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Out of darkness, and into light



The Cult Watcher Handbook



- They believe that theirs is the only truth.
- They have a belief in prophesy which is the New word of God for today
- They are not allowed to disagree with or question the beliefs of the group.
- They are forbidden from having anything to do with ex members.
- They are not allowed to read other literature than their own publications
- They have secret beliefs that are withheld from outsiders and new members.
- They often believe the end justifies the means. Therefore lying and misrepresenting themselves to the public is allowed if it furthers their cause.

Cult Information Family Support

What is CIFS?

CIFS is an Australian support and information network based in Sydney NSW. CIFS was initially formed by parents and family members of loved ones caught up in abusive groups.

The network has grown to include families, friends, former members and concerned individuals working together towards a common goal, to provide support and develop awareness for those affected by high demand groups or cultic relationships.

CIFS aims and objectives are:

- To offer support and friendship to persons concerned about family members or friends in cults and in particular to put them in touch with persons having similar concerns.
- To provide ongoing contact and to meet together at regular intervals for the purpose of supporting one another both prayerfully and physically.
- To lobby members of parliament and other appropriate people when felt necessary.
- To support each other by way of peaceful protests against cults.
- To aim at informing the public and in particular the youth of Australia through schools, of the dangers of becoming involved in cults.

Contact

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P.S. CIFS is only made possible by the goodwill and donations of its members. Please consider helping us to forward our work with either a single donation or membership.

Introduction

This booklet is a collection of papers and articles designed to give you an overall idea of the identifying marks of a cult, and to impart some strategies should you in some way be affected by an extremist group.

This booklet is a 'not for profit' publication with one goal, that being, to disseminate good information and hopefully cut through some of the waffle in a concise manner and give a broad overview of the topic.

We will look at the topic of "mind control" and see that although this term conjures up mental images of hypnosis and water torture it is a much more everyday occurrence. We ask, "Is there a certain type of person that would join a cult?" the answer of course is both yes and no. Other questions addressed are;

- What is the difference between a church and a cult?
- The Marines are controlled and have to obey their officers, why aren't they a cult?
- What are some similarities between domestic violence situations and abusive control?
- Finally we look at some strategies for the family member that joins a high demand group and the problems encountered by the ex cult member.

Control, manipulation and various abuses, whether political, religious or sociological have been with us as long as mankind has been on the planet. There are always some who would take advantage of those in need and exploit them to suit their own ends. The pattern of exploitation has always been the same however, and while it would be impossible to list every cult in the world today the pattern they follow is the same.

So the trick is to identify the pattern, and if it "looks like a duck and quacks like a duck...?"

You will see that cult involvement has more to do with control and manipulation than with religious dogma, and that they operate by targeting new recruits using coercion. They isolate new members from family and friends, control their behaviour and information while at the same time using organised peer pressure tactics and simplistic black and white thought processes to gain control of the mind.

Presently we live in a society that in many ways is conditioning us and our children to fall into these traps. We are bombarded with far more information than we can process effectively; this causes us to feel so overwhelmed we can tend to accept things without taking the time to research. It is a complex world with many shades of grey and a multitude of beliefs on offer, to sift through all of this can be quite daunting. Enter the cult leader with simplistic solutions to extremely complex issues and we find many vulnerable people can be drawn in and damaged as a result.

What messages are behind today's cults?

Philip G. Zimbardo, Ph.D. APA
Monitor, May 1997

The appeal

What is the appeal of cults? Imagine being part of a group in which you will find instant friendship, a caring family, respect for your contributions, an identity, safety, security, simplicity, and an organized daily agenda. You will learn new skills, have a respected position, gain personal insight, improve your personality and intelligence. There is no crime or violence and your healthy lifestyle means there is no illness. Your leader may promise not only to heal any sickness and foretell the future, but give you the gift of immortality, if you are a true believer. In addition, your group's ideology represents a unique spiritual/religious agenda (in other cults it is political, social or personal enhancement) that if followed, will enhance the Human Condition somewhere in the world or cosmos.

Who would fall for such appeals? Most of us, if they were made by someone we trusted, in a setting that was familiar, and especially if we had unfulfilled needs.

Who would fall for such appeals?

Most of us, if they were made by someone we trusted, in a setting that was familiar, and especially if we had unfulfilled needs.

Much cult recruitment is done by family, friends, neighbours, co-workers, teachers and highly trained professional recruiters. They recruit not on the streets or airports, but in contexts that are "home bases" for the potential recruit; at schools, in the home, coffee houses, on the job, at sports events, lectures, churches, or drop-in dinners and free personal assessment

workshops. The Heaven's Gate group made us aware that recruiting is now also active over the Internet and across the World Wide Web.

In a 1980 study where we (C. Hartley and I) surveyed and interviewed more than 1,000 randomly selected high school students in the greater San Francisco Bay Area, 54 percent reported they had at least one

active recruiting attempt by someone they identified with a cult, and 40 percent said they had experienced three to five such contacts. And that was long before electronic cult recruiting could be a new allure for a generation of youngsters growing up as web surfers.

What makes any of us especially vulnerable to cult appeals? Someone is in a transitional phase in life: moved to a new city or country, lost a job, dropped out of school, parents divorced, romantic relationship broken, gave up traditional

religion as personally irrelevant. Add to the recipe, all those who find their work tedious and trivial, education abstractly meaningless, social life absent or inconsistent, family remote or dysfunctional, friends too busy to find time for you and trust in government eroded.

Cults promise to fulfill most of those personal individual's needs and also to compensate for a litany of societal failures: to make their slice of the world

Our society is in a curious transitional phase; as science and technology make remarkable advances, anti-scientific values and beliefs in the paranormal and occult abound,

safe, healthy, caring, predictable and controllable. They will eliminate the increasing feelings of isolation and alienation being created by mobility, technology, competition, meritocracy, incivility, and dehumanized living and working

conditions in our society. In general, cult leaders offer simple solutions to the increasingly complex world problems we all face daily.

They offer the simple path to happiness, to success, to salvation by following their simple rules, simple group regimentation and simple total lifestyle. Ultimately, each new member contributes to the power of

the leader by trading his or her freedom for the illusion of security and reflected glory that group membership holds out.

It seems like a "win-win" trade for those whose freedom is without power to make a difference in their lives. This may be especially so for the shy among us. Shyness among adults is now escalating to epidemic proportions, according to recent research by Dr. B. Carducci in Indiana and my research team in California. More than 50 percent of college-aged adults report being chronically shy (lacking social skills, low self-esteem, awkward in many social encounters). As with the rise in cult membership, a public health model is essential for understanding how societal pathology is implicated in contributing to the rise in shyness among adults and children in America.

A society in transition

Our society is in a curious transitional phase; as science and technology make remarkable advances, anti-scientific values and beliefs in the paranormal and occult abound, family values are stridently promoted in Congress and pulpits, yet divorce is rising along with spouse and child abuse, fear of nuclear annihilation in superpower wars is replaced by fears of crime in our streets and drugs in our schools, and the economic gap grows exponentially between the rich and

powerful and our legions of poor and powerless.

Such change and confusion create intellectual chaos that makes it difficult for many citizens to believe in anything, to trust anyone, to stand for anything substantial.

On such shifting sands

On such shifting sands of time and resolve, the cult leader stands firm with simple directions for what to think and feel, and how to act.

of time and resolve, the cult leader stands firm with simple directions for what to think and feel, and how to act. "Follow me, I know the path to sanity, security and salvation," proclaims Marshall Applewhite, with other cult leaders chanting the same lyric in that celestial chorus. And many will follow.

What makes cults dangerous? It depends in part on the kind of cult since they come in many sizes, purposes and disguises. Some cults are in the business of power and money. They need members to give money, work for free, beg and recruit new members. They won't go the deathly route of the Heaven's Gaters; their danger lies in deception, mindless devotion, and failure to deliver on the recruiting promises.

Danger also comes in the form of insisting on contributions of exorbitant amounts of money (tithing, signing over life

insurance, social security or property, and fees for personal testing and training).

Add exhausting labor as another danger (spending all one's waking time begging for money, recruiting new members, or doing menial service for little or no remuneration). Most cult groups demand that members sever ties with former

family and friends which

creates total dependence on the group for self identity, recognition, social reinforcement. Unquestioning obedience to the leader and following arbitrary rules and regulations eliminates independent, critical thinking, and the exercise of free will. Such cerebral straightjacketing is a terrible danger that can lead in turn to the ultimate twin dangers of committing suicide upon command or destroying the cult's enemies.

Potential for the worst abuse is found in "total situations" where the group is physically and socially isolated from the outside community. The accompanying total milieu and informational control permits idiosyncratic and paranoid thinking to flourish and be shared without limits. The madness of any leader then becomes normalized as members embrace it, and the folly of one becomes folie & agrave; deux, and finally, with three or

more adherents, it becomes a constitutionally protected belief system that is an ideology defended to the death.

A remarkable thing about cult mind control is that it's so ordinary in the tactics and strategies of social influence employed. They are variants of well-known social psychological principles of compliance, conformity, persuasion, dissonance, reactance, framing, emotional manipulation, and others that are used on all of us daily to entice us: to buy, to try, to donate, to vote, to join, to change, to believe, to love, to hate the enemy.

Cult mind control is not different in kind from these everyday varieties, but in its greater intensity, persistence, duration, and scope. One difference is in its greater efforts to block quitting the group, by imposing high exit costs, replete with induced phobias of harm, failure, and personal isolation.

What's the solution?

Heaven's Gate mass suicides have made cults front-page news. While their number and ritually methodical formula are unusual, cults are not. They exist as part of the frayed edges of our society and have vital messages for us to reflect upon if we want to prevent such tragedies or our children and neighbours from joining such destructive groups that are on the near horizon.

The solution? Simple. All we have to do is to create an alternative, "perfect cult." We need to work together to find ways to make our society actually deliver on many of those cult promises, to co-opt their appeal, without their deception, distortion and potential for destruction.

No man or woman is an island unto itself, nor a space traveller without an earthly control centre. Finding that centre, spreading that continent of connections, enriching that core of common humanity should be our first priority as we learn and share a vital lesson from the tragedy of Heaven's Gate

Brainwashing: Not just in wartime

By RAY SIDDONS, For the Daily Facts

Although the concept of "brainwashing" is usually associated with prisoners of war, there are examples in our everyday world, Kidnappings, cults, and domestic violence raise issues about victims and their ability to fight off or recover from brainwashing.

Brainwashing occurs when a person is overwhelmed physically and psychologically while under the control of the aggressor. The victim loses individual responsibility and decision-making ability as the aggressor uses subtle or direct force to gain more and more dominance.

This can occur quickly when the trauma is severe or surprising, like a kidnapping. The violence occurs and the victim's whole world is turned upside down. Or, brainwashing can take a longer period of time, as in domestic violence, when a wife, over a period of years, gradually comes under the hypnotic power of an abusive husband.

As with any victimization, the person loses her healthy support system and the reality checks that keep us normal. The victim is so emotionally vulnerable that a deviant can force a new reality. Once in place, the deviant reality is accepted with virtually no dissonance. That is why victims must be deprogrammed out of the reach of the deviant before resuming normal functioning.

This healing can take weeks, months or years regardless of whether the victim is kidnapped, in a cult, or a prisoner of war. The psychological principle that explains a victim's compliance is termed "identification with the aggressor." This means that victims lose so much of their individual identity that they adopt the ways of their captor.

This explains how victims seem to support, empathise with, and have difficulty escaping from their captors. Outsiders have questioned this process because it is so hard to grasp the concept

of losing one's identity to the point of being enslaved by another.

Please, never second-guess a victim who feels she is only able to survive based on getting along with the aggressor. Even a

As with any victimization, the person loses her healthy support system and the reality checks that keep us normal.

strong, resilient individual can lose it when a captor has tools of violence and control.

If you have never been threatened with a weapon, been beat

up, or been forced to endure extended time with psychological warfare, you have no right to question a victim or assume that you would have done better.

Victims primarily fear consequences; anything they do may be disagreeable and could worsen the situation. Victims are broken down physically by:

1) threats of more violence, and 2) creating physical changes or hardships such as imprisonment or controlling the victim's every move. Victims are broken psychologically by 1) destroying the victim's sense of well-being and safety, and 2) the aggressor forcing a dogma and new way leaving the victim no chance to dispute it.

Victims also go downhill because of an issue of complicity. They feel some degree

of guilt of being at fault for what went wrong. Our culture has promulgated a distorted view that we have more control than we do and that accidents and bad fortune can be rooted in our own inadequacies. Or, that we deserve what we get. Victims often backtrack from feeling bad to that undeserving distortion that they caused the problem. This self-doubt makes it easier for the aggressor to dominate.

Sometimes victims don't know any better. An abused wife may have been set-up early in life by a father being violent to her mother, a sibling, or herself. A victim may have been sheltered in a loving environment growing up and is, therefore, totally shocked when the trauma occurs.

This is not to imply that there is anything wrong with a sheltered upbringing; we need genuinely nice people. However, we need to provide proper resources if someone like this is damaged.

Most can fully recover from brainwashing once they are out of the crisis that precipitated it. Life is different, and there may be some residual feelings that intrude once in a while. Every day life must become healthy again, or we have let the perpetrators win.

(Ray Siddons is a licensed marriage and family therapist with a private practice in Redlands.)

Is there a certain type of person who is more likely to join a cult...

(The following article has been excerpted from Take Back Your Life: Recovering from Cults and Abusive Relationships by Janja Lalich and Madeleine Tobias (Bay Tree Publishing).

Individual vulnerability factors matter much more than personality type when it comes to joining or staying in a cult or abusive relationship. "Everyone is influenced and persuaded daily in various ways," writes the late Margaret Singer, "but the vulnerability to influence varies.

The ability to fend off persuaders is reduced when one is rushed, stressed, uncertain, lonely, indifferent, uninformed, distracted, or fatigued... Also affecting vulnerability are the status and power of the persuader.... No one type of person is prone to become involved with cults.

About two-thirds of those studied have been normal young persons induced to join groups in periods of personal crisis, [such as] broken romance or failures to get the job or college of their choice. Vulnerable, the young person affiliates with a cult offering promises of unconditional love, new mental powers, and social utopia.

Since modern cults are persistent and often deceptive in their recruiting, many prospective group members have no accurate knowledge of the cult and almost

no understanding of what eventually will be expected of them as long-term members.”

Many cults have flourished in recent decades, and changes in recruitment styles and targets have occurred. In the 1970s and early '80s, primarily young adults, either in college or some other life transition, joined these groups. At that time, cults were extremely active (and some still are) on college campuses and in places where young people

Most experts agree, though, that whether the joiner is young or old, certain predisposing factors may facilitate attraction to a cultic system, the success of recruitment and indoctrination efforts, and the length and depth of involvement

congregate. Today, however, increasing numbers of people in their late twenties and older are joining cult groups or getting involved in abusive relationships. In fact, the majority of inquiries to cult information resources involve new recruits or adherents who are in their thirties to fifties, or even sixties. Still no single personality profile characterizes cult members.²

Most experts agree, though, that whether the joiner is young or old, certain predisposing factors may facilitate attraction to a cultic system, the success of recruitment and indoctrination efforts,

and the length and depth of involvement. These factors include:

- A desire to belong
- Unassertiveness (the inability to say no or express criticism or doubt)
- Gullibility (impaired capacity to question critically what one is told, observes, thinks, and so forth)
- Low tolerance for ambiguity (need for absolute answers, impatience to obtain answers)
- Cultural disillusionment (alienation, dissatisfaction with the status quo)
- Idealism
- Susceptibility to trance-like states (in some cases, perhaps, due to prior hallucinogenic drug experiences)
- A lack of self-confidence
- A desire for spiritual meaning
- Ignorance of how groups can manipulate individuals³

A wide range of human susceptibility emerges when we combine the list of predisposing factors with the potential vulnerabilities mentioned above. The stereotype of a recruit is a young person worried about leaving college or uncertain

about “facing life.” The reality, however, is that anyone, at any age in a moment of confusion, personal crisis, or simply a life transition may become attracted to or drawn in by a cult’s appeal. “New in town, lost a job, recently divorced, a friend or family member just died, need a career change, feel a little blue?” The unstable and anxious feelings experienced at such times make a person vulnerable, whether that person is twenty or seventy years old. If a vulnerable

Cult recruitment is not mysterious. It is as simple and commonplace as the seduction and persuasion processes used by lovers and advertisers.

person happens to cross paths with a cult advertisement or personal recruiter putting forth even a mildly interesting offer, then that ad will likely pay for itself and that recruiter will stand a good chance of making her mark.

According to Michael Langone, “Conversion to cults is not truly a matter of choice. Vulnerabilities do not merely ‘lead’ individuals to a particular group. The group manipulates these vulnerabilities and deceives prospects in order to persuade them to join and, ultimately, renounce their old lives.”

While we are at it, let’s shatter another myth: people who join cults are not stupid, weird, crazy, weak-willed, or neurotic. Most cult members are of above-

average intelligence, well adjusted, adaptable, and perhaps a bit idealistic. In relatively few cases is there a history of a pre-existing mental disorder.

Anyone is capable of being recruited (or seduced) into a cult if his personal and situational circumstances are right.

Currently there are so many cults formed around so many different types of beliefs that it is impossible for a person to truthfully claim that he would never be vulnerable to a cult’s appeal.

Cult recruitment is not mysterious. It is as simple and commonplace as the seduction and persuasion processes used by lovers and advertisers. However, depending on the degree of deception and manipulation involved, the resultant attachments can be even more powerful.

(More information available at <http://www.baytreepublish.com/take-back-life-fr.html>)



Entrapment...

...Is a gradual process, in which individuals escalate their commitment to a course of action, to justify their investment of time money or effort.

Aren't the Marines a Cult by Your Definition?

I have had to point out why the United States Marine Corps is not a cult so many times that I carry a list to lectures and court appearances. It cites 19 ways in which the practices of the Marine Corps differ from those found in most modern cults....

Cults clearly differ from such purely authoritarian groups as the military, some types of sects and communes, and centuries-old Roman Catholic and Greek and Russian Orthodox Orders. These groups, though rigid and controlling, lack a double agenda and are not manipulative or leader-centred. The differences become apparent when we examine the intensity and pervasiveness with which mind-manipulating techniques and deceptions are or are not applied.

Jesuit seminaries may isolate the seminarian from the rest of the world for periods of time, but the candidate is not deliberately deceived about the obligations and burdens of the priesthood. In fact, he is warned in advance about what is expected, and what he can and cannot do....

Mainstream religious organizations do not concentrate their search on the lonely and the vulnerable.... Nor do mainstream religions focus recruitment on wealthy

believers who are seen as pots of gold for the church, as is the case with those cults who target rich individuals....

Military training and legitimate executive training programs may use the dictates of authority as well as peer pressure to encourage the adoption of new patterns of thought and behaviour. They do not seek, however, to accelerate the process by prolonged or intense psychological depletion or by stirring up feelings of dread, guilt, and sinfulness....

And what is wrong with cults is not just that cults are secret societies. In our culture, there are openly recognized, social secret societies, such as the Masons, in which new members know up front that they will gradually learn the shared rituals of the group.... In [cults], there is deliberate deception about what the group is and what some of the rituals might be, and primarily, there is deception about what the ultimate goal will be for a member, what will ultimately be demanded and expected, and what the damages resulting from some of the practices might be. A secret handshake is not equivalent to mind control.

(--adapted from Cults in Our Midst: The Hidden Menace in Our Everyday Lives, Margaret Singer and Janja Lalich, Jossey-Bass, 1995.)

Domestic Violence and Cultic Abuse

Comparative Study

Cultic studies journal, Volume 17, 2000, page 6

Domestic Violence

Environmental Control

Perpetrators control whom the woman sees, talks to, what she reads and where she goes. Limits outside involvement

Economic Abuse

Perpetrators can prevent the woman from getting a job, make her ask for money. Take her money, forbid access to family income.

Using Children

Perpetrators can use the children to make the woman feel guilty, threaten harm to the children, alienate children from mother.

Coercion & Threats

Perpetrators threaten to hurt and can use guilt and fear and other emotional manipulations to control the women.

Minimizing / Blaming

Perpetrators refuse to take responsibility for abusive behaviour; they say it is the woman's fault or ignore or make light of abuse.

Powerlessness / Helplessness

Perpetrators ensure that the woman is dependent on the male; a learned helplessness is established.

Attack on Self

The result of DV can be a shattered self, a hollow shell. "I no longer feel like a person."

Performance Orientated

"As long as you do what you are told, it'll be OK."
I'll try not to upset him tonight.

Residual Effects

Many battered women exhibit symptoms consistent with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Walker 1993)

Cultic Abuse

Environmental Control

Cults control whom the individual is allowed to see and associate with. Cults control reading matter, living arrangements, and lifestyle.

Economic Abuse

Cults often expect a large proportion of an individual's income, including signing over assets, getting money from family, money making activities.

Using Children

Cults can emotionally, spiritually and physically abuse children. They can threaten to harm children to control the parents.

Coercion & Threats

Cults regularly use fear, guilt, and other emotional manipulations to control members.

Minimizing / Blaming

Cults make sure if something is wrong it is the individual's fault; no critical thinking about the group is allowed.

Powerlessness / Helplessness

Cults systematically create a sense of powerlessness through a system of rewards and punishments.

Attack on Self

Cults destabilize the sense of self, reinterpret reality according to the group and create a cult identity.

Performance Orientated

Happiness and commitment are measured through performance. Measure up or suffer the consequences.

Residual Effects

One of the most common psychiatric disorders experienced by ex cult members is PTSD.

The Differences between a...

...Christian Church

Will stress the authority of Scripture (2Tim 3:16,17)

Is directed by men who lead with a strong but gentle example, giving instruction and encouragement. (2Tim 2:24,25; 1Peter 5:1-3)

Teaches and encourages godly relationships with those outside the church, society in general. (1 Cor 5:9-11 1 Peter 5:1-3)

Will encourage love and respect for family members even though they are not Christians- and though they recognize that on the one hand differing beliefs may cause division, they will not promote division by their own attitude. (Matt 10:34-37; Eph 5:22-6:4)

Will act with integrity keeping none of their beliefs and identity from their contacts. (2 cor 4:2)

Accepts and recognizes all who confess the name of Jesus in faith and practice, regardless of denomination.

Will not use manipulative techniques, but believes in the ability of the Holy Spirit to work in peoples lives through the word of God. (1 cor 2:3-5; 2 cor 2:17,)

Encourages members to judge for themselves whether they are being led in a biblical way.

Makes personal faith in Jesus Christ alone as the requirement for salvation. (Gal 3:1-7, Eph 2: 8-9.)

Teaches giving is voluntary.

Requires leaders and members to maintain a high level of moral conduct and sexual purity.(1Tim 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9)

Will show respect to people and institutions that do not hold to it's values.

Teaches biblical principles encouraging personal growth, thoughts decisions and maturity. (2 Tim. 3: 16-17)

Is sometimes persecuted because it identifies with Jesus Christ and his word.

and a Pseudo Christian Cult

Will emphasize the authority of scripture added to, or subtracted from or interpreted by their leaders.

A cult leader dominates by the strength of his personality and his repeated emphasis as a spokesman for God.

Often requires withdrawing from society except for earning money or making converts.

Often insist on contempt for non-members, parents and relatives, regardless of what they think of Jesus
The cult will encourage separation.

A cult operates by deception, keeping back some of some of their more unpleasant beliefs from contacts until they feel they are ready to accept them.

A cult only recognizes its own membership.

A cult often uses behaviour modification similar to those used on prisoners of war. (Thought reform by strict control of information, environment and time.)

A cult discourages or even forbids any critical or analytical thinking.

A cult almost always makes additional requirements for salvation. (Obedience to leaders & groups rules)

Cults often specify the giving requirements or demand that all property and or possessions be assigned to the group.

Often a double standard and leaders are above the law.

A cult will encourage feelings of contempt for those with opposing views. Not just the beliefs but those who hold those beliefs as well.

A cult creates a sense of dependence, which in turn allows leadership to make all the important decisions.

A cult is often persecuted for it's actions towards those outside the group, or unethical or illegal behaviour.

Unhealthy Faith

Taken from; "Faith that Hurts Faith that heals" Arteburn & Felton.

Unhealthy faith is a destructive, dangerous relationship that allows the religion, the church, the beliefs or the group, not the relationship with God, to control the person's life. It is a defective faith and has an incomplete or contaminated view of God. It is abusive and manipulative.

Family and friends become insignificant compared to the need to uphold the beliefs.

Unhealthy faith is used to avoid reality and responsibility.

It has nothing to do with God, and everything to do with men and women who concoct a god or faith that serves them rather than honouring God.

Harmful faith is an excuse to put off dealing with life's pain, to "wait on God" for "direction" rather than getting on with life or to abuse one's wife because she must submit to him as if he were God. It provides a distraction through religious ritual and "realigaholicism."

Faith becomes unhealthy when individuals use God or religion for profit, power, pleasure or prestige. These four ambitions are the foundation of any dependency. But they must be totally separated from faith. Each time faith is distorted or minimised because of these four

ambitions people are hurt, some are killed and many are left to suffer alone after families, friends and fortunes have been lost.

Variations of Unhealthy Faith

Unhealthy faith can have many variations. For example one could have **driving religious activity**. They work in the hope that God will change reality. These people are running from the pain of life.



Alternatively one could be **spiritually lazy** and put all responsibility onto God for everything. e.g Wanting God to instantly heal a marriage rather than working on yourself to change. It is easier to pray and do nothing more than it is to face one's responsibility and seen help to go through the pain of growth. These are people who want a "god drug" to wipe out all the pain and consequences of their actions.

Another variation of unhealthy faith is **extreme intolerance**. These people will denigrate the faith of others if it doesn't suit their model of faith. They insist that everyone else worship God their way, attend their type of church, judge others by the standards THEY say God has set. This kind of intolerance of others is common amongst those with unhealthy faith. As long as they believe they are doing what God would have them do, they don't hesitate to push their ideas and

beliefs on others. They control others by demeaning their beliefs, and the practice of their faith. They create a fake faith and a legalistic character.

Giving to get back is another variation of unhealthy faith. This is more like a materialistic investment than an act of worship. God cannot be bribed but many people attempt to do so.

Obsession with self is next. They are poisoned by their constant focus on their own needs, hurts and desire for relief. There is little room left for truly worshipping God and they are never truly interested in helping others except when it is to meet their own needs.

These people concentrate on having others constantly meet their needs, and especially on how God can relieve them of their burdens. To have faith in God because of what He can do for you is to have faith in what He does rather than in Him. Self-obsession is gross sin and the greatest poisoner of faith.

The **addiction to the religious high** comes next. Trusting God can and should relieve one of being overwhelmed with problems or needing all problems resolved immediately. However, unhealthy faith that is an emotional frenzy that robs real faith. These people will manufacture religious experiences and spiritual frenzy

to provide an adrenalin rush that makes them feel good. Their intent is not to worship God but to alter reality. They are obsessed with the quick fix to life.

The Religaholic

Running from life is the everyday reality of the religaholic. In our fear of living forever in our pain or being overwhelmed by it we often run into the nearest type of relief available - even unhealthy faith.

To some the religaholic will look good. They are at every church function, preaching to all they meet. They look like the "perfect" Christian in all their works. Inside they have a poor self-image and don't feel worthy of God's love. they experience the thrill of being valued by others but don't feel valued in themselves.

They may admonish those they don't feel are walking right with God (to their standards). They may berate their friends and relatives for rebelliousness against God. They will "bible-bash" and shame people into doing things their way. They may constantly demean and condemn those who don't measure up. Just like a substance-abuse addict they will blame everyone and everything else for their problems and rather than face them. They may even decide to turn their back on those they don't feel measure up to their standards in an attempt to not face themselves.

The unhealthy faith becomes entrapped and enmeshed in an unhealthy involvement in church and church life. Convictions become addictions and the pains of life are eased with excess activity. Rather than becoming dependent on God the person is dependent upon work and the comfort the experience when they become too involved to have to cope with their problems. The peace they find is not the peace of God by the peace that comes from the numbness of avoidance.

Worship and praising God is a wonderful experience. However those who have an unhealthy faith will use this to achieve emotional highs and these highs become the focus of the experience rather than God being the focus. Rather than bringing them closer to God this type of experience only serves to further alienate them from God because they can only feel good when they are having the emotional high and there is nothing in between.



There is a line between these two extremities. At one end there is a faith in a God who is loving, caring and all-powerful. At the other end is faith in a God who is ineffective, uncaring and powerless. Those who have faith in the latter seek a God who can mend every situation, avert all pain and hurt and heal all disharmony.

A healthy Faith is:

(Taken from the book "Faith that Hurts, Faith that heals" Arterburn & Felton.)

Focused on God. Not based on what we want God to do, or on ourselves and our perceived importance in the scheme of things, but on Christ and what He has done for us.



Growing: Healthy faith grows and matures over time. When we are determined to face the storms of life with confidence in God to see us through and fellowship of other non-toxic believers we set ourselves up for growth. We are free to be vulnerable. Being vulnerable means being real.

Relationship oriented Shift away from rules to relationships. Healthy faith strives to develop intimacy with God and others. We can become so obsessed with our own spirituality it becomes a self-focus that excludes others. Our relationship with God should be a personal one, not via a group.

It should be balanced.

- It is not so pre-occupied with work that family is destroyed.

- It is not so intent on witnessing to people that we fail to meet their needs
- It does not become so intent on memorizing Scripture that the author of Scripture is forgotten.
- Obedience to the rules is balanced with freedom to serve others in ways of individual expression.
- It is not a black/ white faith but allows us to feel OK with the struggle over grey areas.

A healthy faith is **non-defensive** and welcomes critical evaluation and tough questions as opportunities to learn and relate. Those who question them are not considered disobedient but merely encouraged as they explore their doubts. When God is in control there is no reason to feel threatened. Healthy faith attracts people to it rather than repelling them. Defensive people repel others, Christ drew others to Him. What a relief it is to realise that we don't have to defend every criticism made by everyone outside the faith.

Recovering "religious addicts" **stop judging people** and start listening to them. When this occurs compassion and empathy develop in the hearts of believers. A toxic faith is so focused on the system (doctrine) that the needs of people are forgotten. Healthy believers look for similarities in order to establish a

relationship. Each person is seen as a fellow struggler in a different stage of the struggle.

The healthy believer embraces **reality**, he acknowledges the miraculous power of God but does not need to see it to believe that God is real. The healthy believer does not look to God to magically change life's circumstances but looks to Him in the midst of the trials. Because faith grows strong there is no need to deny reality.

True faith embraces all our **emotions** and allows room to express grief, happiness, sorrow, anger and love. We should rejoice that God has given us emotions to experience the extremes of life.

We embrace our **humanity** and acknowledges our capacity to sin and make mistakes. There is no need to strive to be perfect and hide when we are not. We don't have to live up to someone else's standards but are comfortable in the knowledge that mercy and grace are gifts freely given and if they were to be earned they would not be gifts. We do not have to deny who we are to be acceptable to God. He made us this way and loves us anyway.

Healthy faith is characterised by the capacity to **love and be loved**. Healthy believers are patient with themselves and others as they allow God to correct their

character defects. If faith does not move people to love more, it is not healthy. Love is patient with others, Kind, not self seeking, and forgives.

The development of a healthy faith in God is the greatest process and achievement of a lifetime. It is a never ending process with seasons of tremendous growth and times of near stagnation.



Ten things to do if you have a cult member in your family

1. This is NOT a family disgrace. It can happen to anybody and is really a backhanded compliment to parents who did the right thing and raised their child to be independent of them and an idealist who wants a better world.
2. Don't nag, preach or lecture to the cult victim. Chances are the cult has already told him that you will do this and that this is a sign that they are in the one true channel or on the true road to freedom or in gods true church. He will take just so much and reject the rest as persecution.
3. Guard against the holier-than-thou or martyr-like attitude. It is possible to create this impression without saying a word. An cult victims sensitivity is such that he judges other peoples attitudes toward him more by small things than by outspoken words.
4. Don't use the if-you-love-me appeal. Since the cult victim doesn't believe that you love him as much as the group does or God does anyway this won't work!!
5. Avoid any threats. There may be times when a specific action is necessary to protect under-age children but idle threats only make the cult victim believe you don't mean what you say.
6. Don't destroy their books or tapes. Usually this only pushes the cult victim further into the group and shows disrespect for their personal belongings.
7. Don't let the cult victim persuade you to join with him on the grounds that it will help you understand him better. It rarely does more than either make you angrier or gets you converted too. Wait until you are educated enough to take this step. When you are fully prepared you can then attend their meetings etc and discuss this with him rationally.
8. Don't be jealous of the cult. The tendency is to think that love of home and family is enough incentive for them to leave. It isn't. Mind control is stronger than family ties.
9. Do offer love, support and understanding to the cult victim during

the time in the cult, coming out of the cult and during recovery.

10. Don't expect an immediate 100% recovery when they leave. In any illness there is a period of convalescence. There may be relapses & times of tension and resentment during their grief.

An excerpt from;

Repairing The Soul After A Cult

Janja Lalich, Ph.D

Creating A New Personality

All cults, no matter their stripe, are a variation on a theme, for their common denominator is the use of coercive persuasion and behaviour control without the knowledge of the person who is being manipulated. They manage this by targeting (and eventually attacking, disassembling, and reformulating according to the cult's desired image) a person's innermost self. They take away you and give you back a cult personality, a pseudo personality.

They punish you when the old you turns up, and they reward the new you. Before you know it, you don't know who you are or how you got there; you only know (or you are trained to believe) that you have to stay there. In a cult there is only one

way cults are totalitarian, a yellow brick road to serve the leader's whims and desires, be they power, sex, or money.

When I was in my cult, I so desperately wanted to believe that I had finally found the answer. Life in our society today can be difficult, confusing, daunting, disheartening, alarming, and frightening.

Someone with a glib tongue and good line can sometimes appear to offer you a solution. In my case, I was drawn in by the proposed political solution to bring about social change. For someone else, the focus may be on health, diet, psychological awareness, the environment, the stars, a spirit being, or even becoming a more successful business person.

The crux is that cult leaders are adept at convincing us that what they have to offer is special, real, unique, and forever and that we wouldn't be able to survive apart from the cult. A person's sense of belief is so dear, so deep, and so powerful; ultimately it is that belief that helps bind the person to the cult. It is the glue used by the cult to make the mind manipulations stick.

It is our very core, our very belief in ourself and our commitment, it is our very faith in humankind and the world that is exploited and abused and turned against us by the cults.

When a person finally breaks from a cultic

relationship, it is the soul, then, that is most in need of repair. When you discover one day that your guru is a fraud, that the "miracles" are no more than magic tricks, that the group's victories and accomplishments are fabrications of an internal public relations system, that your holy teacher is breaking his avowed celibacy with every young disciple, that the group's connections to people of import are nonexistent when awareness's such as these come upon you, you are faced with what many have called a "spiritual rape."

Whether your cultic experience was religious or secular, the realization of such enormous loss and betrayal tends to cause considerable pain. As a result, afterwards, many people are prone to reject all forms of belief. In some cases, it may take years to overcome the disillusionment, and learn not only to trust in your inner self but also to believe in something again.

There is also a related difficulty: that persistent nagging feeling that you have made a mistake in leaving the groups perhaps the teachings are true and the leader is right; perhaps it is you who failed. Because cults are so clever at manipulating certain emotions and events

in particular, wonder, awe, transcendence, and mystery (this is sometimes called "mystical manipulation") and because of the human desire to believe, a former cult member may grasp at some way to go on believing even after leaving the group. For this reason, many people today go from one cult to another, or go in and out of the same cultic group or relationship (known as "cult hopping").

Since every person needs something to

Most people who come out of a cultic experience shy away from organized religion or any kind of organized group for some time.

believe in a philosophy of life, a

way of being, an organized religion, a political commitment, or a combination thereof sorting out these matters of belief tends to be a major area of adjustment after a cultic experience.

What to Believe in Now?

Since a cult involvement is often an ill-fated attempt to live out some form of personal belief, the process of figuring out what to believe in once you've left the cult may be facilitated by dissecting the cult's ideological system.

Do an evaluation of the group's philosophy, attitudes, and worldview; define it for yourself in your own language, not the language of the cult. Then see how this holds up against the cult's actual daily practice or what you now know about the group.

For some, it might be useful to go back and research the spiritual or philosophical system that you were raised in or believed in prior to the cult involvement. Through this process you will be better able to assess what is real and what is not, what is useful and what is not, what is distortion and what is not. By having a basis for comparison, you will be able to question and explore areas of knowledge or belief that were no doubt systematically closed to you while in the cult.

Most people who come out of a cultic experience shy away from organized religion or any kind of organized group for some time. I generally encourage people to take their time before choosing another religious affiliation or group involvement. As with any intimate relationship, trust is reciprocal and must be earned.

After a cult experience, when you wake up to face the deepest emptiness, the darkest hole, the sharpest scream of inner terror at the deception and betrayal you feel, I can only offer hope by saying that in confronting the loss, you will find the real you. And when your soul is healed, refreshed, and free of the nightmare bondage of cult lies and manipulations, the real you will find a new path, a valid path a path to freedom and wholeness.

(Janja Lalich is a cult information specialist and consultant in Alameda, CA. She is co-author with Margaret Singer of **Cults in Our Midst: The Hidden**

Menace in Our Everyday Lives (Jossey-Bass, 1995). Ms. Lalich is also a member of advisory committees of AFF, publisher of **The Cult Observer**.)

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Recovery from Spiritual Abuse How You Can Help

By Sharon Hilderbrant, M.A.

Recently, I have read two new books that describe in detail the abusive behaviour of various churches and the effects of this abuse on church members. *Churches That Abuse*, by Ron Enroth, and *Damaged Disciples* (in press), by Ron and Vicki Burks, both published by Zondervan, relate stories that may be hard for some Christians to believe. Those of us who work with the victims, however, know the stories are true.

Churches on the fringe exist in every major metropolitan area as well as in small towns and isolated rural areas. Some are large, "mega-church" organizations, while some may be small house-church gatherings. Most of them look fairly normal to outsiders. That is, until abused persons begin to leave and tell of their experiences.

Getting out of the group is only the beginning of recovery. Recovery involves,

according to one survivor, getting "the group out of us." The effects of abuse are long-standing. The following outlines how Christians can help the spiritually abused in their recovery.

Trust:

Most survivors will have much trouble trusting. Anyone. Especially churches. A support system is desperately needed, but survivors will have difficulty approaching. Help with material needs (housing, job, food, etc.) is usually much appreciated. Social support via invitations to events or dinner, or just a conversation about something other than church or religious issues is very much needed.

Therefore, a *safe* place for confidentiality, a place to be relaxed without expectations of appearances or performance, a place to connect with another caring person (or persons) without becoming too involved in private lives, is needed. A dysfunctional *don't trust* rule was present in the system, by teaching, by practice, or both. Don't push for trust. Don't push the recovery process. Respect their boundaries.

Talk:

Survivors need to tell their story. So they will remember it themselves, and not deny any part of it. So they can be validated by others who believe them. So they can use the truth to dispel the deceptions of the past and discern deception in the future. The dysfunctional system no doubt had a *don't talk* rule by

practice—but probably spiritualized and cloaked in scripture as well. The *don't talk* rule serves to hide a myriad of the leaders' sins.

Emotion:

It is normal for anyone who has been victimized and abused to feel intense emotions. The longer the survivors had to endure abuse without an outlet for emotions, the longer it will take for them to experience the full range of emotions about it. Depression and anxiety are common masks for other emotions.

Too much intellectualizing may inhibit the survivor from getting in touch with his or her emotions. Fear, guilt, anger, grief, rage, sorrow—all must be felt and expressed in their own time. An over spiritualizing of emotions may have been present in the dysfunctional system, with certain emotions demanded and others condemned by a twisting of scripture. The result is a *don't feel your real feelings* rule.

Truth:

Encourage survivors to talk about what happened to them. Listen. Empathize. Offer words that may describe what the person is feeling, since they may not be able to identify it themselves at first. Limit feedback and comments to supportive statements. Keep confidentiality. Be trustworthy.

Who am I?

Survivors typically do not know who they are anymore. They lost themselves in the church/cult. They need to know they are lovable. Count them as equal to yourself—not less just because they are needy. Assure them they do not have to be perfect. Accept them as they are. Encourage them. Build confidence, offer choices. Allow them to have strengths and weaknesses.

They need to know that they are not evil or possessed, not crazy, not shameful. They need to know that they are not powerless and that they can recover and grow beyond this experience. Don't make decisions for them and don't try to *fix* them. Let them know you speak for yourself. Be careful of speaking for God. Tell them recovery takes a long time—2 to 4 years, or longer.

What about the group?

It is critical that survivors know that God is not the group. Leaving the group is not equivalent to leaving God. They must hear that no group has exclusive truth, or is the elite, or is especially anointed over another for ministry of the gospel. (It is the gospel that is anointed!)

They also need to recognize that group leaders actually deceived people, used and abused people, twisted scripture, and fostered co-dependent and/or addictive behaviours (perhaps immoral behaviour, too) among members. Be gentle as you

interpret what was hurtful and wrong in the group. Remember, they probably have left behind some people that are still dear to their hearts and do not wish to blame them. Information about co-dependency and dysfunctional families and other institutions at this stage may be helpful in confronting denial. Save Bible reading until the individual is ready to grapple with it in small doses.

What is God really like?

Just as survivors lost themselves in the group, so did they lose reality about who God is. They need to have grace explained in depth and to examine God's attributes carefully. The long process of recovery involves continually uncovering misrepresentations of God conveyed by the words and behaviour of group leaders, parents and other authority figures.

Survivors will need to be reminded again and again of the true attributes of God and the principle of grace. Be genuine. Be personal. Explain how scripture helps you to understand God's attributes. If you have received grace, you can speak confidently about it. Tell what you love about God.

God's people:

To become reconciled to God requires reconciliation with God's people. Many who begin to trust God again have much more difficulty trusting people in any church. It helps to confront the truth

about God's people with statements similar to the following:

- Leaders are not more favoured by God over others in the church.
- All struggle spiritually, even leaders.
- All are in various stages of growth (no instant spirituality).
- All make mistakes, none are infallible.
- All can learn to *hear* God's voice for themselves—no need to remain spiritual children who must submit to parental leaders.
- All need each other—none are needless.
- All have something to give and are valuable to God.
- All—leaders and lay persons—are called to live by the same standards.
- All need **to have their own relationship** with God apart from the involvement of other believers—including spouses.
- The *church* is not just one building or one gathering, but believers everywhere.

Be honest:

Be honest about yourself and your own church. Admit your own inability to have all the answers. The truth will not hinder their relationship with God. Remember it is the Holy Spirit's job to draw them to Himself. Your admission of struggle may help them to learn to struggle and not give up.

Going to church:

Survivors may need help working through

memories and emotions triggered by going to church. Continually point them to God Himself. It is not God who has violated them, but people—some well intended and some deceptive. **Help survivors to see** that Christians are individuals—imperfect—not to be put on pedestals, but to share in the struggles and the benefits of the Christian faith.

Help them to recognize the distorted thinking—about themselves, about God, etc.—that accompanies traumatic reactions. This is a good time to use the safety and authority of scripture to confront the deception created by the group, and to soothe and console. A trained counsellor may be needed for this part of recovery.

Untwisting Scripture:

All survivors will need help working through memories and feelings triggered by scripture. Scripture was twisted to the advantage of the group or its leaders. True meanings of Scripture are healing and give life. Untwisting takes much work. Make no assumptions of what they know or understand. Challenge every concept, all usage of jargon and Bible language for clarification of what it means to them. They may assume you *know* their understanding of a phrase, as if there is only one way to interpret it. Respect their spiritual boundaries. Be sure they are ready to grapple with scripture. (It is

normal to avoid reading the Bible at all for 12-18 months or more.)

Conclusion:

The recovery process I have just outlined takes a long time. One-on-one support is a long-term commitment. More helpful is a group support system, where all are assisting survivors in various aspects. Create a network of Christians who will assist with material needs, who will provide financial assistance to attend community events (or a couples' weekend, or a family camp) for rest and recreation, who will assist with filling out tax forms, or who will advise on how to buy a good used car.

Help them obtain medical care or tutor their children to bring them up to grade level. Provide information that will help them learn (or re-learn) how to function, without fear or shame, in the larger society. Lend them self-help books to read. Help with professional counselling as needed. Be available as a friend in a small group of friends. (Isn't that how Jesus would do it?)

Untitled Poem

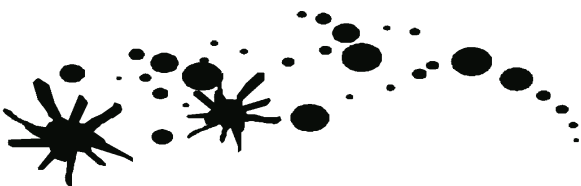
by P.M.K.

*So you struggle with the sorrow
of the time which they have
borrowed
and you wonder how they ever
took your mind.
But it's my heart that had been
taken
and all the dreams that I'd been
making
were the luring and prophetic
hopes sublime.*

*Now I wander through
uncertainty,
an emptiness called liberty,
Not knowing what to grasp and
what to shun.*

*Good and right within myself
throw countless pages back upon
the shelf.*

*No easy answers, but it seems a
new life has begun*



Useful Links:

Australia:

- www.cultinfo.org.au Cult Information Service Brisbane QLD.
- www.cultcounselling.org Melbourne / Raphael Aaron
- www.ccg.org.au Concerned Christian Growth Ministries
- www.caic.org.au Cult Awareness and information Centre
This is a non active site but has a lot of information on all cults primarily Jehovah's witnesses.
- www.pnc.com.au/~fichrist Free in Christ Ministries
Primarily for ex Jehovah's Witnesses
- www.users.bigpond.net.au/wanglese/pebble.htm
Little Pebble site detailing the path to prosecution. A NSW District Court found William Kamm, self-proclaimed prophet, 56, guilty of five counts of sexual intercourse with a person under the age of 16 under his authority and one count of committing an act of indecency.

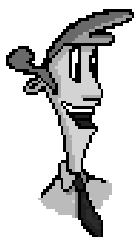
International:

- www.apologeticsindex.org Primarily a Christian site with comprehensive news coverage as well as many informative articles
- www.csj.org cultic studies journal
The International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA) is an interdisciplinary network of academicians, professionals, former group members, and families who study and educate the public about social-psychological influence and control, authoritarianism, and zealotry in cultic groups, alternative movements, and other environments. Founded in 1979 as AFF (American Family Foundation), ICSA took on its current name in late 2004 to better reflect the organization's focus and increasingly international and scholarly dimensions.
- www.culticstudiesreview.org Cultic Studies Review
Cultic Studies Review: An Internet Journal of Research, News & Opinion (CSR) is a triannual periodical published by AFF (American Family Foundation).
- www.macgregorministries.org Macgregor Ministries

Mainly a Christian perspective on how various cults differ from orthodox Christianity.

- www.exfamily.org Ex Children of God
Comprehensive site on COG with their own publications online as well as chat boards for ex members.
- www.movingon.org Children of the Children of God a web site that cites the abuses in the COG it has chat boards and ways to connect with former members.
- www.germany.info/relaunch/info/archives/background/scientology.html Understanding the German View of Scientology
- www.rickross.com Rick Ross
Another very informative site with news & articles on all cults
- http://jonestown.sdsu.edu Memorial site to the tragedy of Jonestown & the Peoples Temple
- www.factnet.org Informative site with news and information as well as discussion boards has discussion board on Twelve Tribes community
- www.xenutv.com Scientology
- www.twelvetribe-ex.org/ Twelve Tribes
- www.criticalthinking.org You guessed it, a website on critical thinking.
- www.refocus.org Recovering Former Cultists' Support Network
- www.regainnetwork.org Livia Bardin ReGAIN's mission is to outreach, unite and support those touched or adversely affected by the Legion of Christ and Regnum Christi Movement. Past and present members and all those who quest for justice and truth, resolution and healing are invited to join in this endeavor.
- www.wellspringretreat.org A live in centre offering programmes for recovery from abusive groups and relationships.
- www.meadowhaven.org Bob and Judy Pardon run a centre for recovery. Massachusetts USA
- www.zimbardo.com/ Site contains comments on political psychology of terrorists, video of Prison Experiment and other psychology articles.

You might be in the wrong Church If...



The Bible they use is the Dr. Seuss version.

The scripture lesson is on "Jonah the Shepherd Boy and His Ark of Many Colours."

- The preacher is wearing a "David Koresh Rules!" T-shirt.
- The ushers passing around the offering basket are wearing ski masks.
- The choir wears black leather robes.
- The Elders Council meetings usually break up in a fight for the remote control.
- The church picnic will be held at KFC this year.
- The church bus has a gun rack.

Contact

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