1980).

In sum, the Conch Club served as a "mediating structure" (Robbins, 1981: 214-15) between ISKCON and the conventional secular society, allowing members to reconstruct their worldview in preparation for exiting. The group prepared its members ideologically for defection by bridging the two familiar, but previously unconnected and seemingly incongruent, frames.[7]

The Conch Club served its members socially, as well as ideologically, in their preparation for defecting from ISKCON. The social support provided by the group to each of its members is expressed in the following statement by a Conch Club member:

> The Conch Club became an important source of support as each of us began to consider leaving ISKCON. We talked a lot about how it would be and what we would do. Let's face it, leaving [ISKCON] felt like a big risk to all of us. Many of us had been in the movement for many, many years. . . . In the end, we all left in roughly the same period. We started our own little community not far from the [ISKCON] Temple and we tried to help each other get over the whole ISKCON trip (Los Angeles, 1980).

All the members of the Conch Club and their families defected from ISKCON within months of each other in the autumn and early winter of 1978. They established their own community in an apartment complex just a few blocks from the local ISKCON community. Three of the men found work together in a local publishing firm. Two others gained employment at a mortgage company. The women spent their days together tending to the needs

7. My use of the concept "frame bridging" differs from the way Snow *et al.* (1986) have defined the term. They refer to frame bridging as "the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem" (1986: 467). By contrast, the cognitive "bridge-work" of Conch Club members involved the attempt to graft at least portions of their pre-ISKCON interpretive frame onto their Krishna conscious worldview, without a resulting transformation of frame. (See Snow *et al.*, 1986: 473-76, on domain-specific and global transformations of frame.) The Conch Club, therefore, served a different function from other forms of re-evaluation therapy, exit counseling, and deprogramming which seek "deconversion" as their objective. The next section will cover the strategies employed by Conch Club members to bridge their Krishna beliefs with the conventional worldview, and the overall problematics of this task.

of their children. Socially, their lives were tied to one another, and to a few other ex-ISKCON members who lived in the area near the ISKCON community. They often collectively attended the Sunday feast at the temple and could be found occasionally worshipping alongside committed ISKCON members during morning or evening services.

Although the members of the Conch Club and their families had defected from ISKCON, they continued to view themselves as Krishna devotees. Their reasons for leaving were motivated largely by political and economic concerns, rather than by serious spiritual misgivings or backsliding. In keeping with this desire to retain their devotee status, members of the Conch Club continued to use the sanskrit names given them by their Spiritual Master and made reference to themselves as "ex-CONS" rather than "ex-devotees."

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE KIRTAN HALL

Within a year after leaving ISKCON, three of the original members of the Conch Club began planning what was to become the Kirtan Hall. Over a nine-month period in 1979 and 1980, they debated what the purpose, structure, and beliefs of the new organization would be. In the end they decided that the group should provide for the participation of a wide spectrum of people, whether former ISKCON members or other persons with emerging interests in Krishna Consciousness. As one of the founding trustees explained:

> The idea [behind the Kirtan Hall] is to incorporate Americanism within spiritual life. We want people to stay within their daily lives. I mean the whole idea of people searching, like in the '60s, for a guru and some new lifestyle is dead. The guru concept is what is hurting ISKCON now. We want to create an organization where people can participate in a democratic way. . . . This is something ISKCON has gone away from with these gurus (Los Angeles member, 1980).

The formal charter of the Kirtan Hall likewise emphasized the inclusive and denominational quality of the group:

> (Purpose #1) To provide a friendly environment where people — whether the priestly type, those pursuing a professional career, or those simply earning an honest living — may worship Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, by feasting, dancing, and chanting the Holy Name (Charter for Lord Chaitanya's Kirtan Hall, 1980).

Originally a core group of 15 men and women met, along with their children, twice weekly in the home of one of the Kirtan Hall's founders. Attendance at the meetings tended to fluctuate between six and 30 adults. On average, a group of 10 adults and a half-dozen or more children would be present. Members collectively chanted, played music and danced, discussed the philosophy of Krishna Consciousness, and feasted on vegetarian foodstuffs.

The meetings in various ways mirrored ISKCON's beginnings in New York City in 1966 (see Goswami, 1980; Rochford, 1982: 402-03). Under the influence of one of Prabhupada's first disciples in the U.S., the *kirtans*, or chants, were simple, involving variations on the Hare Krishna mantra; the music was popular in character, and the discussions wide-ranging and accepting in tone rather than dogmatic. An excerpt from my field notes provides a flavor of the meetings and the group's accommodative style:

> Following Govinda's reading of Srila Prabhupada's purport from the *Bhagavad Gita* the discussion centered on the need for people to change their consciousness in order to be devotees of Krishna. As Rupa explained to the gathering: 'You can continue to engage the senses as long as you change

> the consciousness involved. Do what you must do in your life but do it for Krishna. You don't have to change your clothes, your job, nothing like that; just change your consciousness. God is merciful' (Los Angeles member, 1980).

During my months of participant observation, the Kirtan Hall gained only three new members who attended meetings on a regular basis. Without exception, those joining were former ISKCON members residing in the Los Angeles area. In the weeks prior to the demise of the Kirtan Hall, a feeble attempt was made to bring "fresh blood" into the group. One of the leaders requested that for the next meeting everyone should bring a friend. Everyone nodded in agreement, but at the next meeting not even one new face was present. Nothing was said about the obvious failure and the meeting proceeded as usual.

The failure of the Kirtan Hall as an incipient sectarian organization was strongly influenced by its ineffective mobilization. Critical to successful adherent mobilization is the presence of lines of communication (Jackson *et al.*, 1960; Freeman, 1973) and cooptable networks (McCarthy, 1987; Snow *et al.*, 1980; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980) which link potential supporters to a movement's membership. Resource mobilization theorists refer to these dimensions of social structure as "social infrastructural supports" (McCarthy, 1987; Tilly, 1978; Zald & McCarthy, 1987a). The presence or absence of infrastructural supports strongly influences the course and prospects of any social movement organization (Zald & McCarthy, 1987b: 45; Jackson *et al.*, 1960).

Stark (1987: 22-23) emphasizes that new religions can succeed only if they combine dense internal networks with open networks radiating outward into the surrounding society. A pattern of dense internal attachments provides the basis of group commitment and solidarity; open networks facilitate the work of recruitment. Successful religious groups are able to maintain the "delicate balance . . . between internal and external attachments" (Stark, 1987: 23). Below, I consider the microstructural and ideological factors which constrained the Kirtan Hall's mobilization efforts, leaving it vulnerable to failure.

Microstructural Constraints on Recruitment

Members of the Kirtan Hall had strong ties with other ex-ISKCON devotees, and in some cases with still-committed ISKCON members, but had only "weak" ties (Granovetter, 1973) with non-devotee acquaintances and co-workers. As I have already explained, their work lives and personal lives were entangled with one another as they sought to limit ties with others beyond their ex-member circle of friends. This process of "differential association and differential identification" (Simmons, 1964: 254) effectively insulated them from at least some of the inevitable "pulls" on their faith exerted by the conventional secular society. This pattern of relationships served, however, to limit their involvement to people who were largely unwilling or otherwise unavailable for membership in the Kirtan Hall.

Over the course of my research, only one young woman having no previous commitment to ISKCON attended group meetings. She was a co-worker of two of the Kirtan Hall's founders. She attended five meetings, asked many questions about Krishna Consciousness (for example, regarding its overly strict sexual proscriptions), but finally

dropped out. She did report turning to vegetarianism during her period of involvement. Before actually departing from the group, she had suggested on several occasions that her husband was unhappy with her participation in the Kirtan Hall.

The Kirtan Hall's lack of success in mobilizing potential supporters through conventional interpersonal ties was also a function of having inherited ISKCON's public image as a peculiar and threatening cult. (See Liebman *et al.*, 1988: 344, on how the development of a schismatic movement may be linked to the characteristics of its parent religious group.) Members of the Kirtan Hall consciously avoided telling others about their prior involvement in ISKCON and about their continuing interest in Krishna Consciousness. As one Kirtan Hall member stated, "I just can't risk telling people at work about Krishna; I can talk about religious values and acting in a Godly fashion but people would freak-out if they knew I was a devotee." As a result, network ties in the workplace and beyond were only "weakly available for cooptation" (McCarthy, 1987: 59).

Fewer than one dozen still-committed ISKCON members attended a Kirtan Hall meeting, each making only a single appearance. Although I anticipated that at least a few of the ISKCON members who attended would in time defect from ISKCON and become involved in the Kirtan Hall, none ever did. Despite the fact that several were outspoken critics of ISKCON's spiritual and political reorganization, nevertheless they chose to remain within the local ISKCON community. My interviews and conversations with five of them revealed a degree of optimism that ISKCON's internal political problems were being resolved. All explained that, while they had a number of good friends who were members of the Kirtan Hall, they would not risk being ostracized from the local ISKCON community by being aligned with the new group.

Another factor which limited the appeal of the Kirtan Hall to dissident ISKCON members was the absence of a central charismatic figure to lead the group. The Kirtan Hall prided itself on its democratic governing structure, but without charismatic leadership the group lacked the "principal form of authority legitimating schism" (Wallis, 1979: 186). As a result, the group had no claim to supernatural legitimation.

The ex-ISKCON members who attended the Kirtan Hall tended to display two patterns of involvement: Most attended one or two meetings before dropping out; others attended meetings sporadically, expressing little or no interest in becoming formal members. The latter cited their desire to take part in the *kirtan* as the sole basis for their occasional attendance.

When asked why they chose not to join the Kirtan Hall, all of the ex-ISKCON members interviewed cited one of two reasons. About one-third (N = 4) of the 15 interviewed reported that they still held out some hope that ISKCON would right itself spiritually and politically, making it possible for them to return as ISKCON members.

> Radha reported that her husband did not want her to attend any more of the Kirtan Hall meetings. 'He said that it wasn't all over with ISKCON. We had to think about how devotees in the [ISKCON] community would feel. [He told me] if I want to worship, go to the Temple' (Los Angeles member, 1980).

The majority (N = 11) of the ex-ISKCON members who chose not to continue their participation in the Kirtan Hall expressed a general resistance to joining another religious organization. One night after a lecture the following rather heated exchange took place between one of the leaders of the Kirtan Hall and an ex-ISKCON member who had attended meetings on two other occasions.

> As the meeting was nearing an end Jaya leaned over and suggested to Prabhu that he look over the Kirtan Hall charter. Prabhu responded with some feeling, 'No. I'm not interested in any charter. I didn't come here to join. I heard from Bhakta [another ex-ISKCON member] that there was going to be a *kirtan* here tonight. I love the *kirtan* but I don't want to join anything. After ISKCON I have had enough (Los Angeles member, 1980).

Frame Maintenance and Ideological Work

While the Kirtan Hall suffered from ineffective mobilization because its members lacked access to cooptable networks, it also failed at recruitment because of ideological considerations. By turning inward to assure the continuation of their own faith, members of the Kirtan Hall effectively abandoned recruitment as an organizational objective. The practical and ongoing focus of members centered largely on problems of internal frame maintenance (Snow *et al.*, 1986: 478). Ultimately, the group spent the majority of its time and energies involved in what Bennett Berger (1981) calls "ideological work."

Although the ex-ISKCON members of Kirtan Hall had attained some measure of insulation from the larger secular culture, through what might be called "circumstantial work," or the creation of a social environment consistent with individual and group beliefs, they still faced the reality of having to adapt to some of the demands of living and working in the conventional world. Moreover, many members of the Kirtan Hall did not desire to forsake all aspects of the material society. Most members occasionally attended the cinema, some consumed drugs and alcohol, and most seemed willing to abandon what they saw as the "unrealistic" sexual proscriptions to which they had previously adhered.

Bennett Berger (1981: 20-21) argues that apparent contradictions between behavior or lifestyle and ideology are threatening to the believer. While the believer can "sell-out" and accommodate his or her unconventional beliefs to the dominant worldview — as most defectors from new religions in time do — other adaptations are possible. As Berger describes them, these latter solutions involve ideological work on the part of individuals or groups.

> . . . a group may struggle against oppressive circumstances to make its beliefs more probably realizable; in this case ideological work is likely to attempt to mobilize the energies of believers in behalf of the struggle. Or . . . a group may accommodate its beliefs to the circumstances it cannot alter, while manipulating those it can to achieve the best bargain it can get. . . . All of these solutions require ideological work (1981: 21).[8]

Many Kirtan Hall meetings involved discussion about what members called "dovetailing." Dovetailing is a form of ideological work in which individuals and groups attempt to provide "a sense of coherence and continuity" between everyday activity and belief (Berger, 1988: 37). The term was often used by Prabhupada as he instructed his followers that the material world should not be rejected but rather used in Krishna's service (Goswami, 1980: 82-86). In other words, a devotee of Krishna can be involved in material, secular activities as long as these pursuits are for Godly purposes. As a leader of the Kirtan Hall explained to the gathering one evening:

> Devotees appear, to the uninformed, to be involved in material activity but, in fact, they are liberated. Their activities are not generating *karma* because they have accepted Krishna, they are Krishna

8. In Goffman's terms, "ideological work" is the cognitive work undertaken by individuals and groups to deal with the problematics of internal frame maintenance. (For an application to ISKCON of Berger's approach, see Rochford, 1985: 192-214.)

> conscious. . . . Of course, we all must find a way to escape the material world, that is for sure. But there are liberal and conservative styles of getting out. So one should not just think that [being saved from the material world] requires renunciation. Because another way of getting out is to engage positively the objects and energy of the material nature in Krishna's service. By so doing one transforms matter into spirit (Los Angeles member, 1980).

Following the formal presentation of Prabhupada's commentaries on the *Bhagavad-Gita*, it was normal for those present to discuss the problems they encountered in dovetailing their ongoing life activities with their Krishna beliefs. One evening, a member of the Kirtan Hall raised these concerns:

> I find it more difficult to dovetail now that I am away from the Temple. It's harder to know if you're really dovetailing. Before, I could just go to the Temple President with my ideas and check them out. I can't be sure now that I am on my own. [With] Prabhupada's disappearance [death], how can you tell if you're dovetailing or just desiring too much? It seems like I am continually making decisions, but I don't know if I am dovetailing or fooling myself. Rupa: That's what we have the Kirtan Hall for. You have people here that you can check things out with (Los Angeles member, 1980).

On other occasions, the question of what should be the appropriate limits of an individual's ideological work became a central issue of group discussion. One member, for example, talked about trying to dovetail an expensive automobile:

> Everytime I see a 450 Mercedes my desire is very strong. I once tried to dovetail a 450. It kind of worked, but it didn't really. But that is part of the fight; to go out there [in the conventional world] yet be internally Krishna conscious. That's our success. Jiva: Yes, but the important thing is to be sure you are not doing the other thing that doves do with their tail! [laughter by all present] (Los Angeles member, 1980).[9]

IMPLICATIONS

This study of factionalism, group defection, and schism has described and analyzed the relation among organizational change, structure, and ideology in the career of the Hare Krishna movement. The ethnographic data and analysis presented raise three additional issues concerning collective forms of disengagement and the development of religious movements and organizations:

(1) Zald and Ash argue that "the inclusive organization retains its factions while the exclusive organization spews them forth" (1966: 337). The question remains: In what form do these factions go forth? The literature suggests that factions splinter from religious organizations as schisms, or sects, in Stark and Bainbridge (1985) terms. The case of the Conch Club suggests another alternative: Insurgent groups may also defect. Given these possible options, it becomes theoretically useful to account for why some dissident groups defect, while others splinter from their parent religious organizations as sectarian movements. Why, for example, did the Bhaktivedanta Fellowship disengage from ISKCON as a schismatic group, while members of the Conch Club collectively defected, only later to build a sectarian organization?

9. The Kirtan Hall formally disbanded in October, 1980. During the weeks just prior to its demise, the group failed to meet on a regular basis, and when it did there were often no more than three or four adults present. The final blow came when one of the leaders, in whose house the Kirtan Hall's meetings were held, relocated to the southeastern United States. I should add, however, that it was just after the group folded when I discontinued my field work and lost touch with members of the Kirtan Hall. It is possible that the group reformed sometime after my departure from the field.

It is a truism that religious organizations require resources such as money, people, leadership, and power, to sustain their efforts; but resource accumulation is particularly problematic for insurgent groups seeking to exit highly centralized, totalistic, and deviant religious organizations like ISKCON. On the one hand, insurgents normally find it difficult to appropriate resources from within (Zald & Berger, 1978), and on the other, they may find it equally problematic to mobilize resources from the conventional society, given the movement's controversial public definition. Under such conditions, insurgent groups are hard pressed to accumulate the resources necessary to begin a schismatic organization, requiring them either to defect from the organization or to lower their political voice and accommodate rather than fight (Hirschman, 1970; Zald & Berger, 1978).

The ability of the Bhaktivedanta Fellowship to splinter from ISKCON was largely a function of having the independent financial resources of some of its members at its disposal to underwrite a new sectarian enterprise. Most other ISKCON members in Los Angeles and elsewhere lacked such discretionary resources. Few had individual bank accounts and almost all received financial assistance from their ISKCON community as their sole means of support. Like most other ISKCON devotees, members of the Conch Club lacked independent financial resources. Moreover, none had jobs outside ISKCON, and their employment possibilities were uncertain at best. In sum, the Bhaktivedanta Fellowship possessed the requisite infrastructural supports to break from ISKCON and begin an alternative Krishna Consciousness community. The Conch Club, by contrast, lacked such an option because it was resource-deficient. Its members were left to defect. Only after a period of resource accumulation (e.g., money gained from employment, housing) were they able to begin the task of building a sectarian organization.[10]

Thus, insurgent groups lacking in discretionary resources will have their exit options limited to individual or collective forms of defection, while dissidents who possess resources, or are able to appeal to resources controlled by external groups (Zald & McCarthy, 1987a: 85), are likely to splinter from their parent religious organization as a schismatic group.[11]

(2) Defection from "greedy" (Coser, 1974) and world-transforming religious movements (Bromley & Shupe, 1979a), such as ISKCON, is fundamentally a transition involving a change in status from member to ex-member, and perhaps to re-membering with the conventional society. This change may or may not involve a shift in cognitive orientation implied by concepts such as "deconversion" (Jacobs, 1984, 1987) or "desocialization and resocialization" (Lewis, 1986; Wright, 1983b). Many, if not most, ex-members of new religions do undergo changes in worldview following defection, re-establishing themselves as members of the dominant society. Other defectors, especially those who have

10. Of course, what becomes of group defectors remains empirically problematic. If they are absorbed into conventional society and/or become members of new movements, they retain their status as defectors. Should they collectively unite to build a sectarian organization, they become schismatics. Group defection, as we see in the development of the Kirtan Hall, may represent a stage or way-station in the direction of sectarian schism, rather than a theoretically distinct phenomenon or process.

11. One schismatic group which broke from ISKCON was able to mobilize the support of a Prabhupada "Godbrother" in India. In 1983, Dheera Krishna, the former president of the Los Angeles ISKCON community, was reinitiated by Sridara Maharaja. He returned to the United States and founded the Chaitanya Saraswat Mandal in San Jose, California (Rochford, 1985: 248-49; Shinn, 1987b: 130). Another group which splintered from ISKCON on the east coast of the U.S., the Sri Nitai Gaura Association, was also supported by Sridara Maharaja in the early 1980s (Shinn, 1987b: 130).

discontinued their involvement for political or organizational reasons, may self-consciously seek to maintain their unconventional religious beliefs.

Members of the Conch Club, while questioning aspects of their Krishna conscious beliefs, remained converts as they sought to re-establish themselves marginally within the larger society. In rejecting ISKCON as unworthy of their membership, they had not abandoned their Krishna beliefs and way of life. Defection did not involve a process of resocialization leading Conch Club members to become "recruited back into conventional social networks" (Lewis & Bromley, 1987: 511) and ultimately to the dominant worldview. Members sought, instead, to retain their identity as Krishna devotees. Through strategies of circumstantial and ideological work, members of the Kirtan Hall constructed a social world which supported their unconventional religious beliefs.

The theoretical implications of this study emphasize that leaving a religious organization by no means assures that the "meaning systems" (Berger, 1963) of former members undergo a transformation toward a conventional worldview; some ex-members actively seek to retain their religious worldview and identity following defection. The Kirtan Hall represents one example of how this might be accomplished. Other strategies have been noted in the literature.

Several investigators of new religious movements have presented evidence that it is not uncommon for voluntary defectors later to become members of other new religions (Jacobs, 1987; Wright, 1983b). Richardson (1978, 1980) describes this process as a "conversion career." Wright (1983b) reports that 78% of the voluntary defectors he studied joined another new religion after leaving their previous one. Jacobs (1987) found that 50% of the defectors in her sample had become affiliated with a different religious group. Although these researchers view such changes in membership as evidence of "reconversion," I would argue that only the specific content of the defectors' meaning system underwent change. Their primary religious framework remained in place, despite a shift in organizational affiliation. Thus, joining another religious organization can be viewed as a strategy to avoid reconverting to the conventional secular worldview.

(3) A related issue concerns movement success and failure. Researchers of social movements often assume that defection and schism rob a movement of its energy and vitality (but see Gerlach & Hine, 1972: 63-78). Gamson goes so far as to argue that factionalism is the major cause of movement failure (1975: 101-03). This view of failure confuses the conceptual difference between movement-organizations and movements, and offers what Gusfield suggests is a linear image of social movements. He proposed that the focus on organizations in the study of social movements has essentially made movement-organizations "synonymous with the Movement" (1981: 320). If we view movements as the fortunes of movement-organizations, defection and factionalism easily become signs of failure; but if we take what Gusfield calls a "fluid" perspective of social movements, we become less concerned about "the boundaries of organizations and more alive to the larger contexts of change" in which those organizations exist (1981: 323). When people defect from religious or secular movement-organizations for political rather than ideological reasons, they *remain members of the movement.* The members of the Kirtan Hall clearly remained largely committed to the practices and beliefs of Krishna Consciousness despite their decision to defect from ISKCON. ISKCON may have suffered factionalism, a loss of members, and decline by the end of the 1970s, but the larger movement lived on and continued to exert its influence in American society, though in

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APPENDIX 1

Ashram — in the present context, a place of communal residence.

Bhaktivedanta — the name bestowed on Prabhupada by his spiritual master's Gaudiya Vaisnava Society in India in 1947, in honor of his philosophical learning and devotion.

Bramacharie — a single male devotee.

Conch — In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna and Arjuna sound their conch shells indicating victory on the battlefield of Kuruksetra. Conch shells are sounded at the end of religious ceremonies held in ISKCON temples.

Guru — a spiritual master, or teacher, who initiated disciples into spiritual life.

Gurukula — a school dedicated to Vedic learning for boys and girls five years and over. The school is under the direction of the spiritual master.

Karma — everyday material activities yielding good or bad reactions.

Kirtan — collective chanting and singing of the holy names of God.

Sankirtana — involves three types of activities in public places: Book distribution is the practice whereby devotees venture into airports and other public places to distribute religious texts for money; *Hare Nam* usually involves a group of ISKCON members going into public locations to chant and preach (may or may not involve literature distribution); *Picking* is a form of public solicitation which involves selling nonreligious products (e.g., candles, record albums, prints of art work) or seeking straight donations on behalf of worthy causes (e.g., to feed needy people).

Shika — clump of hair which remains on the back of men's heads after they have otherwise shaved their heads.

Swami — title for a devotee who is in the renounced order of life (i.e., has given up work and family obligations to commit himself fully to spiritual life).

Vaisnava — a devotee of Krishna.