

Education and Reeducation in Ideological Organizations and their Implications for Children

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Abstract

This article attempts to identify commonalities among alternative religions and other high-demand ideologies that explain why so many of these groups have failed to keep their young "in the faith" as adults. I hypothesize that, in conjunction with ongoing demands entailed in sectarian membership, the ways in which these groups resocialize first-generation converts frequently make the education of the second generation insufficient to ensure their loyalty into their own child-bearing years.

An unanticipated consequence of the widespread conversions of young people to controversial sects and so-called cults in the 1960s and 1970s has been the wave of defecting adult children during the 1990s and into this century. Although no studies exist that systematically identify how many second-generation members have abandoned the adopted beliefs of their parents, one is hard pressed to name any prominent sectarian group from thirty years ago that now has substantial numbers of adult children carrying on the faith and raising their own offspring in it. A recent book, for example, by the *San Francisco Chronicle's* religion reporter, Don Lattin, contains interviews with many adults who grew up amid the American sectarian explosion of the 1960s and 1970s. Lattin did find that some of these individuals had "kept the faith and even passed it on to a third generation" (Lattin, 2003:3). More common, however, were those adult children who had renounced the faiths of their parents. The "one theme that runs through nearly all" of the stories that he gathered from those adult children of the Aquarian Age, and which probably goes a long way toward explaining why

they have chosen not to continue in the faiths of their parents, "is the feeling that Mom and Dad just weren't around enough" (Lattin 2003:240). "While their parents were out spreading a counterculture gospel, the kids were often left behind at nurseries, boarding schools, and communal farms. Some were abandoned and abused and left the fold as soon as they could" (Lattin, 2003:2-3).

Most notable have been the defections of the dissatisfied children of various groups' leaders and elite. Among these individuals are the Unification Church's first "perfect child" born from Western converts, Donna Collins, who has spoken out regularly about her life in and departure from, Reverend Moon's organization (Lattin, 2003:189-199; Orme-Collins, 2002). So, too, has one of Moon's former daughters-in-law, Nansook Hong, whose book about her tragic marriage to one of Moon's sons paints a disturbing portrait of the Moon family (Hong, 1998).

Regarding another group, the rebellion by second-generation people against first-generation abusers in the Hare Krishnas took on near-epic proportions as the young adults placed on the Internet heart-wrenching stories of their childhood violations (VOICE, 1996), and nearly eighty of them banded together in a lawsuit against particular older members and the organization itself (United States District Court, 2000; see Lattin, 2003:81-95). Very similar dynamics currently are going on with adult children from the first-generation Children of God members, who are seeking attorneys to launch a lawsuit on their behalf over the abuses that they allegedly experienced. The group's recent biographer, James Chancellor, concluded that almost all people who were born in the Children of God sect during the early 1970s have left the organization (Chancellor, 2000:242). His prediction that many more people from the next cohort (presumably born in the late 1970s and 1980s) will stay in the group remains to be seen (Chancellor, 2000:242).

This failure to keep the loyalty of the first generation's children bodes ill for these sects because "without effective socialization a movement will suffer damaging rates of defection as its youngest members grow up and leave the faith[s]" (Stark, 1987:24). If in fact I am correct in suggesting that youth defection is a sectarian problem that cuts across the ideological spectrum, then one must ask

whether commonalities across belief boundaries might be factors. In essence, the ways that sects, cults, and high-demand ideologies work as units of social control alienate large portions of the second generation, whose members were either born into, or brought into, groups *not* of their choosing. If research on second-generation defections from major religions provides indications for what has gone on within the smaller groups, then data suggests that poor relationships between parents and children frequently contribute to the children's defection when they get old enough to leave (Hood, et. al., 1996:98). Deficiencies apparently exist, therefore, in the socialization or education of the young, but these deficiencies appear to be systemic to sects and ideological groups, given that so many of them are witnessing the failure of the children to continue in their parents' footsteps.

Certainly the doctrines, beliefs, and practices of particular groups heighten or lessen the content and quality of second-generation education, and the unique chemistry of family personalities has long-term consequences for all of the parties involved. Nevertheless, a recently presented model about what psychologist Anthony Stahelski called "the five phases of social-psychological conditioning" (Stahelski, 2004:32) used by terrorists and cults provides a construct within which I can identify those commonalities among first-generation converts that likely have an impact upon members of the second generation.

Anthony Stahelski's Five Phases of Social-Psychological Conditioning

Stahelski's primary concern was with the creation of terrorism. His research, however, overlapped with studies on the origins of cults because he reported, "[t]errorism researchers have compared terrorist groups to cults, and they have concluded that the cult model is applicable to terrorist groups" (Stahelski, 2004). That "cult model" that he identified, however, appears to have been his own creation. The model expanded upon some concepts (such as dehumanization and demonization) that are commonplace in social-psychological literature, but Stahelski also gave creative twists to the commonly used term *deindividuation*, and apparently introduced a new term, *depluralization*, as part of his resocialization model. He argued that "[m]ost

cults center on a charismatic leader" who supplies "joiners with meaningful existences" and fulfills "their affiliative needs," and in return "requests and receives unquestioning obedience from the joiners" (Stahelski, 2004:32). These joiners or recruits are "extremely vulnerable to the five-phase social-psychological conditioning process used in violent cults." The phases are as follows:

- Phase 1—Depluralization: stripping away all other group-member identities.
- Phase 2—Self-deindividuation: stripping away each member's personal identity.
- Phase 3—Other-deindividuation: stripping away the personal identities of enemies.
- Phase 4—Dehumanization: identifying enemies as subhuman or nonhuman.
- Phase 5—Demonization: identifying enemies as evil (Stahelski, 2004:32).

As a means of distinguishing among types of groups, Stahelski claimed, "[t]he dehumanization phase separates extremist hate groups and terrorist groups from non-violent cults, which do not dehumanize out groups" (Stahelski, 2004:35). Apparently, too, nonviolent cults do not demonize others since this phase prevents "the occurrence of after-action killing remorse" among those who seek to murder their presumed enemies (Stahelski, 2004:35). Nor do nonviolent cults kill either defectors or their families (Stahelski, 2004:36). Otherwise, both terrorists and cult recruits encounter "powerful dynamics that make the conditioning almost impossible to resist" (Stahelski, 2004:36).

Stahelski did not discuss issues that concern second-generation education, but I point out that these phases translate into behaviors and attitudes among members that constrain and confine their social relationships, including those relationships with children and the young. Indeed, in several cases, group leaders prohibited children entirely from their organizations, which are instances of extreme reeducation that the parents had undergone as standard aspects of group membership. I will examine each of Stahelski's phases, along with his brief discussion of charisma, make some modifications to his claims, and give examples of how various groups exemplified the phases. At

the same time, I will suggest implications that the examples likely had on the second generation.

Charisma

Reputed access to unique, even godly, special powers and/or skills is the hallmark of charisma as Max Weber defined it nearly a century ago. As Weber wrote, charisma is

a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he [or she] is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a 'leader' (Weber, 1978:241).

Stahelski, in turn, mentioned numerous characteristics that charismatic leaders frequently have: "physical presence, intelligence, experience, education and expertise, the ability to verbally and clearly articulate the vision and the mission, and, most important, a strong emotional appeal" (Stahelski, 2004:32). This list, however, omits what *really* might be charismatic leaders' major trait—at least for those who create new religions: varying degrees of biopsychosocial dysfunction—that is, personality disorders and/or psychological imbalances.

The term *biopsychosocial dysfunction* embodies the fact that some people have biological, hormonal, or genetic abnormalities that may cause or combine with psychological disorders that in turn have a negative impact upon their activities in the social world. Some of these dysfunctions may stem from childhood; others might occur later in life. Especially in adulthood, these debilitating conditions might be exacerbated by drug and alcohol abuse, along with violent or irrational ideas that exist within the religious and cultural domain in which these people live (Kent, 2004:104-109; Roy, 2000:394-395; Whitsett and Kent, 2003:493-494). People encumbered by these conditions have flawed interactions with others—their behavior is out of the ordinary; they have unusual senses of self-worth; and they demand deference from those around them. Although some seekers are repelled by these odd characteristics, others see

the constellations of unusual traits as signs of spiritual charisma.

The history of alternative religions abounds with leaders whom followers consider charismatic but whom outside observers consider to have dysfunctional personality disorders if not mental illnesses (Storr, 1996). Moreover, researchers can speculate about how difficult it was on their children to live with these extraordinary parents, since those children bore the direct consequences of their mother's or father's dysfunctional charisma. For example, the Children of God's founder, David Berg, portrayed himself to his adoring followers as God's end-time prophet, but in reality he probably was a nonexclusive heterosexual pedophile (meaning that he had sex with both women and children). He also was an alcoholic. One son, Aaron Berg, died mysteriously from a fall off a Swiss mountain in 1972, and many people think that his death was a suicide (Davis [Linda Berg], 1984:128-129). No mystery, however, exists around the death of Berg's stepson, Ricky Rodriguez, who, hours before he killed his childhood nanny (and shortly thereafter, himself), left a video discussing his rage over his sexualized upbringing [Goldstein, 2005]. Like Berg, the Branch Davidian's leader, David Koresh, also seems to have been a nonexclusive heterosexual pedophile. He refused to release his twelve biological children to authorities during the siege of his compound, and they eventually were among the twenty-one children who died in the fire (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995:231 n.22; 255). Scientology's founder, L. Ron Hubbard, likely was plagued by narcissism and paranoia, the latter accentuated though drug abuse (Atack 1990: 119, 131, 171, 372; Kent 2004: 106). His son, Quentin, committed suicide, ostensibly because of his homosexuality (a lifestyle that his father abhorred [Miller 1987: 303]).

The Unification Church's founder, Reverend Sun Myung Moon, thinks of himself as the messiah (Chambers 1982), yet one of his sons, Young Jin Moon, apparently jumped or fell from the seventh floor of a Las Vegas hotel room in November 1999 (Schoenmann 1999). People's Temple founder, Jim Jones, once received a psychiatric diagnosis of "paranoid with delusions of grandeur" (Reiterman with Jacobs, 1982:262), and his family watched him slip into increasingly destructive and deceitful behaviour. The strain on his biological son, Stephan, worsened as family life

deteriorated amidst the father's philandering, hypocrisy, and drug abuse. These and other pressures drove the young man to overdose on Quaaludes on two separate occasions (Reiterman with Jacobs, 1982:125, 310).

Anecdotal as these accounts are, that several prominent sect leaders from the 1970s had children who could not stand living under the shadow of their charismatic parents is remarkable. The pressures of being a child of the "godly" was simply too much to withstand. Charisma, it seems, provided poor frameworks in which to rear the young, and we only can speculate why this was so. A likely factor was the hypocrisy that these offspring witnessed between the public figure and the private parent. A teenaged Donna Collins, for example,

started asking tough questions about what she saw in Moon's inner circle.... "He and his kids didn't live by the teachings. His sons would come in and swear all the time. They were having steaks flown in from America [to Korea]. I'd been eating rice and kimchi for three years and getting serious dysentery. It was a joke. I started asking myself, 'What is godly about all this?'" (Collins in Lattin, 2003:198).

Later, I will discuss the tragic case of David Berg's granddaughter, Merry Berg, who paid a terrible price for expressing doubts about the godliness of her hypocritical grandfather. Berg's household environment proved disastrous to Merry Berg, Ricky Rodriguez, and other children reared in that inner circle, but the models of education and socialization that had failed on Berg's own family were the foundation for equally disastrous and abusive programs implemented on children throughout the Children of God organization. In varying degrees, the failed patterns of socialization and education within the families of charismatic leaders led to equally disastrous child-rearing and educational practices throughout entire organizations (see Whitsett and Kent, 2003:493-495). Countless children were hurt by their parents and other adults. The charisma at the foundation of these organizations was dysfunctional if not at times pathological, but it became the basis upon which leaders and their followers developed and imposed socialization and education programs upon the young.

Depluralization

The term *depluralization* is not one readily found in social-psychological literature, yet it conveys an important dimension of the reeducation process of many converts. Stahelski's point is that the "ideal type" of social person in a complex society has multiple social contacts, all of which contribute to that person's self-identity. Moreover, people in some segments of a person's life may comment upon or advise that individual about other dimensions of his or her life. High-demand groups, however, are what sociologist Lewis Coser called "greedy institutions" (Coser, 1974) in that they attempt to encapsulate, or envelop, all aspects of their members' lives. As Stahelski stated,

Cults cannot effectively condition joiners unless the cult group is the joiners' only group of affiliation. An individual who has only one group affiliation has self-concept and self-esteem that are totally dependent on retaining membership in that group. The completely dependent individual is then willing to do whatever it takes to retain membership in the group (Stahelski, 2004:33).

Among previous group affiliations that joiners frequently relinquish are their families (Stahelski, 2004:33). Although many people envision the new recruits giving up contacts with their parents and siblings, quite a number of cases exist of parents either severing ties or greatly reducing their contact with their own children.

A handwritten note by Scientology's founder L. Ron Hubbard, reproduced in an International Association of Scientologists' magazine, clearly illustrates the depluralizing aspirations he had regarding members:

We're not now in this for play. Our personal futures depend on keeping going and making no major flubs. It isn't a question of is there something else. There isn't. Nobody can be half in and half out of Scientology (Hubbard, in CSI [Church of Scientology International], Inc. 1988).

Indeed, Scientology's version of ethics has, as one of its intentions, the elimination of all non-Scientology activity and interests on the part of people under its control (Hubbard, 1976:179).

The consequences for children whose parents have total dedication to an organization are not hard to predict. As a former Scientologist-turned-critic surmised in 1991,

Next to saving the world, caring for children may not seem so important. "Scientology comes first and everything else is off-purpose," said former Scientologist Vicki Aznaran, who is suing the organization. "Parents who want to spend time with their children are looked down on. It's not socially acceptable" (Aznaran, quoted in Krueger, 1991:12A).

A related consequence for children is that they might become part of their parents' "saving the world" efforts. A Florida newspaper, for example, in 1991 ran an article concerning "Scientology's Children," which reported that an eleven-year-old girl signed a billion-year contract to join Scientology's dedicated corps called the Sea Organization (or simply, the Sea Org), and she ended up working about fifty hours a week during the school year (Krueger, 1991:14A).

Parents in the Children of God organization received specific instructions from their leader, David Berg, to disassociate from their children, with Berg arguing that to do so was God's will:

1. GOD WILL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE HIM, NOT EVEN THE SANCTITY OF THE MARRIAGE GOD!
2. THE FAMILY MARRIAGE, THE SPIRITUAL REALITY BEHIND SO-CALLED GROUP MARRIAGE, IS THAT OF PUTTING THE LARGER FAMILY, THE WHOLE FAMILY, FIRST, even above the last remaining vestige of private property, your husband or your wife! (Berg, 1972:1367; original capitalization and punctuation).

A few paragraphs later, Berg added

22. DON'T FORGET THIS MEANS YOUR CHILDREN, ALSO! Special favoritism and partiality—that is, selfish property interest! If you love your flesh-and-blood children more than you love God's children of God's Family, then you haven't come to the realization of what God's Family is all about! (Berg, 1972:1370; original capitalization and punctuation).

The stories about the Children of God group's maltreatment of children warrant book-length studies on their own, but

suffice it to say that many children rarely saw their parents, and when they did, their emotional bonding was strained, at best. As the somewhat sympathetic researcher on *The Family*, James Chancellor, reported, "[d]islocation from parents remained a very common feature of Family [i.e., Children of God] life. Until the reforms . . . in the mid-1990s, virtually every second-generation disciple spent considerable time apart from parents before the age of sixteen" (Chancellor, 2000:217). No wonder members of that generation are involved in a revolt of sorts against their parents' generation because of the abuses they suffered (see Kent, 2004a).

Self-Deindividuation

The concept of *deindividuation* has extensive social psychological literature devoted to it. Deindividuation originally emerged as a theory to explain antinormative, often violent acts committed by people in crowds, mobs, gangs, and the like (see Postmes and Spears 1998:238). A newer theoretical variant called the "social identity model of deindividuated effects" (the SIDE model, for brevity) is more promising than older forms of deindividuation theory, and this newer form might be most in line with how Stahelski used the *deindividuation* term. "According to this model, deindividuating settings do not lead to a loss of personal identity; rather, they can facilitate a transition from a personal to a more social or collective identity" (Postmes and Spears, 1998:254). Surely, this transition to a collective identity is what occurs in totalistic groups.

The consequences of such a transition are well known, and Stahelski gave numerous examples. He mentioned *internal* transformations that involve giving up

any values, beliefs, attitudes, or behavior patterns that deviate from the group values and expectations. Deindividuated joiners give up their personal sense of right and wrong if it is different from that of the leader. Furthermore, the joiners' broad view of reality—their view of how the past, present, and future fit together to create the modern social world—becomes aligned with that of the leader. Deindividuated persons stop thinking about their own unique qualities. They absorb the concept that they

simply are anonymous parts of the greater whole, the cult (Stahelski, 2004:34).

A typical *external* manifestation, therefore, of deindividuation involves members dressing alike (see Stahelski, 2004:34), as well as eliminating aspects of personal taste or self-expression in their appearances.

Although few researchers who study high-demand ideological groups would disagree with these general characteristics, we still must address the education processes that groups use to induce deindividuation among their members. Having addressed those processes, we then can see how educational programs that deindividuate adults also affect children. I propose that groups attack and undermine the value of supposedly negative aspects in people's lives at the same time that they replace these aspects with new, collective moral and ethical systems based upon leaders' values. My assumption here is that negative experiences and behaviors—things that we have done, seen, or suffered—provide individual foundations for our moral and ethical decisions. By undermining the value of these experiences and behaviors, deviant groups reduce people's ability to take moral and ethical stands based upon their own individuated experiences. Concomitantly, the groups use numerous techniques to infuse people with the groups' alternative values and ethical codes. In essence, as people deindividuate, they look less inward and more outward for moral and ethical cues.

With groups' directions, people undercut the foundations for their own value systems in numerous ways: pseudocounseling in both individual and large-group settings; manipulated "born-again" experiences wherein one denounces one's previous life; intrusive and aggressive psychotherapy; and so on. One of countless groups whose leaders were masterful at inducing deindividuation was the Rajneeshees, who accomplished this goal through numerous time-consuming and energy-draining pseudopsychotherapeutic techniques and physical exercises. A British writer, Tim Guest, was a child whose mother was a devotee of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, and Guest captured with painful clarity the consequences for children growing up in that environment:

Bhagwan invented radically new 'dynamic' meditations and therapies; he took nitrous oxide and spoke from a dentist's chair; he encouraged his disciples to surrender totally to him and to live their lives to the extreme. For my mother, on a rocket-ship rebellion from her strict Catholic girlhood, Bhagwan offered everything she had long hoped for; the path to enlightenment but with free love, drugs and rock n' roll thrown in.

For the children—at least for me—Bhagwan's communes were a different proposition. As each adult struggled to prove himself or herself the most egoless, we competed to show who had the best break-dance moves. As they abandoned the consumerist dream, we fought over Legos and 'E.T.' toys. Intent on building spiritual togetherness as a model for the world, my mother and her friends ignored some of the more practical needs of the children under their feet—forgetting, for example, to take us to the dentist or to clip our fingernails (Guest, 2004a; see 2004b:98).

His mother's neglect had profound, life-altering consequences for him, and in all likelihood for other children who suffered similar feelings:

When I was born, my mother swore she would never let her child suffer the way she had; she felt that her Catholic childhood had crushed her. She gave me what *she* had longed for. She let me run free. At some point, I made a similar vow to not inflict the particular agony I knew—of abandonment and absence—on my children. Even if that meant not having kids at all (Guest, 2004a).

It was a story repeated thousands of times across, one suspects, dozens if not hundreds of groups: parents trying to save the world by giving themselves over to a spiritual teacher, but all the while neglecting their children.

Other-Deindividuation

As deindividuating people align themselves more with high-demand groups, they intensify normal processes of creating "in-groups" and "out-groups" by deindividuating perceived enemies. According to Stahelski, deindividuating people cut

off contact with supposedly "enemy" group members and essentially deny their individuality by blending them all in a "homogeneous, faceless mass" (Stahelski, 2004:34). Sometimes children themselves were among the most unfortunate victims of this process of other-deindividuation. Commonly, children were at variance with adults' own spiritual quests.

In extreme cases, group leadership defined children as hindrances to adults' spiritual growth and/or as financial drains, so members got sterilized. Although the prospect of parenting was not even a consideration among members of Heaven's Gate, eight men underwent castration (and several others "underwent chemical treatments to reduce their sex drive[s]") (Balch and Taylor, 2002:220). Among followers of Rajneesh,

sterilizations were strongly encouraged . . . because children were "a distraction from the path of meditation" and "very few people had the *karma* to have children in this lifetime." If you were here with Bhagwan, why be distracted from that and go off on a different tack? the reasoning went. The better choice would be to be with him *totally* (Strelley, 1987:151-152; emphasis in original).

Hundreds of followers of both sexes underwent sterilization procedures, including a "few girls as young as fourteen" (Gordon, 1987:83).

Before the sterilizations, many pregnant Rajneeshee women had abortions (Guest, 2004b:30; Strelley with San Souci, 1987:149-150), and Rajneesh was able to "boast that not a single child was born in Rajneeshpuram, his sannyasin city in Oregon, USA between 1981 and 1985" (Guest 2004b:31). Nor were any children born to members of a deviant, California-based group called the Center for Feeling Therapy during its ten-year life that ended in November 1980—a feat achieved through successful therapeutic pressure on numerous women to abort (Ayella, 1998:28, 15, 73, 86-87; Mithers, 1994:262, 281). Evidence exists that Scientology transfers women out of its Sea Organization if they go through with pregnancies, but that pregnant women undergo significant coercion into getting abortions (Tabayoyon, 1994:para. 7-23). Apparently Scientology claimed that "the Sea Org simply did not have the time, money, and resources

to raise children properly" Tabayoyon, 1994:para.7). In the late 1980s, while doing interviews with former members who had followed a Canadian sectarian leader named Robin Carlsen, I heard accounts of numerous abortions that Carlsen himself actively encouraged (Kent [Interviewer], with Dunston and Dunston [pseudonyms], 1989:8-11). In the late 1970s, the American drug-treatment-turned religion program, Synanon, initiated a program of vasectomies for all males who were at least eighteen years old and had been members for at least five years, in conjunction with abortions for numerous women (Olin, 1980:251, 265, 273, 275). Sometimes, in these circumstances, their leaders convinced potential parents that abortion was best because of their low levels of spirituality or mental health. The fact remains, however, that these leaders pressured and usually convinced pregnant women that their fetuses would become hindrances to either the groups' goals or the adults' quests for spiritual development.

A related solution to the "problem" of children, especially ones born before parents were group members, simply was to abandon them, which many parents have done for reasons similar to those people who aborted used. An unspecified number of women in the Center for Feeling Therapy gave up their children (Ayella, 1998:86). Likewise, in Ontario, Canada, five or six mothers who followed the brutal cult leader Roch Theriault chose to remain with him at the price of losing their children—fourteen in total—to a child-welfare agency in 1985 (Kaihla and Ross, 1993:176, 162). As one former Rajneshee said, "I made the abandonment of my children into a moral principle, clothing it in spirituality" (quoted in Lattin, 2003:105).

The most vivid account of child abandonment about which I am familiar came from a former Canadian member of an American group, the Christ Family, whose members believed that their leader, Jesus Christ Lightning Amen, was the messiah. She had a young son and daughter whom she brought with her into the group, and not long after joining she was at a camp with older, more seasoned members. She got into a conversation with an older "sister" who quoted Matthew 10:34 to her: "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me..." The older sister continued, saying something like "You have to choose

between Jesus, serving Jesus Christ, being in this mission which is the most important thing that's happening on the face of the earth, or going back into the world and serving those kids" (Kent interview with Margaret, 1989:15). Within the hour, the mother had abandoned her kids, whom her own parents subsequently raised for several years until she left the group. She had lost the ability to value the emotions of her own offspring.

This loss of ability to empathize with others likely is a key element in other-deindividuation, and is not one of the characteristics that Stahelski discusses. In essence, adults' abilities to understand the needs of their children were severely distorted by misattribution concerning charisma, depluralized activities—if there were any at all—with their families, and damaged understandings of their own individualities. In extreme cases, adults completely misunderstood their children's needs and even offered them over to charismatic leaders who violated them under the guise of spiritual growth and education. Fundamentalist Mormon fathers in the American West, for example, routinely give over their young, often underage, daughters to older men as polygamous marriage partners, despite the very real possibilities of sexual, emotional, and physical harm befalling them (Kent, forthcoming). At least one mother in the Branch Davidian compound gave her ten-year-old daughter to David Koresh, knowing that he was going to make her one of his "brides" by having sex with her (ABC News, 2003; Bunting and Willman, 1995). Women in Austria's free-love commune, Friedrichshof, procured, and even chased down and dragged back, girls as young as fourteen so that their leader, Otto Múhl, could have sex with them (Soul Purpose Productions, 1999). Clearly, as they facilitated statutory rapes in the name of spiritual benefit, these women, as well as others in their respective communities who saw similar things going on, had no appreciation of children's emotional needs.

The most egregious example of parents demonstrating the inability to empathize (certainly in an appropriate, healthy manner) with their children is the mass poisonings and murders that parents perpetrated on their children at Jonestown. According to the most detailed account of Jim Jones's movement, at the final event in Guyana:

The children were brought forward first. A nurse directed the crowd and addressed them in a taut voice: "There's nothing to worry about. So everybody keep calm and try to keep your children calm. They aren't crying out in pain. It's just a little bitter-tasting."

Youngsters were bawling and screaming. Some were fighting, pulling away from their elders. Some had the potion shot to the back of their throats with syringes, where the swallowing reflex would bring it home. Parents and grandparents cried as their children died—not quickly and not painlessly. The doomed convulsed and gagged as the poison took effect. For several minutes, they vomited and screamed, they bled (Reiterman with Jacobs, 1982:559).

It appears that some parents may have realized the horror of their actions, but many offered up their children willingly and assisted with their poisonings. Sources provide different figures, but at least 260 (and possibly as many as 276) children were among the 913 (or 914) people who died in that November 1978 tragedy (Lattin, 2003:96; Wooden 1981:1; see Reiterman with Jacobs, 1982:571).

While adults in the Solar Temple also took at least seven children and three teenagers to their deaths along with them (Hall and Schuyler, 2000:141, 144), the number of teen deaths would have been higher had it not been for the failure (in March 1997) of a mechanism designed to set afire a house. Apparently, three teens awoke (along with their parents) the morning after this device failed, and the teens realized what had happened and that the adults were going to try again. They "told their parents that they did not want to go" via fire to the star Sirius, so the parents allowed them to remain outside as they retried (this time successfully) to ignite their house. "The children voluntarily took medication, sleeping pills, and went to sleep in the shed [near the house] knowing that when they woke up, their parents and grandmother would be dead," a Quebec police official said (*Washington Post*, 1997). These teenagers survived, but the mere fact that their parents and a grandparent tried to kill them, and then let them awake to their family members' fiery deaths, shows to what extent the deindividuation of the teens by the adults had devolved.

Dehumanization

After group members have dichotomized the world and deindividuated members of out-groups, then they can easily remove all positive characteristics (such as "moral virtue, intelligence, responsibility, honesty, trustworthiness, reliability") from them while they assign to them completely negative ones (such as "moral degeneracy, stupidity, irresponsibility, dishonesty, untrustworthiness, [and] unreliability" [Stahelski, 2004]). Going further, in-group members assign nonhuman, animal characteristics to the others. Perceived opponents become vermin, infections, rodents, and the like. Consequently, by viewing others as subhuman, in-group members devalue outside criticisms and justify any actions that they themselves might take against out-group members (see Stahelski, 2004). Of particular importance here is evidence of how some groups dehumanized the young dissenters among their own ranks, which is an important if not troubling extension of the basic claims that Stahelski makes.

Several examples from the Krishna organization demonstrate how adults, especially organizational leaders, dehumanized children, often to their great harm. Former member-turned-writer Nori Muster takes one perspective on the issue, pointing out that

[t]he Hindu scriptures offer old-fashioned concepts of women's place, comparing women to menacing animals or children. ISKCON could have tried to modernize the philosophy for a late twentieth century Western audience [. . .], but [founder] Prabhupada and other men in the hierarchy amplified the chauvinistic points instead (Muster 2004:13).

In essence, ISKCON's all-male leadership saw women and children as less than full humans, and hence not subject to equal treatment with men. ISKCON women were, however, better literature distributors and fundraisers (activities called *sankirtan*) than men, and raising children hindered if not prevented them from doing these activities (because *sankirtan* usually required extensive traveling). Consequently, a common saying among Krishna followers in one of their larger communities that provided child care was "Dump the load and hit the road" (cited in Rochford and Heinlein, 1998:11). In essence, children were "loads" or

burdens on the women, hurting their ability to work for the organization.

Scholar E. Burke Rochford added another dimension to the issue of ISKCON children being dehumanized. He reported that "[u]p until the early 1980s, children born within ISKCON were commonly portrayed as being spiritually pure.... Yet this view changed by the mid-1980s, as some leaders complained that ISKCON's children were turning out to be little more than 'karmies' (that is, non-religious outsiders) . . ." (Rochford with Heinlein, 1998:9). This pejorative label came about as ISKCON children who had gone through its own school system had not become the spiritually pure and devoted teens that leaders had expected. Rather than blame the results on the contents of their education and the behaviours of numerous abusive teachers, leadership blamed the youth themselves (Rochford with Heinlein, 1998:10).

Analogous pejorative labels befell Children of God teens, as adults in that group had to face the fact that their education and socialization efforts toward the second generation had serious problems. By the mid-1980s, leaders became aware that many Children of God teens were rebelling against the faith of their parents, and they established a series of "teen training camps" in various parts of the world, plus additional "victor camps" or "detention teen camps" for the most recalcitrant second-generation members. Initially, leaders called these difficult young people "delinquent teens" (see Sara, 1986:73) and put the boys on a "Back to the Basics Boys" program (or BBB team), also called the group's "Detention Teens or Hard Labor Crew" (Family Services, 1989:6). Accounts that I have recorded from former members also indicate that many teen girls did hard labor in various locations (such as in Brazil, Macao, and Mexico [Kent and Hall, 2000:66-67]). In 1989, Children of God leaders changed the name of these resistant teens from the "Back to the Basic Boys" to the "Rotten Apples" (Family Services, 1989:7), a term that incorporated both sexes and that shifted responsibility for their rebellion onto the shoulders of a few deviant individuals and away from the organization, its policies, and its practices. According to dehumanizing labels, the individuals were flawed, not the charismatically dysfunctional environment in which the teens grew up and against which they now resisted. While Stahelski considered only that cults and terrorists would dehumanize out-groups,

it also is clear that ideological groups sometimes will do the same thing to in-group deviants, including the young.

Demonization

As a final phase in social-psychological conditioning, claims by terrorist groups and violent cults that "the enemy is in league with the devil and cosmic evil" may prevent "the occurrence of after-action killing remorse" (Stahelski, 2204). Stahelski saw this process occurring within terrorist groups, but a distressing example of demonization probably being used to prevent remorse involved the 1995 murder of two recent defectors and their infant son, by Order of the Solar Temple members. Apparently, one of the Solar Temple leaders, Joseph Di Mambro, was "outraged" that, without his permission, the couple had a child and gave him a name (Christopher Emmanuel) that resembled one of the leader's daughters, Emmanuelle. In retaliation, the leader identified the child as the Antichrist, and when the two members of the group's assassination team killed the family, they "used a wooden stake in the ritual slaying, driving it through the infant's heart" (Farnsworth, 1995). This form of murder was in accordance with Temple ritual instructions about how to kill the Antichrist (Hall and Schuyler, 2000:139).

A less dramatic but still disturbing example of demonization occurring against rebellious children took place in the Children of God organization. Although leaders were inclined to see the devil behind all of the teens' rebellion (Berg, 1988), two particular attempts to demonize them are especially noteworthy.

The first attempt targeted David Berg's granddaughter, Merry Berg, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Merry Berg had developed doubts about his leadership and reputedly divine connections "as she repeatedly saw him drunk, depressed, unable to eat properly (because of throat and stomach damage from his alcohol consumption), contradicting himself, and making unfulfilled prophecies, all the while assaulting her" (Kent, 2004a:63). Rather than facing the wisdom of her perceptions, Berg and his inner circle declared that she was afflicted with demonism (Davidito, 1987) and put her through "six months of intense and forceful efforts to dissuade these doubts, which included exorcisms, lengthy prayer sessions, spankings, head-

shakings, threats of severe beatings, and various humiliations" (Kent, 2004a:63, see 64).

These acts of violence failed to remove Merry's doubts about her grandfather, so he sent her to an abusive delinquent-teen training camp in Macao where, "for three and one half years, Merry endured sexual and physical assaults, hard labor, constant humiliations, and obligatory study of her grandfather's teachings until a nervous breakdown landed her in a mental institution" (Kent, 2004a:63-64). In essence, Berg and his inner circle demonized his own granddaughter, and through that demonization committed extraordinary acts of abuse and violence against her.

Several years later, reflecting upon his struggle with his granddaughter, Berg wrote to his followers, "And I got the most gruesome picture of [Merry], with her mouth all red & dripping, drooling with blood like a vampire! Of course, she's just a little ignorant nobody, but it shows you how the Devil is using her" (Berg, 1992:3). Because Merry questioned the authority of her drunken, abusive grandfather, he dehumanized and demonized her. This action set a precedent for what Children of God leadership would do a decade later when adult children of first-generation members were in open revolt concerning the treatment and abuse that they themselves had experienced.

Throughout the 1990s and into this century, these young adults became increasingly vocal about what life was like as children in the cult. Through a Website, movingon.org, they reconnected, wrote about their experiences, and even named alleged perpetrators. Amid repeated calls for justice against the first-generation adults who had violated their second-generation offspring, Children of God (now called The Family) leadership responded in much the same way as had Berg to the challenges of someone he had abused—leadership demonized the critics. In September 2002, current leaders Maria and Peter Amsterdam published a missive that contained sections about demonic, blood-dripping, grotesque, "agents of the netherworld" called the "Vandari." According to the text, "The 'van' is derived from the word 'vandals,' the 'dar' from the word 'dark,' [and] the 'I' spelling of the last syllable signifies 'I,' denoting self or selfishness" (in Maria and Peter, 2002:para. 142). Because of

the age range of several of the demons in the text, no doubt existed that these Vandari were second-generation critics.

In passages attributed to Jesus, these Vandari "are let loose upon the Earth. Their mission is to recruit those who will bow down and worship the son of perdition in the appointed day. Likewise, they seek to oppose My truth" (in Maria and Peter, 2002:para. 145). Indeed, they are vile creatures:

You've seen rats, because they cohabitâte with the Vandari. The Vandari populate and dwell in the sewer systems of the world, a fitting place in the physical world for such creatures. In the netherworld, they belong to some of the lowest strata and levels of the spirit world, where they dwell with the dregs of the spirit (in Maria and Peter, 2002:para. 146).

In summary, when faced with a crescendo of criticism against its charismatic leader, the abusive policies that he implemented, and the consequences of those policies on young people's lives, Children of God leaders attempted to discredit the critical adult children of the first generation by demonizing and dehumanizing them to the group's remaining members. The message to members was to avoid the criticisms at all costs because they came from the Devil. This scenario is a remarkable example of how a cult attempts to protect itself and its charismatic leader, even at the expense of its own children.

Conclusion

This study began with the assumption that the failure of so many sectarian groups to retain their young into adulthood suggests systemic problems with charismatic leadership. Charisma may not be so much based upon a leader's contact with the divine as it is an indication of biopsychosocial dysfunction. Such dysfunction certainly seems to take its toll on a number of the children who live under the pale of parents whom others consider to be divine. Moreover, adults, who often are on spiritual quests of the highest motives, join other devotees in encapsulated, depluralized worlds centered on reputedly divine or enlightened charismatic figures. Their social networks weave tightly with other seekers, but often they either neglect their children as they pursue what for them is a higher cause, or they involve children in that

pursuit in ways that do not have the children's needs as primary.

High-demand ideological groups offer various techniques designed to facilitate the merging of members' personal identities into the collective form based upon leaders' charisma. These self-deindividuating techniques undermine people's abilities to form independent moral and ethical decisions. At the same time, these techniques offer replacement values that stress the primacy of the groups themselves and the often-dysfunctional leaders who founded them. Assimilating these techniques, however, takes long hours of study, experience, and practice; but once again, children often are neglected. Indeed, many adults also other-deindividuate and lose the ability to empathize with children to such a degree that youth come to represent hindrances, if not opponents, both to the adults' spiritual quests and to the groups in which the adults are pursuing their dreams.

If the feeling of opposition toward children grows sufficiently strong, then adults, even parents, will view the younger generation in dehumanizing ways. The youth become burdens or loads that adults should dispense with in order to get on with their "godly" work, or adults label them as unspiritual failures who do not deserve adults' time, energy, or resources. In extreme cases, adults demonize their children, as has happened in at least one group in which former childhood victims, now adults, demand justice for the violations that they suffered. Demonization of one's own sons and daughters appears as a desperate measure, an attempt to prevent current members from listening to what former-members-turned-critics have to say.

I have painted a bleak picture here about how the reeducation of adults who join groups leads to educational environments for children that are based upon neglect. Surely I realize that this picture is not likely to be universal for all groups, and that even families within the same group likely will show differences in child-rearing practices. Some second-generation members remain in many groups, and we all would benefit from learning about why some remain while others leave. Other groups change their child-rearing practices over time, and it would be important to know whether these groups also must make simultaneous

adjustments to the techniques it uses to reeducate and resocialize adults.

I in no way wish to undervalue these questions and qualifications. The fact remains, however, that a growing body of evidence suggests that growing up in charismatically driven, high-demand groups is exceedingly difficult on many children. Perhaps by learning more about what these children went through we will be of greater assistance to them when they come out and try to get on with their lives.

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