

Misunderstanding Cults

Searching for Objectivity in a Controversial Field

Edited by Benjamin Zablocki and Thomas Robbins



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8. Brainwashing Programs in The Family/ Children of God and Scientology

Stephen A. Kent

A recent attempt to renew the 'sociology of religion debate' about 'brainwashing' insisted that earlier academic dismissals of the term were premature, at least regarding its applicability to techniques and programs found within some alternative religions. Leading this attempt at renewal is sociologist Ben Zablocki, who stated that he disagreed with earlier definitional restrictions on the brainwashing concept. These earlier restrictions concluded that forcible confinement *had* to be part of a person's experience before it could receive the brainwashing label (see Zablocki 1998: 231-2; cf. Schefflin and Opton 1978: 40). In refutation, Zablocki argued that he had observed profound personality transformations among members of high-demand faiths without physical constraint having played a role (Zablocki 1997: 97, see 99), and that these profound transformations convinced him that in fact the brainwashing term did have utility for explaining these kinds of phenomena.

Scholars currently disagree about the appropriateness of applying the "brainwashing" term to situations where there is no physical force or force-threat. But, presumably, most would agree that the term is applicable to cultic situations in which members experience programs involving threats or force. My study of high-demand camps and programs in two groups - The Family (formerly the Children of God) and

*Please note that this is an historical analysis; it does not necessarily describe events as they exist in Scientology or The Family at the present time (eds.).

Scientology explores the effects of brainwashing in systems that did threaten and use force. Brainwashing is an appropriate descriptor of what these groups imposed upon hundreds of their members. Characteristics of these two systems of ideological reshaping were: (1) forcible confinement, (2) physical maltreatment (Anthony 1990: 304–5; see Anthony and Robbins 1992: 18; World Services 1993: 4, 20, 21; Zablocki 1997: 112–14), (3) social degradations and maltreatment, along with (4) intense study of ideology, coupled with (5) forced confessions, and (6) personal 'success' stories.

Social degradations and maltreatment were part of a brainwashing program's efforts to pressure selected individuals into renouncing fundamental aspects of their lives. Humiliation, social isolation, submission, public degradations, and confessions characterized such efforts. Their purpose was to shame individuals into renouncing aspects of their past in attempts to instill or renew leadership-sanctioned, 'acceptable' ideological teachings. Concurrently, group leaders conducted specific programs that provided the targeted individuals with the beliefs and behaviours that persons in charge required them to adopt and internalize. Individuals had to confess their reputed shortcomings by negatively comparing themselves to the imposed beliefs and behaviours. Finally, before leaders allowed members to leave these programs, the members had to produce stories that glorified the supposedly positive transformations that they underwent.

I build my case for the appropriateness of the brainwashing term by utilizing primary documents, publications, and policies from The Family and Scientology, combined with legal statements, media accounts, and personal interviews with former members of both groups who had been through the brainwashing programs. Much of this evidence was relatively easy to obtain, and a considerable portion of the Scientology information is available on the World Wide Web.

The Family operated what it called Victor programs in relation to its teen training centres in the 1980s and into the early 1990s, and discussion specifically of the centres and programs appears in Family publications (for example, Family Services 1990; see Home Services 1992: 10), several academic sources (Kent and Hall 1997: Melton 1994: 90; Millikan 1994: 229; Shepherd and Lilliston 1994: 63; Van Zandt 1991: 171–2), and one British court case (Ward 1995: 125–33). Thirteen former members, moreover, who were young teens in the organization during the period, spoke to me at length about their experiences in centres and Victor programs, and recently former members discussed or men-

tioned the Victor programs on an Internet website, <excognet.com> (for example, Cobra 1998; La Mattery 1998; McNeil 1998a, 1998b). An additional former member provided me with a written account about one particularly harsh punishment that she personally witnessed being imposed upon a teen in The Family's large Filipino facility (Priebe 1995).

Scientology refers to its Rehabilitation Task Force (RPF) and its more severe punishment system within the brainwashing program – the Rehabilitation Project Force's Rehabilitation Project Force (RPF's RPF) – in a widely circulated book (Hubbard 1976: 441–2, 451), and a few of the actual policies overseeing the program have become available (see, for example, Boards of Directors of the Churches of Scientology 1974, 1977, 1980). In addition, accounts of the RPF from former members have appeared in print since 1980, first in a court case (Burden 1980) and subsequently in additional court documents (Armstrong 1982; Aznaran and Aznaran 1988; Whitfield 1989, 1994; Young 1994) and in testimonies (*California Court of Appeal* 1989; *Royal Courts of Justice* 1984). Authors have reported similar accounts in numerous books, newspapers, and magazines in the United States (Behar 1986; Corydon 1996: 123–9, 136–7; Koff 1989; Shelor 1984; Welkos and Sappell 1990), England (Atack 1990; Barnes 1984; Bracchi 1994: 5; Miller 1987), and Germany (Bavarian State Ministry of the Interior 1997; Enquete Kommission 1998: 77 n. 135; Gruber and Kintzinger (interviewers) 1994; *Hessische Allgemeine* 1997; Kintzinger (interviewer) 1997: 52; Reichelt 1997: 284–5, see 273–85; Tongi 1998; Young 1995: 107). Eight former members have discussed with me their experiences in the RPF (and in some cases, the RPF's RPF), and some of these same people have posted accounts on the Internet. Recently an active Scientologist posted some of his RPF experiences on the Web's <alt.religion.scientology> newsgroup (SB 1998a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i). (I decided not to attempt to interview current Family members¹ or Scientologists² because I feared they likely would suffer unacceptable consequences if they were to reveal aspects about these camps and programs that their respective groups want to keep concealed.) All of the information tells a consistent set of stories, except for the RPF account that Scientology has on one of its websites (Church of Scientology International 1996).³ In essence, the operation of forced labour and reindoctrination programs in both The Family and Scientology is well known, yet they have received scant academic attention.

Some differences exist between these programs in The Family as

opposed to Scientology, and even within each facility or program in different locations and at different points in time. Nevertheless, the slight variations pale in comparison to the internal consistency within each program or facility and the parallels between the two of them. Initially The Family's Victor program targeted adolescents, but later it expanded to include adults (although we still know little about the adult program [see *COUNTERCOG*, n.d.; Dupuy, circa 1993: 8–14]). By contrast, from the inception of Scientology's RPF programs, teens and possibly younger children were subject to its harsh regime (Cohee 1989; Jebson 1997; Kent, Interview with Dale, 1997: 4; Kent, Interview with Pat, 1997a: 32; Kent, Interview with Pignotti, 1997: 30), even though a majority of inmates were adults (apparently with no upper age limit).

Brief Program Histories

Each of the respective organization's programs has its own unique genesis. The Family's teen centres and related Victor programs appear to have emerged in the mid-1980s, as a wave of young people born inside the group were maturing children or young teens. Many Family youth lacked the fervour and commitment that motivated their parents, which meant that The Family suffered the classic 'crisis of the second generation' that is common in many sects. As Maria (who was the long-time partner to The Family's founder) realized in 1990, converts '*were willing to forsake all to join us, and were determined to give their lives for what we stand for*. But most of our JETTs [Junior End Time Teens, around 10 to 13 years old] have *not* volunteered to join The Family, and what we stand for' (Maria 1990a: 617 [emphasis Maria's]). In an attempt to socialize them more deeply into the group's ideology, Family leadership established instructional centres for them in various parts of the world. Leaders overseeing these instructional or educational centres sent young members to special disciplinary regimes – the Victor programs – if they did not adjust to their rules or expressed persistent doubts about the organization's teachings, practices, or leaders.

A Family publication, for example, commented on the beginning of the Japanese Victor Program:

Recently, different teens were brought in from many different field Homes to the Heavenly City School to be part of the 'Teen Ministry Train-

ing Program' where they were to receive special training in different ministries. At the same time the Shepherds wanted to help a number of teens who had serious problems & were greatly in need of very close oversight, discipline & intense retraining & rewiring in the Word.

To give this small group of problem teens the care & attention needed, the 'Teen Victor Program' was begun. These problem teens, now called the Teen Victors, were moved to a retraining centre where their Shepherds were able to zero in on their needs. (Family Services 1990: 10–11)

A separate document suggests that the Victor Program began some time during 1989 (Maria 1990c: 636).

What little we know about the subsequent inclusion of adults in Victor programs suggests that leaders sent them for intensive confessions and indoctrination for similar reasons as they did to the youth (Dupuy circa 1993: 8, 10, 12–14). According to one researcher who had been close to the group, the last Victor program (in England) closed in 1992 (Millikan 1994: 229). Before their closure, however, Maria called for the attention and discipline that teens received in the Teen Centers and Victory Program to become part of regular home life (Maria 1990b: 626–7).

Scientology's RPF program began in January 1974 on a ship captained by Scientology's founder, L. Ron Hubbard. It had a number of antecedent programs, which in various degrees punished supposedly wayward members, trained them in particular skills, and extracted nearly free labour from them (Boards of Directors of the Churches of Scientology 1977: 1 [on the Estates Project Force]; Dagnell 1997: 3–4; Hubbard 1969 [on the Decks Projects Force]; Hubbard 1972, 1976: 501 [on the Stewards Project Force]; Hubbard 1976: 341 [on the mud box brigade]; Hubbard 1976: 429 [on the Pursers Project Force]; Hubbard 1977: 1). Hubbard himself almost certainly forged a brainwashing manual in the mid-1950s, which his organization distributed widely at the time (Hubbard [probable author] n.d. [circa 1955], 1955),⁴ and ideas appearing in it likely influenced aspects of Scientology's subsequent forced labour and re-indoctrination programs (see, for example [Hubbard, L. Ron] 1969). The immediate incident, however, that propelled Hubbard to order an aide to design the program was an injurious motorcycle accident he suffered, and that he blamed on subversive elements working on the ship (Miller 1987: 321; see Kent, Interview with Ernesto, 1997: 1; with Pignotti, 1997: 6). Subsequently, Scientologists received RPF assignments if they gave indications on Scientology's

confessional and interrogation machine, the E-Meter, that they harboured dangerous thoughts against Scientology or its leader. People also received RPF assignments if they were performing poorly on their jobs, were showing negative personality indicators (presumably such things as attitude, doubts, hostility, etc.), or were causing trouble (Boards of Directors of the Churches of Scientology 1977: 1).

It appears that the first assignment to the RPF's RPF occurred on 24 April 1974 when someone thought that his or her 'RPF assignment was amusing' and therefore 'was unable to recognize a need for redemption or any means to effect it,' which the regular RPF supposedly provided (Hubbard 1976: 451, see 627). (The Scientology source on the RPF's RPF does not allow readers to determine either who made the first assignment, or who was the first person assigned.) Inmates stayed in this harsher program until they 'recognized this need [for redemption] and of their own self-determinism requested to be included in RPF redemption actions ...' While in it they remained segregated from the RPFers, received no pay for their work, did not receive auditing (a type of Scientology counselling), but received no more than six hours sleep and triple punishments for infractions (Hubbard 1976: 451).

Forcible Confinement

Both the Victor programs and various RPF programs operated within larger organizational facilities, and both also had some programs that functioned in relative isolation. Some of the Victor camp locations are well documented, while others receive mention in accounts by one or more people who claim to have been in them. Discussion about the Victor program (sometimes called a Teens Detention Camp [Ward 1995: 152]) in Macao, for example, received attention in a British court case involving The Family (Ward 1995: 74, 131, 152, 157-62; see also Kent, Interview with Frost, 1995; Interview with Lorna, 1996: 11-24), in which 'the children were subjected to a regime of physical and psychological brutality' (Ward 1995: 158). Moreover, so many former members have discussed the forced isolation and often harsh conditions within The Family's facilities in the Philippines during the 1980s that their existence is beyond doubt (Ward 1995: 153-5; see Kent, Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 70-113; Interview with Donovan, 1995; Interview with Hendricks, 1995; Interview with Lorna, 1996: 10-11; Priebe 1995). Likewise, the Japanese facility is well documented (Ward 1995: 155; Kent, Interview with Albert, 1997: 25-7, 33; Interview with Marleana, 1995b:

12-17; Interview with Stephanie, 1997: 2, 4). Similar accounts about teen training centres (sometimes with attached Victor programs) in Brazil (Kent, Interview with Stephanie, 1997: 7, 10), England (Kent, Interview with Donovan, 1995: 34), Hungary (Kent, Interview with Frost, 1995: 1), Mexico (Ward 1995: 135, 150, 157, 167; see Kent, Interview with Betty, 1996: 42, 45-6; Interview with Marleana, 1995a: 32-5, 37), Peru (see Kent, Interview with Betty, 1996: 34; Interview with Emily, 1995: 10), and Puerto Rico (Interview with Donovan, 1995: 30; Interview with Shawn, 1995: 27), suggest that Family teens experienced brainwashing conditions around the world (see Ward 1995: 167 [who mentions additional Victor programs in Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, and Thailand]).

Scientology's first RPF was aboard ship in the 1970s, when Hubbard oversaw his small fleet in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean. When the organization began its Clearwater, Florida, land operation in 1975 (Atack 1990: 209), the RPF also came ashore (Superior Court of the State of California 1984: 1461-3). On the other side of the American continent, RPF labour helped renovate Scientology's current facilities in Los Angeles (Kent, Interview with Pat, 1997a: 21; Interview with Prince, 1998: 15; see Aznaran and Aznaran 1988: 8) after the organization acquired an old Los Angeles hospital building in February 1977 (Church of Scientology of California 1978: 144). RPF labour helped build various desert facilities on Scientology's Gilman Hot Springs, California and La Quinta, California properties (Superior Court of the State of California 1984: 1473-4). Its RPF camp in Happy Valley (near the Soboba Indian reservation in southern California) seems to be the most isolated facility of this nature about which solid evidence exists (see Aznaran and Aznaran 1988: 11-12). Likewise, strong evidence exists for the operation of additional RPF programs in England (Royal Courts of Justice 1984: 27) and Denmark (Kintzinger [Interviewer] 1997; Schernekau/Elleby, n.d. 1990, 1989a, b; 1990a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k). All of these RPFs presumably still operate, except for the ones on the ships (since the small fleet no longer operates).

Scientology's RPF and RPF'S RPF

In The Family's and Scientology's programs, leadership of the respective organizations assigned people and confined them, often by force. The Scientology evidence about forcible confinement is somewhat modified by the fact that, apparently, many current RPF 'participants' sign releases which state that they are in the program voluntarily, having chosen it over the option of automatic Sea Org expulsion (see

Anonymous n.d.). Sufficient numbers of accounts also exist, however, of people indicating that they were sent to the RPF against their will. Consequently, they are most accurately called 'inmates' rather than mere participants. A typical scenario seems to be that two 'guards' arrive with instructions that they are to escort someone to the RPF, which is what happened to Pat in the late 1970s at the Los Angeles building complex (Kent, Interview with Pat, 1997a: 19) and Dennis Erlich in Clearwater, Florida. As Erlich indicated, he did not resist the guards' directive to proceed to the RPF, since 'it was sort of implicit that [if] you wanna [sic] fight you're gonna [sic] get the shit kicked out of you' (Kent, Interview with Erlich, 1997: 9). In 1974 former member Jesse Prince apparently did try to resist the five guards in 1977 whose directive was to accompany him to the RPF, since he recounted that these men literally had to drag him into it as he kicked and screamed (Kent, Interview with Prince, 1998: 15). More dramatically, former member David Mayo stated that in 1982 high ranking Scientologists 'kidnapped me and subsequently kept me captive and physically and mentally abused me for six months' (Mayo 1994: 2-3).

Once in the RPF (or its harsher companion, the RPF's RPF), at least a few inmates seem to have suffered severe restraint or confinement. Erlich, for example, claimed that he spent the first day or two of his RPF's RPF assignment locked in a metal cage (Kent, Interview with Erlich, 1997: 8). Moreover, four former members – Dennis Erlich, Hana Whitfield, Tonya Burden, and an anonymous Internet 'poster' calling herself Nefertiti – each wrote about seeing a woman chained to a pipe in the basement of Scientology's Fort Harrison Hotel in Clearwater, and at least two of the accounts appear to be of incidents that are roughly a decade apart (Burden 1980: 12; Nefertiti 1997: 3; Whitfield 1994: 42; WMNF 1996: 5).⁵

Final evidence about the forcible confinement issue comes from the fact that some former RPFers indicated that they escaped from RPF facilities. Julie Mayo, for example, reported that she snuck out of a guarded Scientology compound when a gate was momentarily open (Mayo 1996: 8-9). Similarly, Vicki Aznaran swore that she and two others fled from the RPF facility called Happy Valley, even though Scientology guards pursued them on motorcycles (Aznaran and Aznaran 1998: 12). Apparently Pat had to devise an elaborate ruse to escape, which culminated in her tricking her guard so that she had time to jump into the car of a friend she had arranged to meet (Kent, Interview with Pat, 1997b: 4).

Guards at some of the RPF facilities apparently were armed. For

example, former high-ranking Scientologist Jesse Prince reported both that the guards at the Happy Valley RPF carried rifles (Kent, Interview with Prince, 1998: 42, 49), and that while he was in the Sea Org staff at Gilman Hot Springs (where RPFers worked), he and other Scientology executives had many guns (49). A more extensive discussion of the weaponry that the guards and others had at Gilman Hot Springs appeared in the affidavit of former member Andre Tabayoyon, who indicated that he helped design the security system for the facility (Tabayoyon 1994: 8 [par. 28]). The weapons stockpile allegedly included 'semi-automatic assault rifles (HK 91 assault rifles capable of firing 300 to 500 rounds of ammunition a minute[]), 45 caliber pistols, .380 automatic weapons, and twelve gauge shotguns ...' He further claimed that guards on motorcycles 'were trained to carry loaded cocked 45 caliber pistols,' and that a marksman sat at a location high above the base with 'a high powered rifle with a telescopic scope' (8 [par. 31-2]). The grounds themselves, Tabayoyon indicated, were secured with a perimeter fence, razor wire, lighting, electronic monitors, concealed microphones, ground sensors, motion sensors, and hidden cameras (8 [par. 28]).

Finally, from yet another Scientology RPF facility, the security conditions that existed during the renovations of the former hospital construction site in Los Angeles (which now is a Scientology complex) allegedly included a barbed wire fence patrolled by guards with dogs. Ostensibly security guards intended to keep out unauthorized people from the facility, but their presence also kept RPFers from leaving (with a few accounts of people actually having to escape in order to get out [Kent, Interview with Prince, 1998: 25-6, 28-9]). Taken together, these descriptions of RPF guards at various facilities strongly suggest that the RPF programs meet the necessary academic requirement that forcible confinement must be a factor before stating that inmates were participants in a brainwashing program.

The Family's Teen Training and Victor Programs

In contrast to some of the RPF accounts, no comparable escape stories exist regarding inmates fleeing either the teen camps or their harsher Victor programs. Leaders did prevent, however, the teens from leaving their respective programs and facilities. Indeed, the Filipino facility known as 'The Jumbo' (because of its size) contained (according to one estimate) up to three hundred and fifty people living within ten- to fifteen-foot walls – walls patrolled by armed guards at night (Kent, Interview with Donovan, 1995: 1-2; see also Interview with Hendricks,

1995: 18). In the year Ernest Donovan was there, he only left the compound five times, always under supervision (Kent, Interview with Donovan, 1995: 2). Cheryl indicated that she only went outside the compound three times during the year she was there, also only under supervision (Kent, Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 60). For the teens at least, they were confined within The Family compound.

Entering the teen program was far easier than leaving it. Thirteen-year-old Cheryl read about The Family's invitation for teens to receive training at the Jumbo, so she and her parents parted company and she travelled to the Philippines as they left for missionary work in other parts of the world (Kent, Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 55-6). Many months later she had grown tired of the physical and emotional demands of the program, so she asked the leaders in charge for permission to leave. Rather than granting it, one of the male leaders reputedly took her in a closet and beat her four or five times with a paddle. As Cheryl remembered, he said something like, "And now, this is for your own good. We're not going to let you go ... We're not going to let this be a failure. After all we've invested in you, we're not gonna let you just get off the hook so easily" (Kent, Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 92).

A common experience for teens in the training camps was for supposedly deviant or disruptive teens to be confined in an area away from the others (Ward 1995: 167). Cheryl, for example, went into (what she called) 'isolation' for having expressed doubts about both the existence of God and The Family's founder, David Berg, being God's prophet (Kent, Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 69). She also found herself monitored by an adult 'shepherd' day and night. (See also Kent, Interview with Betty, 1996: 45.) Another young member named Sam Hendricks reported being confined in isolation for (he indicated) a month and a half (Kent, Interview with Hendricks, 1995: 21). By far, however, the most dramatic physical confinement allegedly took place in the Macao Victor program, in which Merry Berg, the granddaughter of the founder, spent six months in a locked room. During part of that time, she allegedly had to use a bucket containing disinfectant as a toilet (Kent, Interview with Berg, 1992a: 80).

Physical Maltreatment

As would be expected in brainwashing programs, Family members and Scientologists experienced a range of physically difficult, and often painful, assignments. Family youth in the Filipino Jumbo, for example, had to perform calisthenics - 'sit-ups, jumping jacks ... vigor-

ous running, running up and down stairs, push-ups, and star jumps' (Kent, Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 100-3; Interview with Donovan, 1995: 10, 12). By far the most arduous (and potentially damaging) exercise was the 'duck-walk' that involved the teens walking around the compound while squatting (Kent, Interview with Donovan, 1995: 11; Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 101).

Scientology's RPFers often had to do calisthenics as punishment, but running was (and remains) a basic part of the program. RPFers were required to run everywhere (see Hartwell n.d.: 3), and former members who went through different RPF programs universally report having had to run in a variety of circumstances. People who were on the RPF on a Scientology ship in the mid-1970s report having to run laps around the deck (Pignotti 1989: 23). Similarly, former inmates from the Fort Harrison incarceration had to run up and down the ramp in the car park (Kent, Interview with Erlich, 1997: 16; Neferitti 1997: 11; Rosenblum n.d.: 2). In Los Angeles, Pat indicated that RPFers ran stairs or did laps around the complex (Kent, Interview with Pat, 1997a: 27), and RPFers in Denmark experienced similar running punishments (Schernekau/Elleby 1990g: 2; 1990h; k; see 1990i). By far, however, the most extreme running punishments took place at the Happy Valley (and possibly the Gilman Hot Springs) RPF programs, where RPF inmates had to run around either a tree or a pole for up to twelve hours a day (with few breaks) in the hot sun (Aznaran and Aznaran 1988: 9; Kent, Interview with Prince, 1998: 45; D. Mayo 1994: 3; J. Mayo 1996: 7).

In addition to the physical demands running placed upon RPFers, they also performed hard physical labour, usually including maintenance and renovation. Cleaning, scraping paint, washing, and structure refurbishing were common assignments, sometimes involving extremely dirty and potentially dangerous chores. On the ship *Apollo*, for example, RPFer Monica Pignotti had to clean the muck and sludge from the bilges, and then paint the area (Kent, Interview with Pignotti, 1997: 26). A current Scientologist and former RPFer in the Los Angeles Scientology facility wrote about inmates having to clean a narrow, roach-infested tunnel beneath the food preparation area that was criss-crossed with hot pipes and smelled so badly that in one instance he passed out (SB 1998h: 2). The most extreme working conditions existed in the Los Angeles facility around 1977 and 1978, when RPFers were required to perform potentially dangerous renovation work for thirty hours at a time, followed only by three hours' sleep (Kent, Interview with Pat, 1997a: 25-26; Interview with Prince, 1998: 16).

Family teens likewise performed hard labour in the Victor programs, often in the hot sun of tropical or semi-tropical climates. Chores in the Victor program in Macao involved breaking up old concrete, pouring cement, cutting grass with sickles, doing farm chores, carrying away scrap metal, building septic tanks, and (like their RPF counterparts) working a considerable amount of time on construction sites and painting (Kent, Interview with Berg, 1992b: 8; see also Interview with Frost, 1995: 11, 34–6; Interview with Lorna, 1996: 19). Apparently these types of hard labour also took place in the Victor program in Brazil (Interview with Stephanie, 1997: 7). Concerning a Mexican teen home, Valerie spoke about people in it who were 'put on, like, hard labour for weeks and months on end, just out in the sun, you know, hauling rocks and digging holes and filling 'em back up again' (Interview with Valerie, 1996: 31; also Interview with Betty, 1996: 46). A very similar report also came from the RTC (Retraining Camp) in Japan, which a former member indicated 'was a predecessor to the Victor camps' (Interview with Albert, 1997: 37–8; see also Interview with Stephanie, 1997: 5). In fact, this former member blames the degeneration of his back on the 'excessive work' that The Family director allegedly forced him to do (Interview with Albert, 1997: 38).

Victor Program teens who supposedly misbehaved suffered a fate that did not befall adults on Scientology's RPF: Leaders reportedly beat them publicly. Young adults who were teens in various Victor programs (in Macao, the Philippines, and Japan) spoke about the (frequently public) beatings they received by leaders who used wooden paddles that had holes drilled in them to reduce wind resistance (Kent, Interview with Albert, 1997: 26; Interview with Berg, 1992a: 82; 1992b: 6; Interview with Donovan, 1995: 13–15; Interview with Stephanie, 1997: 2; see Ward 1995: 155). One young man who received a beating in the Filipino Jumbo later recounted that he had been hit repeatedly, so hard that afterward the bruises on his legs and buttocks thickened to the point that he could not sit or sleep on his back for a period of time (Interview with Hendricks, 1995: 24–5). I am not aware of anything comparable occurring in the RPF programs.

Social Degradations and Maltreatment

Coupled with the forms of physical maltreatment that occurred in the RPF and Victor programs was an array of social maltreatment. These degradations receive little attention in discussions about brainwash-

ing, yet social maltreatment helps to reduce people's support networks while attacking the psychosocial dimensions of personality (such as status, self-esteem, and identity). Social maltreatment contributes to the coercive efforts by which groups attempt to reduce a person's resistance to the re-indoctrination efforts. Remarkably, both programs developed relatively similar forms of maltreatment involving restrictions on social interactions with others.

The most dramatic similarities between the two groups are the restrictions on communications that existed in the programs of each of them. Both programs placed severe restrictions on inmates' abilities to communicate with one another and with people who were not in the programs. The Scientology document, for example, which provides the directives for the RPF operation, specifically prohibits inmates from talking either to staff members who are not in the RPF or to members of the public unless they absolutely have to (Boards of Directors of the Churches of Scientology 1977: 10). Contact with the outside world was even more curtailed by the prohibition against radios, televisions, or taped music (11). Scientologists easily recognized RPF inmates by their garments: either dark boiler suits or blue work uniforms (1).

Family teenagers did not wear special uniforms, but teens receiving punishment were easily distinguishable by the signs that leaders placed around their necks announcing, 'Don't talk to me – I'm on silence restriction' (Kent, Interview with Albert, 1997: 25 [in Japan]; Interview with Donovan, 1995: 19 [in the Philippines]; Interview with Lorna, 1996: 19 [in Macao]; Interview with Marleana, 1995b: 15 [in Japan]; Interview with Shawn, 1995: 27 [in Puerto Rico]; Interview with Stephanie, 1997: 6 [in Japan], 9, 10 [in Brazil]; Interview with Valerie, 1996: 31 [in Mexico]). One former inmate reported being brought into a public meeting wearing a mask over his mouth (Interview with Hendricks, 1995: 24).

Additional forms of social maltreatment contributed to both groups' attempts to utilize social pressure to acquire conformity. Teens on The Family's Victor program had little if any contact with their birth families (Kent, Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 56; Interview with Donovan, 1995: 6; Interview with Lorna, 1996: 8; see also Interview with Frost, 1995: 2), and RPF inmates had limited and highly controlled family contact only after they had achieved a level of success on the RPF program (see Boards of Directors of Churches of Scientology 1977: 10). Access to mainstream media – television, magazines, radio, music, and so on – was prohibited on both programs, and the Victor program's

teens did not receive payment for their hard physical labour (Kent, Interview with Berg, 1992b: 9). RPF policy, in contrast, stated that inmates were to receive a quarter or a half of their normal salaries (Boards of Directors of Churches of Scientology 1977: 10).⁶ Inmates, however, of the RPF received no pay, regardless of what work they performed or how long they laboured (Hubbard 1975: 451). In reality, however, many RPF inmates received dramatically low weekly payments – well under eight dollars for as much as 100 hours' work a week in the late 1970s and 1980s (Superior Court of the State of California 1984: 1463; Kent, Interview with Pignotti, 1997: 17; Interview with Young, 1994: 24; Rosenblum, n.d.: 3; see Aznaran and Aznaran 1988: 8).

Ideological Study

Except during periods when pressing construction demands determined the schedules of RPFers, RPF inmates and Victor program teens had extended periods of time set aside each day for study of ideological tracts, especially ones written by their respective leaders. The assumption in both contexts seems to have been that the leader had uncovered or revealed the truth, and that the road to 'rehabilitating' supposedly deviant members was to expose them to that truth in a context that punished any other perspectives by imposing intense physical and social malfeasance. Brainwashing, therefore, entailed not only the adoption of the leaders' ideologies, but also the renunciation of previous ideas that might have indicated degrees of social or intellectual independence.

The schedule for 'auditing' (e.g., a form of counselling) and the study of various Scientology courses – filled with the founder's writings – was supposed to involve five hours a day over a period of months (and, it seems in some cases, years [Boards of Directors of Churches of Scientology 1977: 4]). For hundreds of hours, RPFers studied Hubbard's teachings, as they worked through combinations of readings, tapes, and exercises that all inmates had to undergo (Boards of Directors of Churches of Scientology 1974; 1980). By contrast, The Family imposed an unlimited number of study hours on 'deviant' young members who had to examine extensive accumulations of material to ensure that they internalized their leader's (often eccentric) instructions and worldview (Kent, Interview with Berg, 1992b: 9; Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 72–3). Teens who were in ordinary educational programs had periods of time set aside each day for reading or listen-

ing to their founder's writings, plus attending lectures and memorizing key ideological passages (Kent, Interview with Berg, 1992b: 3; Interview with Betty, 1996: 45–6; Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 66; Interview with Donovan, 1995: 20).

Forced Confessions and Success Stories

Amid environments in which forcibly confined people were physically and socially maltreated as they (re)studied group ideology, the use of forced confessions became an intricate aspect of the brainwashing process (Kent, Interview with Erlich, 1997: 10–11; Interview with Pat, 1997a: 30; Interview with Pignotti, 1997: 14; J. Mayo 1996: 7; Nefertiti 1997: 12). Through such confessions, people renounced crucial aspects of their lives prior to their entry into the brainwashing programs, as well as subjected themselves to often scathing self-criticism for both large and seemingly small behavioural or 'thought-crimes.' Indeed, RPFers frequently confessed to extraordinary crimes that they allegedly committed in past lives (Kent, Interview with Pignotti, 1997: 15). In both groups, the procedures for forced confessions were highly systematized.

RPF members were coupled or 'twinned' with specific partners, and the RPF leaders made the members feel responsible for their twins' progress in the program. Partners heard and recorded one another's confessions in counselling (or what Scientology calls 'auditing') sessions, and they charted one another's progress through the numerous readings they had to absorb (California Court of Appeal 1989: 9269; Kent, Interview with Dale, 1997: 8–9; Rosenblum, n.d.: 2, 4). The system placed additional pressure on RPFers to conform, since deviance damaged members themselves along with their twins (who would not be able to progress).

No such 'buddy' system existed in The Family, since no partner-obligations existed among the teens. Leaders expected them, however, to report one another if they knew or heard of infractions (including ones they learned about through supposedly private conversations [Kent, Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 105–6]). Adult leaders supposedly would assign deviant teens to Victor programs, and then collect daily confessions and personal reflections (called Open Heart Reports) from them (Kent, Interview with Berg, 1992b: 4; Ward 1995: 150, 154–5). These confessions required that teens report on what they supposedly had learned from the daily readings, often doing so in a context in which

they spoke about alleged shortcomings that the readings had allowed them to overcome. The teens then shared their confessions in small groups (Kent, Interview with Donovan, 1995: 21; Interview with Frost, 1995: 44). Often in large public meetings, Family leaders who worked with teens criticized them either for items they had disclosed or for other alleged improprieties (Kent, Interview with Berg, 1992b: 3-4; Interview with Donovan, 1995: 21; see also Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 84).

The goal of these confessions, and indeed of the entire Family program, was to pressure teens to get 'the Victory,' which was a poorly defined experience (see Kent, Interview with Betty, 1996: 48) that seemingly involved one's self-acceptance as a sinner who needed the direction of Family leadership for salvation. Cheryl, for example, was in isolation when she apparently had a 'Victory' experience: 'it's hard to put it in words. I just couldn't stop crying and I thought, "the Family is right. I'm - I'm so wrong." And "how could I have been so presumptuous to think that I knew better than ... than God's prophet?"' (Kent, Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 79).

Similarly, the Scientology RPF experience intended to instill in inmates a belief that they had fallen off the 'bridge to total freedom,' but had been saved by the rehabilitation that the harsh program offered them (see Kent, Interview with Pat, 1997a: 24). Consequently, they spent what may have been hundreds of hours with their partners, supposedly 'discovering' misdeeds that date back thousands if not millions of years. After each reputed 'revelation,' the RPF program required that people state how much better and unburdened they felt (Nefertiti 1997: 12; see Forde 1996: 3). Their graduation from the RPF program coincided with - indeed, depended upon - their construction of written 'success stories' that praised the RPF program and gave thanks for the redemption that it provided (Kent, Interview with Pignotti, 1997: 19-20; Interview with Young, 1994: 17-18; Sea Organization 1977: 4-5).

Conclusion

Many social scientists seem reluctant to apply the brainwashing term to activities that 'religious' groups undertake, fearing in part that critics will use the term to justify acts of repression against those groups by authorities and the press. In the particular cases that this article analyses, however, 'brainwashing' is undeniably the appropriate aca-

demically term to describe what institutions have attempted to impose upon what may have been hundreds of their members. By embracing the brainwashing term to describe situations involving forcible confinement and physical and social maltreatment in the context of an indoctrination program, social scientists still can oppose repressive acts against (especially minority) faiths. At the same time, however, they also must acknowledge that ideological groups have operated brainwashing programs in the recent past that involved serious human rights abuses for which the groups themselves may be held accountable. Confinement and maltreatment violate basic rights concerning (among others) religious freedom, privacy, personal honour, fair wages and appropriate work conditions, and acceptable standards of mental and physical health (see United Nations 1996a; 1996b). These probable human rights issues are in addition to the strictly academic issues that also deserve attention.

Among the most important academic issues involved is the new direction that the current brainwashing debate has taken. No longer are the advocates of the brainwashing term using it to explain conversions, as some persons had attempted to do in the 1970s and early 1980s. Now its proponents see it as efforts by some controversial religions to *retain* members whom leadership fears are deviating or drifting away (Zablocki 1998: 218). Even Maria, who was the person closest to The Family's founder, saw the teen programs in this manner. When, for example, she addressed teens who had been through various programs, she stated, '[n]ow is your chance to *re-dedicate* your lives, to bring the best of your TTC [Teen Training Camp] training, the best of your Family training, the best of your Teen Combo training, the best of your Victor training, and the best of our new disciple babes training into our Homes!' (Maria 1991: 742). Similarly, Scientology's web page entry on the RPF refers to it as 'a second chance' for 'Sea Organization staff members who would otherwise be subject to dismissal for serious and/or continuous ecclesiastical violations' (Church of Scientology International 1996). Again, the RPF's purported purpose is to retain existing members.

This new focus on brainwashing as an effort to retain members adds a new dimension to existing brainwashing theory. According to Alan Scheflin and Edward Opton, Jr., all brainwashing programs strive to obtain *compliance* from inmates, but the goals of various programs have differed widely. Soviet brainwashing in the 1930s, for example, demanded *compliance and confession* from its victims, whom the state

used in show trials as they confessed to 'crimes' (Schefflin and Opton 1978: 88). By contrast, Chinese Communist brainwashing in the early 1950s demanded *compliance and ideological conversion* from inmates. The Chinese Communists expected their victims to adopt the teachings of Chairman Mao (88). Finally, the North Koreans modified both Soviet and Chinese brainwashing systems and developed their own goals, which demanded *compliance and collaboration* from captured Western soldiers (89). The brainwashing systems that I have discussed in both *The Family* and Scientology, however, demand(ed) from their inmates *compliance and re-conversion or membership retention*.

Other high-demand ideologies containing strong religious overtones also may have implemented brainwashing programs in efforts at member retention in ways that resemble the RPF and Victor programs. Synanon, for example, in its third phase, used its 'Boot Camp' program⁷: 'not only to train newcomers but also to retrain old-timers, senior squares [i.e., persons who joined without drug histories], and even some [program] graduates, and to inculcate them with new soldierly devotion' (Gerstel 1982: 160).

Worth noting in this passage is mention that Synanon sent new members to Boot Camp, which may represent an exception to the general sociological conclusion that new religions do not use brainwashing as a recruitment device. In any case, former member David Gerstel highlighted the Boot Camp indoctrination for problem youths, which sounds a great deal like *The Family's* Victor program: '[Boot Camp] was being used, also, as a model for a new branch of the Synanon children's school. A dozen of the community's most recalcitrant adolescent boys had been placed in a "Punk Squad." For several months they were put through a regimen of marching, calisthenics, running, and hard physical work. They were made to address all adults as "Sir" or "Ma'am." They stood at rigid attention for inspection by their squad leaders. And they were subjected to physical punishment' (Gerstel 1982: 160). Gerstel added, '[i]n due course the Punk Squad was enlarged so that it served not only as a reform program for the most difficult kids, but [also] as "obedience training" for a wide range of Synanon children' (161). Indeed, the parallels with the Victor programs for Family youth around the world seem striking.

Other groups, about which we know comparatively little, may have placed children in what amount to brainwashing programs. For example, the 44-page indictment on involuntary servitude charges brought by the United States federal government against former leaders of the

Ecclesia Athletic Ass[ociatio]n provides glimpses into what may have been a brainwashing program. The religious-organization-turned-athletic-commune in Oregon allegedly had children who:

'were compelled to perform long hours of rigorous exercises and were drilled in how to present themselves to the public for marketing purposes,' the indictment stated.

The children who did not want to perform, who made mistakes and who did not fully comply with the defendants' orders were struck with long wooden paddles and whipped with razor straps, braided cords and rubber hoses ... and frequently were forced to watch other children being whipped and beaten,' the indictment continued.

Youngsters were isolated from their parents, other relatives and neighbors, forced to stand in line and remain silent for long periods, and subjected to 'inadequate diet and nutrition, inadequate school and systematic beatings,' to break their will, according to the indictment. (Timnick 1991: B6)

Children are easy brainwashing targets for totalistic groups, since they have fewer skills and resources that they can muster in opposition or in attempts at escape.

An even more dramatic brainwashing program seems to have operated within Colonia Dignidad [Dignity Colony] of German immigrants in Chile. An article in the respected British newspaper, the *Weekend Guardian*, identified the '[f]orced labour, religious obsession, homosexual abuse of children, drugs, electro-shock and experimental torture techniques for the Dina [i.e., the Chilean secret police] ...' that almost certainly went on in the colony (Coad 1991: 12). Finally, one must not forget Jonestown as a brainwashing site, where community members lived under the tight security of armed guards as they suffered public confessions and humiliation, running and hard-labour punishments, sensory deprivation, psychotherapeutic drugs, and occasional 'white night' suicide rehearsals (Hall 1987: 237-42, 245-6).

Returning, finally, to the brainwashing examples in Scientology and *The Family*, my discussion leaves unanswered the question about how 'effective' the RPF and the Teen and Victor programs were in forcing the retention of members. No figures about the RPF's 'success' come from Scientology, although the number of former members willing to speak about their RPF experiences suggests that the re-conversion and retention efforts do fail over the long run in a number of cases. From

The Family's perspective, a top leader lamented in 1991, 'many of these young people who left the Victor Program had a big problem when they went back home ... [T]hey fell back into their NWOs [i.e., 'need work-ons' or problems and doubts], backslid in their spiritual victories, and began to have some of the same serious problems that they'd had before, which of course was very disappointing and discouraging for them' (Maria 1991: 740). It well may be that this new goal of brainwashing people so that they remain members suffers the same basic shortcoming as did the Soviet and the Chinese efforts. In a phrase, '[t]he effectiveness of their techniques dissipates rapidly when the coercive environment is removed' (Schefflin and Opton 1978: 93). Upon leaving the Victor programs and the teen training facilities, youth in The Family may have had too many contacts with the outside world for the desired effects of the group's brainwashing efforts to last. By contrast, the relatively closed and totalitarian world of Scientology's Sea Org may be sufficiently self-contained that the effects on former RPFers from their organization's brainwashing efforts may last a considerable period of time.

Notes

1 The Family has a discussion about 'Offences Warranting Excommunication' in its members' 'charter of responsibilities and rights' (called *The Love Charter* [The Family 1995: 1]). 'Those who disobey them will be excommunicated from The Family fellowship and/or literature, according to the degree of disobedience, which will be determined by the Continental Office' (1995: 116). Among the offences that can lead to excommunication are '[t]he continual voicing of doubts, criticisms, or scepticism, in a destructive manner designed to foster strife or schism, of Dad, Maria, the Word or The Family' (120). The document added that if 'you continue airing matters which result in the spreading of doubts or bringing about contention or division, then this is unacceptable behaviour and will warrant excommunication' (120). Although honest but critical comments to an academic *may* be subject to interpretation, it seems probable that Family leadership would see them as grounds for dismissal.

Knowing that groups such as Scientology and The Family have such punishment policies against honest criticism by their own members, researchers must be highly critical of information that current members provide when leadership knows what they are doing. Likewise, researchers

should weigh carefully the ethics involved in interviewing people whose honest comments may elicit group punishment.

2 Current Scientologists, for example, are subject to being labelled 'suppressive persons' by their organization if they were to tell researchers negative things about the RPF or their experiences in it. Among many actions that the Scientology organization considers 'suppressive acts' are '[p]ublic statements against Scientology or Scientologists but not to Committees of Evidence duly convened' (Hubbard, assisted by LRH Technical Research and Compilations 1991: 875). (Committees of Evidence are internal Scientology courts that rule about people's deviations from Scientology 'tech' and assign penalties to the deviating members.) Another suppressive act involves 'pronouncing Scientologists guilty of the practice of standard Scientology' (875). A third suppressive act is '[w]riting anti-Scientology letters to the press or giving anti-Scientology or anti-Scientologist data to the press' (876). In general, '[o]utright or covert acts knowingly designed to impede or destroy Scientology or Scientologists is what is meant by acts suppressive of Scientology and Scientologists' (885). As a consequence of Committees of Evidence ruling that people committed these or other 'offences,' '[s]uppressive persons or groups relinquish their rights as Scientologists by their very actions and may not receive the benefits of the Codes of the Church' (874). Were Scientologists, therefore, to tell researchers *anything* that was critical of the RPF program and organizational leaders were to discover what had transpired, then the research process would have placed informants at unacceptable risk. Ethical considerations prohibit researchers from doing so to informants. Under the threat of punishment, therefore, current Scientology member informants (especially ones whom leadership know are speaking to researchers) are most likely to provide public relations material of questionable validity.

3 The nine-sentence statement says that the RPF is a 'second chance' for Sea Organization members ('who have signed a pledge of eternal service to Scientology and its goals') to get 'complete rehabilitation' rather than 'dismissal for serious and/or continuous ecclesiastical violations ...' It adds that RPFers 'both study and receive religious counselling on a daily basis to address areas of difficulty in their personal lives,' and they 'work eight hours per day as a team on tasks which improve the facilities of the Church by which they are employed ...' The work, which RPFers perform in teams, allegedly 'allows the individual to regain confidence in himself [*sic*] and the pride of accomplishment' [*sic*]. Apparently many of those members 'participating' in the RPF are experiencing 'personnel "burn out" ...' In contrast to portrayals by critics (whom the statement alleges 'cannot speak authentically

cally from personal experience') RPF graduates 'attest to its enormous personal benefit, and express their appreciation for being able to avail themselves of redemption as opposed to dismissal' (Church of Scientology International 1996). All aspects of this statement – the implicitly voluntary nature of the RPF, the supposedly religious counselling, the work days, the nature of Scientology's employment, and the expressions of appreciation – receive very different interpretations by a number of persons who in fact speak from personal experience but do so outside of the organization's immediate controls.

- 4 Researchers have known for nearly three decades that the text is fraudulent (Kominsky 1970), but they did not know the author. Researchers on Scientology, however, are definite: '[t]he *Brainwashing Manual* is one of Scientology's most revealing [d]ocuments. I believe that this book was secretly authored by L. Ron Hubbard in 1955 and that he incorporated its methods into his organization in the mid 1960s and beyond' (Corydon 1996: 107). Hubbard's (now deceased) son, Ron, Jr., specified that his father was the sole author, and he identified two women (one of whom was his wife) who typed the manuscript from Hubbard's dictation. Moreover, former member John Sanborne indicated that he had given Hubbard the idea to write it (108). However, Ron Jr.'s statement about his father's authorship of the forged brainwashing manual first appeared in a book-length study of Scientology, on which he had been working as co-author until he made a cash settlement with Scientology 'to cease any assistance on the book and remove his name from it' (which the publisher refused to do [Corydon and Hubbard, Jr. 1987: 12]). Beyond these statements by people who worked closely with Hubbard in the 1950s, an analysis of the peculiar language of the brainwashing text (including such odd phrases as 'pain-drug-hypnotism') strongly indicates Hubbard's hand (compare Hubbard [probable author] 1955: 37, 39, with Hubbard 1975: 296). Mostly revealingly, different editions of the manual published by the Scientology organization contained mention of either Dianetics or the Church of Scientology in the actual text as targets for Communist, psycho-political attack (Hubbard [probable author] n.d.: 49; Hubbard [probable author] 1955: 49). Proof that Scientology distributed the brainwashing manual appears in the Church of Scientology of California 1978: 301. I am working with two original copies, as well as a later reprint by a non-Scientology organization.
- 5 Hana Whitfield indicated that, in 1978, she saw Lyn Froyland 'chained to a pipe down there [in the Fort Harrison basement] for weeks, under guard' (Whitfield 1994: 42). Dennis Erlich referred to the same person (WMNF 1996: 5), although with a different spelling of her last name. Tonya Burden

was in the RPF sometime between August and around November 1977 (Burden 1980: 9, 10; see Armstrong 1982: 3). Nefertiti did not give the dates in which she was in the RPF, but she wrote her account in 1997, in which she referred to her escape ten years earlier (i.e., 1987 [Nefertiti 1997: 12]).

6 By the mid-1990s, normal Sea Org pay was around \$50 a week for a minimum of about 50 hours or more of work, plus room and board (Harrington 1997a; 1997b). Excluding the value of the room and board, this amount comes to around \$1.00 per hour.

- 7 Gerstel described the origins of Synanon's boot camp as follows:

Under [founder Charles] Dederich's guidance, the [newcomer] department evolved through several forms [in the early 1970s] until an experimental 'Synanon Boot Camp' was established at the Ranch. A select group of young men and women were put into a strict regime of exercise, physical work, and study ... They answered smartly to roll call, formed closed order ranks, and marched up the road toward the pond, their young voices echoing boisterously across the meadow as they shouted cadence. When they came near the pond, they broke into a jog and disappeared into the hills. After their morning run, they worked menial chores in the gardens or shops ... Toward evening they gathered on circles of hay bales in the meadows and Gamed [i.e., participated in Synanon's process of intensive verbal confrontation, challenge, and defense].

The Boot Camp seemed to have more power to hold new people than any previous form of the newcomer department. (Gerstel 1982: 139–40)

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