

# **Brainwashing and Re-Indoctrination Programs in the Children of God/The Family**

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## **Abstract**

Most contemporary debates about the applicability of "brainwashing" as a social scientific concept involve arguments over what (if any) utility it has when discussing conversion to some high-demand, alternative religions. Some sociologists of religion use the term "brainwashing" to apply to extreme social influences. Others restrict use of the term to situations involving forcible confinement and physical coercion, presumably amidst a group-indoctrination process. Since few such conversion situations exist, these sociologists avoid utilizing brainwashing within social scientific discourse. What they have overlooked, however, is the conceptual utility of the brainwashing concept, even with their restrictive definition, for analyzing some groups' efforts at retaining or reconverting members. This study examines an example of a brainwashing program—the camps and programs that the Children of God\The Family developed for its teen members. These programs included intense re-education programs in the context of physical, psychological, and socio-emotional punishments, often in confined or guarded camps. As a social scientific concept, "brainwashing" has explanatory usefulness for understanding The Family's harsh efforts to increase the intensity of teens' commitment to the organization and to foster compliance to leadership.

Central to the lives of preteen and teenage members of The Family (formerly the Children of God [COG]) in the late 1980s was their

involvement in organizationally run teen training and re-indoctrination camps and programs in various parts of the world. Hundreds of young people passed through programs that operated in Brazil, Denmark, England, Italy, Japan, Macao, Mexico, Norway, the Philippines, Scotland, Switzerland, Thailand, South America, and probably other locations (for a partial list, see Ward, 1995: 135, 167). Some of these young people remained in these programs for years. It is not possible either to establish exact numbers of young people who went through them or to know what was the average length of time that they stayed in them. Likewise, thus far it has proven impossible to obtain detailed information about the imposition of these programs on adults (see COUNTERCOG, n.d.). Nevertheless, we are able to identify many of the activities that routinely occurred as part of the re-indoctrination processes that young detainees experienced in different programs around the world.

COG leadership started these programs and camps in an attempt to heighten commitment to founder, David Berg, and his directives among the children of the initial converts (often called 'the second generation'). By operating these programs, The Family was attempting to address the classic problem that confronts sects, which involves the cultivation of commitment and devotion among a second generation born to parents who are members already. By the early 1980s it seems that a number of teens in The Family were having grave doubts about following in their parents' footsteps, even as others considered themselves committed adherents to Berg's instructions. Teen camps and programs, therefore, were attempts to instill a deep commitment among young people whose faith may have been wavering, or who had not made intense emotional investments to the ideology. On these grounds alone, the stories of people who went through these camps and related programs should interest many scholars.

Of greater interest to scholars, however, is that these teen training programs fit the most restrictive definition of brainwashing facilities. That is to say, these programs variously confined (and at times incarcerated) their young participants as they physically maltreated them, which are the two necessary conditions that some sociologists require for labeling and analyzing a thought reform program as "brainwashing" (Anthony, 1990: 304-305). Indeed, we even could narrow further these already restrictive requirements for brainwashing by saying they must take place amidst a program of intense ideological training consisting of indoctrination classes, social

isolation, and forced confessions, often combined with extremely hard physical labor and social humiliation. Because The Family's so-called teen "education" programs of the late 1980s meet this most narrowly restrictive sociological definition of brainwashing, scholars (especially sociologists of religion) will need to reexamine a term that has been out of favor among them for over a decade and a half.

Our purpose here is not to argue over the long-term effectiveness of brainwashing. Instead, we simply intend to support our claim that The Family instituted programs that meet the most demanding social scientific definition of brainwashing—a definition even stricter than one given in a Family publication that "'brainwashing' implies the use of force, coercion, duress and imprisonment" (World Services, 1993: 20). We are fully prepared to consider the possibility that brainwashing programs can operate outside of settings that forcibly confine and physically maltreat (presumably as they attempt to re-educate). We do not explore, however, this possibility within the study at hand.

Not only does this study call for a reexamination of the brainwashing concept, but also it relies upon a research source—former members—that many sociologists of religion have neglected for a number of years (see Richardson 1994: 34-39). Simple triangulation, involving the collection of multiple accounts of the programs by different people, in combination with organizational publications, help ensure the basic accuracy of former members' information (see Richardson, 1994: 37).

On the topic, therefore, of teen training programs, former members who assisted us are far more reliable than current Family members. Current members appear to have become so conscious of the benefits accruing from favorable public relations from academics that they may not give accurate descriptions of life in these programs and camps (Kent and Krebs, 1998a: 45-46; 1998b: 37-38; 1999: 21-22). Moreover, this particular group has a long-standing policy that justifies deception when protecting its collective interests (Berg, 1979), so members' comments about a controversial subject such as these teen re-education programs are likely to be highly problematic. By contrast, former members who wish to remain anonymous have a great investment in protecting their identities, so if anything they are more likely to understate, rather than overstate, their experiences.

The study's senior author conducted the interviews described in this paper between 1992 and 1998. These interviews build upon and grow out of his ongoing research about so-called "cults and new religions" that have affected Canada and Canadians. The interviews ranged in duration from less than forty-five minutes to several hours. They involved open-ended questions that allowed people to tell their own stories in their own words. Many of the people whom the senior author interviewed felt strongly about what they considered to have been extreme physical, emotional, and sexual abuses that they experienced in these programs, and they were pleased that an academic provided them an opportunity to speak. Moreover, the senior author did all but one of the interviews over the telephone, which prevented interview subjects from being influenced by unintentional body cues.

### **The Teen Training Programs and Victor Camps in Academic Studies of The Family**

Only one of the existing academic discussions of The Family has anything beyond a brief mention of these camps and programs (see Chancellor, 2000: 234-241). Indeed, it is impossible to know what these programs were like from information gleaned from most of the standard (and even controversial) studies on the organization. The earliest scholarly discussion appears to be David E. Van Zandt's *Living with the Children of God*. Writing during a period (January 1991) when at least some of these camps probably still operated, Van Zandt stated that "[a]t the age of eleven or twelve, a member is sent to one of the TTCs [Teen Training Camps] for leadership training. In many cases, those who attend the TTCs do not return to their parents, but are sent directly to new [Family] Homes to begin their adult proselytizing efforts for the Family" (Van Zandt, 1991: 171-172). Van Zandt did not indicate that young people above the age of twelve also entered variations of TTC programs.

Van Zandt suggested that the teen camps were designed to protect teens from sexual pressures:

As with adult sexual sharing, there are reports that some leaders set up "sharing nights" for children in which they were paired off to make love before falling asleep. Moreover, there were many cases in which older males were pressuring young girls to share sexually.

This activity apparently got out of hand by 1984, and the group established "Teen Training Camp[s]" (TTC) in 1985 and 1986 at which pre-and young teens were removed from these sexual pressures and were educated (Van Zandt, 1991: 171).

Our ex-member sources, however, indicate that pre-teen sexual sharing took place for a brief period at one of the camps, and that teen sex flourished at another (Hosea's Macao camp). Moreover, adult sexual exploitation of young girls almost certainly continued at Macao's Detention Teen program, which we will discuss later on.

Other references to The Family's teen camps and programs in academic literature appear in the controversial study of The Family edited by James R. Lewis and Gordon Melton (1994; see Balch, 1996). One article, written by a psychologist and a sociologist who studied young people in The Family, mentioned the problem caused by individualistic expressions in the organization. It continued by stating:

[A]n initial approach to this problem was the establishment of special youth centers in certain parts of the world (e.g., Japan, Mexico, and Brazil) where young people who had been identified as "problems" could be sent for an intensive period of social and spiritual "retraining and strengthening" under the direction of adult teacher-supervisors.... These centers were called "Victor" programs, signifying the hope that those who entered the program would be able to gain a "victory" over personal problems and return to their homes in a "yielded" state, with heightened motivation to make more positive contributions (Shepherd and Lilliston, 1994: 63).

Readers can infer from these comments that one purpose of the Victor program was to train teens to subjugate their individuality to the collective will (presumably what the researchers meant by "a 'yielded' state"), but they give no details about how this subjugation occurred. Gordon Melton's brief mention of these camps and the Victor program only said that "the attendees and the leaders engaged in a rather

frank discussion on sexual issues" (Melton, 1994: 90), without mentioning their more central purpose of individual teen subjugation.

Hints about the intensity of the techniques that many teens experienced in the Victor program appear in a brief section written by David Millikan (1994: 229). Millikan indicated:

[t]he problems of discipline within The Family of young people, led to the establishment of Victor Camps. In a limited number of locations in Maca[o], the Philippines, Norway and elsewhere, problem adolescents were separated from regular Family activities. They were submitted to a strict discipline of hard work, long hours of "Word" study [i.e., David Berg's writings], and for the recalcitrant, extended periods of isolation. The last of the "Victor" camps was closed in England in 1992. They have been the attention of close examinations, in particular, of a wardship court case in London. Some of the accusations of excessive discipline and physical beatings have been admitted to be true. These accusations have been brought by ex-members, including Berg's granddaughter Mene [Merry] Berg, who described a regime of discipline which went beyond the bounds of what could be regarded as acceptable (Millikan, 1994: 229).

Millikan knew about the harsh and often physically abusive conditions of the Victor program, but he did not give details about it. Nor did he, or other researchers, use the term, "brainwashing," to describe what the young people went through, even though the long hours of study, the physical beatings, the "excessive discipline," and the social isolation strongly suggest that the term would have been appropriate.

The British wardship case that Millikan mentioned involved a grandmother attempting to obtain custody of her grandson because her daughter (the child's mother and caregiver) was in The Family. The written judgment by The Right Honourable Lord Justice Alan Ward in the High Court of Justice, Family Division (London, England) about the case (which allowed the mother to maintain custody as long as she followed strict guidelines) spent nearly eight pages discussing Merry Berg's plight (including her Teen Detention Camp experience in Macao). He concluded, "[f]or The Family to gain respectability which

they [sic] now appear to seek, they must acknowledge that what David Berg did to his granddaughter was wrong, not just a mistake, but inexcusably wrong. They must atone for their treatment of her which I find to have been barbaric and cruel" (Ward, 1995: 133, see 125-133).

As clarification to The Family's "disciples" and "friends" about its written response to Justice Ward's queries about reform within the group, Family leader Maria specifically acknowledged that abuses against teens had taken place, and she apologized for them:

Also, we apologize to any of you young people who may have been harshly and unlovingly disciplined in the past. We have heard a number of testimonies of past excessive corporal punishment, prolonged "silence restriction" and/or isolation, as well as other means of discipline which some of you experienced, and we want to say that it pains us to hear such things. It was wrong, and we are truly sorry that any of you received such treatment (Maria, 1995: 6-7).

In essence, because of the trial, the accounts of abuse within many Teen Training Camps had received extensive exposure in open court, and Family leadership had (at the very least) to acknowledge and apologize for what had occurred.

The most recent academic book on The Family quotes two young adults who had been through the beatings, humiliation, silence restrictions, and hard physical labor of the Teen Training Camps, and one older adult who had imposed these regimes on the teens (Chancellor, 2000: 237-241). This study also mentioned, "[i]n the early stages of the Teen Training Camps, several teenage girls related experiences of inappropriate and uninvited sexual contact with adult males," (Chancellor, 2000: 20). In response to these experiences (which probably took place in early-to-mid 1986), Maria instructed the person responsible for the group's child care literature to publish an official internal memorandum stating, "we do not agree to adults having sexual contact with children" (quoted in Chancellor, 2000: 20). Despite having identified these abuses, the author diminishes the impact that they likely had on the youth who were victimized by concluding, "Family leadership and the individuals who

orchestrated the whole TTC affair seem genuinely repentant (Chancellor, 2000: 240).

### **Background to the Teen Training Camps and Victor Program**

Some information exists about why Family leadership initiated both the Teen Training Camps and the Victor program, and undoubtedly several factors facilitated their appearance. By the mid-to-late-1980s, the group had a cohort of children in or approaching their teenage years, and it seems likely (even from the name of the Victor program) that many teens lacked the enthusiasm of their parents. A Family publication from the mid-1980s, for example, indicated:

Many of the couples who had married during the early years of the Children of God era had adolescent children and, as is natural at that age, those young teenagers were encountering serious questions about life and the world around them as they searched for their identities and that, of course, held new challenges for Family parents (quoted in Ward, 1995: 135).

This statement portrayed the problem of the second generation as a "natural" process related to age, and it specifically avoided identifying the "serious questions about life" that the teens were having. Apparently, however, the Mexican Teen Training Camp of 1986 contained a large number of disillusioned teens (Ward, 1995: 135).

Additional insight about the crisis of the second generation came from information that one of the Victor program's designers provided to Lord Justice Ward:

By 1988 there was so much concern about the difficulties in various field homes being experienced with the Jett [Junior End-Time Teens] age (11 to 13 years), that a council of people was called. It had become apparent that some of the teenagers did not have the same commitment to the way of life of The Family as their parents (it [sic] wasn't so much that they didn't have the same beliefs as their parents, they probably did, but they didn't share the same enthusiasm and commitment and many of them [were] bored and felt there was no challenge in their



life [sic] and nothing to do.) We felt that the solution lay in providing for the teenagers the sense of enthusiasm that we had when we first joined the Children of God in the early '70s to bring [to] them a sense of excitement and adventure and to enlarge their vision and the goals of what it means to be in [T]he [F]amily, and that is basically what we try to do with the Victor programme (quoted in Ward, 1995: 163).

While this Family member gave a positive interpretation of her organization's creation of the Victor program, a Family publication suggested that, in some cases, the resistance of the young to the lifestyles of their parents had become pronounced. Indeed, a 1991 Family publication by Maria (entitled "Jett/Teen Discipleship Revolution Needed Now") concluded, "we have a big worldwide emergency with all our Jetts..." (Quoted in Ward, 1995: 168).

Hints at the depth of this resistance appeared in a 1990 Family publication, which indicated that "a number of teens" required special supervision. One can suppose that Family leadership believed these young people were on paths leading out of the organization, so their attitudes, views, and behaviors were causing problems for other teens (and possibly for their parents or guardians). A Family document put it this way:

Recently, different teens were brought in from many different field Homes to the Heavenly City School [in Japan] to be part of the "Teen Ministry Training 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 center where their Shepherds were able to zero in on their needs (Family Services, 1990: 11).

While these comments referred specifically to arrangements for teens in the Japanese facility, they basically described (from The Family's

perspective) the development of all the Victor programs worldwide. Disagreement exists, however, over how long they operated, with a British judge indicating that they ran from about 1989 to their closure approximately eighteen months later in 1990 (Ward, 1995: 163) and an academic indicating that the last one shut down in 1992 (Millikan, 1994: 229). The most recent book on *The Family* locates the establishment of the Mexican Teen Training Camp in June and July, 1986, which stimulated the creation of others in South America and Asia (Chancellor, 2000: 20). Van Zandt's earlier study dates the Teen Training Camps from around 1985 and 1986 (Van Zandt, 1991: 171). One of our informants spoke about entering (what she called) a Teen Combo in Mexico in 1991 or 1992 that strongly resembled the Teen Training Program (Kent Interview with Betty, 1996: 42-50).

Certainly the crisis of faith experienced by David Berg's granddaughter, Merry Berg, had shown Family leadership that teens might need "retraining & rewiring" because they cultivated ideas that challenged the organization's ideological claims. Sara, who was the nanny in the David Berg household, wrote about "how unbelievably good Mene [Merry's Family name] was in her overall behaviour, attitudes, and even spirit. There is no more extreme example we could use as an almost, nearly 'perfect' child" (Sara in [Berg], 1987: 460). Nevertheless, David Berg and his immediate leaders put the fourteen-year-old through at least five exorcisms and frequent beatings because (so they charged) she was filled with pride, making "cruel criticisms of Grandpa & Mama" (i.e., David Berg and his long-time mistress, Maria [Karen Zerby]), having violent dreams about her grandfather (see Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992a: 67), and having serious doubts about his behavior and teachings (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992a: 71; [Berg], 1987: 444-446; Ward, 1995: 131).

During an interview, Merry described a growing disillusionment with her grandfather because of the behavior she witnessed while living in various households with him for several years. As she reflected back on this period, she noted, "it was disappointing for me to come to his house and see what he was really like" (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992a: 59). Little doubt exists, for example, that David Berg sexually assaulted her countless times (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992a: 31-34; Ward, 1995: 116; see Kent, 1994a: 157-159; Kent Interview with Stephanie, 1997: 11, 12-13), and Merry witnessed the debilitating effects on his mind and body from her grandfather's self-admitted alcoholism (Berg, 1989: 3; see Hill, 1981: 44-48, 90;

Kent Interview with Stephanie, 1997: 12-13; Van Zandt, 1991: 169 n.13). As Merry exclaimed, "[h]ere Mo was, you know, guzzling down God knows how much sherry every night..." (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992a: 61, see 60; see Ward, 1995: 131). In addition, Merry also saw "him contradicting himself and his letters all the time" (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992a: 61; see Kent, 1994b: 40-41).

### **The Detention Teen Program in Macao**

Disregarding the factual basis for Merry's doubts, Berg and his inner cadre subjected her to severe physical maltreatment—Lord Justice Ward called her ordeal "a form of torture" (Ward, 1995: 152, see 126-133)—that ultimately failed to "adjust" her thinking about her grandfather. In frustration and anger, they finally sent her to COG property in Macao during April 1987, which her uncle, Hosea (David Berg's son) ran (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992a: 78; cf. Ward, 1995: 125, who gives her departure to Macao as August 1987). Within weeks of her arrival, Family leaders sent Hosea instructions that would become central restrictions against supposedly rebellious teens. Merry recalled these instructions: "'Merry needs to be on silence restriction....[W]henver she walks from place to place, she needs to have an adult with her'" because (as she remembered her uncle telling her) "'you are untrustworthy right now'" (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992a: 78). In the Victor programs that soon developed, silence restriction (which prohibited a person from conversing with others) and close adult monitoring became standard practices.

For the next three-and-a-half years, Merry remained at this facility, which became known as a Detention Teen Camp by the beginning of 1988 (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992a: 83) but which The Family also called "a camp for Determined Teens" (Ward, 1995: 152). Soon other teens began arriving, most of whose parents were members of The Family's elite World Service (Ed Priebe, 1993: 23; Kent Interview with Lorna, 1996: 18; see Kent Interview with Frost, 1995: 12). (At some point Hosea transferred out of his oversight position of the Detention Teen program and led a Victor program on the same Macao property.) Merry estimated that about fifteen teens spent time in the detention camp during her stay there, with their periods of servitude varying from "a couple of months" to "two years" (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992b: 5).

Merry endured many ordeals in the camp, which were the likely causes of her mental breakdown (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992a: 84; 1992b: 17-19; see Ward, 1995: 115, 130-133). These ordeals must have been what David Millikan had in mind when he acknowledged that the "regime of discipline" that she underwent "went beyond the bounds of what could be regarded as acceptable" (Millikan, 1994: 229). Merry stated that she was locked in a room for six months, and during some of that time had to relieve herself in a bucket filled with disinfectant (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992a: 80). Somewhat later, she and other teens were placed on hard labor (beginning at 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning), seven days a week, while they were on silence restriction (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992a: 81; Kent Interview with Lorna, 1996: 19). She recalled one lunch break by which time she and the others already had worked nine hours (Kent Interview with Berg, 1992a: 82). Chores included "busting up cement and old sidewalks," "laying [sic: pouring] cement; cutting grass (mainly with sickles) or gathering it up...with a grass cutter for the horses; doing the farm chores;" manual labor on construction projects; transporting scrap metal, bricks and dirt; building septic tanks; and "a lot of painting" (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992b: 8; see Kent Interview with Frost, 1995: 11, 34-36; Kent Interview with Lorna, 1996: 19; Kent Interview with Stephanie, 1997: 7 [for similar work regimes in Brazil]; Kent Interview with Betty, 1996: 46 [for digging up rocks in Mexico]). Adults constantly watched them "every second" (Kent Interview with Lorna, 1996: 18; Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992b: 11).

Punishments were harsh, and they certainly meet the social scientific definition of "physical maltreatment" that some say must exist in a brainwashing setting. Adult-inflicted physical maltreatment included beatings with a wooden paddle "quite, quite hard" (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992b: 6). Indeed, beatings with paddles or boards are ubiquitous in the accounts from the two Macao programs, the Philippines (Kent Interview with Donovan, 1995: 13-15;), and Japan (Kent Interview with Stephanie, 1997: 2). Immediately prior to her breakdown, Merry "started trying to be honest" by telling her adult female leader about her doubts and negative thoughts, and the adult "decided [that] she'd slap me every time I confessed a critical thought, and I agreed with her because I wanted to get rid of them" (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992b: 17; see 3). Moreover, after a new set of leaders replaced her uncle in the teen detention program, Merry again claimed that she suffered repeated sexual assaults by an adult (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992b: 83). Her accounts of

sexual assault resemble others that allegedly occurred in another physically abusive teen detention program, called the Rotten Apple Camp, which operated in Matsumoto, Japan (Auty, 1999).

Interspersed with the heavy workload and physical maltreatment were classes and instructions in David Berg's writings. Called "Word classes" and "devotions," they involved reading or listening to Bible verses or excerpts from his publications, which leaders often then applied to the teens (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992b: 3; see Kent Interview with Lorna, 1996: 18; Kent Interview with Marleana, 1995: 11 [for Japan]). Leaders were able to apply verses and writings to teens partly because teens had to compose daily "Open Heart Reports," in which they expressed their "confessions of doubts and criticisms." These reports included the teens' "thoughts of disloyalty or... criticism of leadership—especially any kind of leaders... who were in charge of us or especially Mo or Maria" (Kent Interview with Merry Berg, 1992b: 4; see Kent Interview with Betty, 1996: 65 [for their use in Mexico]). Indeed, high-ranking staff in the Filipino Jumbo realized that these Open Heart Reports were "'a very good way for the leadership to stay intimately involved with the different situations and personnel in the camp'" (quoted in Ward, 1995: 154).

In summary, Merry Berg's account of Macao's Detention Teen program, which receives corroboration from another former member, far exceeds the most restrictive social scientific requirements of a brainwashing program. Incarceration and physical maltreatment occurred in the context of social isolation, demanding physical labor, ideological training, and forced confessions. While the Rotten Apples teen program in Japan may have rivaled the Macao program for the brutality and sexual assaults that the teens appear to have experienced (see Kent Interview with Ester, 1998: 16-30), all of the Victor programs about which we have information resembled the Detention Teen program to lesser degrees.

### **The Victor Program in Macao**

Operating on a different part of the Macao property was a Victor program for teens whom leadership considered to be less troubled or troubling. Most often the two programs worked separately, but occasionally inmates had contact (even at occasional dances). Often inmates could see people working in the other program (Kent Interview with Frost, 1995: 9-11). Allegedly these teens in the Victor program also suffered (what one former inmate called) "pants down

spanking[s]" in front of everyone (Kent Interview with Frost, 1995: 42; see Kent Interview with Lorna, 1996: 24). Leaders used a paddle that one witness described as "a big, thick, piece of wood" (Kent Interview with Lorna, 1996: 24) and another described as "a big, thick wood pole" that was "about four feet long" (Kent Interview with Frost, 1995: 44; see Kent Interview with Stephanie, 1997: 4 for a description of the paddle in Japan). One young man who had received many of these beatings claimed that leaders videotaped some of the public beatings (Kent Interview with Frost, 1995: 43). As in the Detention Teen program, the inmates had classes on Bible scripture and Berg's writings (see Kent Interview with Frost, 1995: 29), and leaders punished some teens by putting them on silence restriction (Kent Interview with Frost, 1995: 40; see Kent Interview with Marleana, 1995: 15 [for Japan]; Ward, 1995: 154-155).

The sexual ethic among teen inmates in Macao differed from that in other programs. When Danny Frost [a pseudonym] arrived at the Macao Victor program in the spring of 1988, Family leadership apparently was establishing the sexual policies for the young inmates (cf. Lorna, 1996: 12 for an earlier date). The policies that they developed apparently included adult leaders "encouraging all the teens to have as many dates as they could with other teens...." These dates involved "any two people who wanted to [could] get together and have sex in a room," which adults made available for this purpose (Kent Interview with Frost, 1995: 4; see Kent Interview with Donovan, 1995: 28; Kent Interview with Lorna, 1996: 13-14). Within five months, however, the policy apparently changed to prohibiting teens from having sex until the males were sixteen and the females were fifteen years and three months old (so that they would be sixteen if sex were to have led to pregnancy and birth [Kent Interview with Frost, 1995: 58; Kent Interview with Lorna, 1996: 15; Ward, 1995: 74]).

### **The Victor Program at the "Jumbo" in the Philippines and Elsewhere**

The Family's largest teen Victor program seems to have been in a Filipino complex called "the Jumbo" (so named because of its size). Surrounded by walls at least ten to fifteen feet high, the Jumbo had between two hundred and three hundred and fifty people living there from early 1988 to early 1989 (Kent Interview with Donovan, 1995: 1-2; see Kent Interview with Hendricks, 1995: 18). At night armed guards patrolled the wall (Kent Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 59; see

Kent Interview with Hendricks, 1995: 19, 30), ostensibly to keep out burglars, but their presence also ensured that no one tried to escape. All aspects of the teens' lives were controlled, with leaders requiring (according to one source) that they record the nature of their bowel movements ("hard, runny, or soft" [Kent Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 64]) and restrict themselves to using only three sheets of toilet paper (Kent Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 66).

As at other facilities, the Jumbo's inmates operated under a strict demerit system (Ward, 1995: 153). Early in the program, teen inmates who received three demerits in a day had to do the diaper wash-up in the nursery, which consisted of cleaning "nine garbage cans full of dirty diapers" (Kent Interview with Donovan, 1995: 7, 10). Eventually the adult leader in charge of discipline changed the punishment to a calisthenics program, involving "the usual sit-ups, jumping jacks..., vigorous running, running up and down stairs, push-ups, and star jumps" (Kent Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 100-103; Kent Interview with Donovan, 1995: 10, 12). Most difficult of the calisthenics seems to have been the "duck walk," or "squat walk," where the teens "had to squat and walk around the compound" (Kent Interview with Donovan, 1995: 11; Kent Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 101; Ward, 1995: 185 [for its imposition on teens in the Victor program in Wantage, England in 1989]). Former member Ernest Donovan [a pseudonym] remembers "at least one time one of the boys becoming extremely pale, and passing out while doing calisthenics" because "when you were tired you couldn't stop—you were forced to keep going" (Kent Interview with Donovan, 1995: 10).

The demerit system often led to teens being placed on silence restriction or being "paddled." (One informant, for example, stated that a leader paddled her after she wrote a note indicating that she wanted to leave the Jumbo and go live with her grandparents who were not Family members [Kent Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 92]). Some of the punishments that adult leaders inflicted on the young people in their care were both unique and especially harsh (or as Lord Justice Ward concluded, were "excessively and at times brutally applied" [Ward, 1995: 192]).

"Paddling," or beating disobedient teens with boards, was one of the common features of these programs around the world, but one particularly severe and degrading beating incident in the Jumbo is especially well documented. The senior author spoke with: the teen (now young adult) who received the beating; an unfortunate young

man who was sitting too close in the front row and who got hit accidentally by the paddle as the leader swung it; a teenaged girl (now young woman) who was in the audience; and a staff worker who happened to pass in the hallway as the beating was taking place.

The person who received this well documented beating was Sam Hendricks, who at the time was thirteen years old. The person who inflicted it, according to our sources, was a Family leader (for whom we use the pseudonym, Mickey), who currently contributes to the group's public relations efforts towards scholars and the United States Congress (Bainbridge, 1997: 228).

Hendricks had been an irritant to leaders for some time. Consequently, in the period prior to the beating, Hendricks recounted that Mickey sent him and some other boys into a three day isolation program that involved fasting and reading Berg's writings all day. When the others returned to the main program, leaders prohibited Hendricks from returning with them, keeping him isolated from the others for about a month and a half of additional study and alleged frequent beatings with a belt (Kent Interview with Hendricks, 1995: 20). Still not satisfied with his progress or his attitude, leaders held a two-hour prayer session and exorcism over him (Kent Interview with Hendricks, 1995: 22). Afterwards he returned to the regular teen program, but soon got into trouble for using someone else's earplugs while swimming. Leadership allegedly sent him back to solitary confinement for three months, during which time the leaders had him read a considerable amount of organizational literature and for one week restricted his food to bread, soup, and water (see Ward, 1995: 191 for similar procedures in Rugby, England). Every night he wrote a report about his supposed "victories" that resulted from his readings, but apparently leaders did not believe him. The spankings continued (Kent Interview with Hendricks, 1995: 23).

Eventually Mickey brought Sam into an assembly consisting of all of the other teens—possibly a hundred or so peers—wearing a cloth mask over his mouth and a sign around his neck about being on silence restriction (see Ward, 1995: 189, for similar signs around teens' necks in Rugby, England). Mickey publicly criticized him, then told him to pull down his pants and bend over. Mickey then pulled out a paddle that had holes drilled in it to lessen air resistance (see also Kent Interview with Stephanie 1997: 2, for a similar board in Japan). In Sam's own words:



and I bent over and he smacked me with this thing in the butt, and I remember it was like my entire body just absolutely exploded with, like, fire. [It] just felt like so intense pressure and like heat and everything, you know, it's just unbelievable. And the second time, it wasn't hot any more, it just hurt so badly and it knocked me forward, like, three feet. I remember, like, falling forward. He told me to stand still. And I bent over, and this went on for probably five minutes, maybe, maybe longer. He hit me more than twenty, twenty-five times easily with the breadboard, weighing probably five pounds, and this time... I'd just turned thirteen.... And so he's sitting there and he's spanking the crap out of me.... He spanked me so hard that I had bruises on my butt and legs that were so hard they started to thicken up...and it bruised and it thickened. It was like really thick and hard, and I remember I'd have to sleep on my stomach...and any time I'd touch my butt to anything it stung. I couldn't sit down during the day 'cause it hurt so bad. I could barely move my left leg, because, like, the bruises were so tight it, like, hurt. I felt like I was gonna rip my skin or something. And I went back to solitary confinement... (Kent Interview with Hendricks, 1995: 24-25).

Soon afterward he was sent back to the United States.

Other people spoke about this beating. Ernest Donovan, for example, was in the audience, and he remembered Mickey's talk about Sam's "problems, his foolishness, and talking back, and disobedience" (Kent Interview with Donovan, 1995: 15). Although he only remembered Sam being hit about four times, the beating was vivid for him because "I was inadvertently hit on the back-stroke... [and] it left a bump on my head, you know" (Kent Interview with Donovan, 1995: 16). He described what he remembered happening during the beating itself:

I believe after the first two [hits, Sam] was begging for mercy, in front of a group...which must have been totally embarrassing to him. He was begging for mercy. "Please don't hit me again," to which [Mickey] callously said, "Bend over, and take another one."

And then [he] hit him again (Kent Interview with Donovan, 1995: 16).

Cheryl, who also was in the audience, also remembered that Sam was hit only four or five times (Kent Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 93), but did say that "Sam was beaten quite hard with this paddle" (Kent Interview with Cheryl, 1996: 94).

Cheryl's description of the beating itself is consistent with the other accounts. Sam had to:

hold a chair and put his hands on a chair, turn around, and was beaten. And he tried to hold out a bit, and he eventually just broke down and started crying and begging for mercy. "No, please stop!" And he just-[Mickey] just kept beating away. And I was really shocked (Kent Interview with Cheryl, 1995: 95).

A statement that I obtained from Amalia Priebe, who was working in the Jumbo at the time, reinforces the essential accuracy of the beating:

[A]s I was walking down the hallway (in a round-shaped building on the Jumbo complex) I heard some 'whacking' sounds off to my left and [Mickey's] voice. I looked into an open room and this is what I witnessed:

[Mickey] had made Sam turn around and bend over. [Mickey] was there with two adult cult members... [who] had come all the way from Brazil to learn the proper way to "deal with" the teens, and this was a learning session.

Another male cult member (whose name I don't recall) was there. A teen shepherdess, an American woman... (with glasses and curly hair) was also present.

As [Mickey] was beating Sam, he was telling him words to this effect, "This will straighten you out, so you'll learn to obey. And I'm showing this to your

room shepherds so they'll know how to deal with you when you're stubborn, and you don't submit and obey...." These kind of beatings were common (A. Priebe, 1995: 5).

In summary, details differ about the number of people in the audience and how many times Mickey beat Hendricks. Moreover, only Amalia Priebe reported that Brazilian Family leaders were present at this supposed "learning session." No doubt exists, however, that Mickey beat a thirteen year old severely in a public event. It goes without saying that this incident is a dramatic example of physical maltreatment in the context of large re-indoctrination program involving incarceration and intense ideological study.

Similar beatings also happened elsewhere. Lord Justice Ward reported, for example, that, in a Victor program in Rugby, England, Family leader Mary Malaysia "beat [MS] so hard with the stick cut by DM that MS's buttocks were cut and her knickers covered with blood" (Ward, 1995: 191). Another young woman reported being beaten so severely with a belt by the Rotten Apples program leader in Japan that she was bruised from her waist to her knees (Kent Interview with Ester, 1998: 27-28).

### **Conclusion: The Family's Brainwashing Programs from a Social Scientific Perspective**

The Family's Teen Training Camps and especially the Victor program add a new dimension to existing literature on the subject of brainwashing. This new dimension builds upon a conceptual scheme that Alan Schefflin and Edward Opton, Jr. developed in their definitive brainwashing study. Schefflin and Opton say that the Soviet brainwashing program wanted compliance and confession from their victims. They wanted the brainwashed defendants in the state's show trials to "testify against themselves and confess error in their thoughts and conduct. After their confessions, they were of no further use to the state" (Schefflin and Opton, 1978: 88).

The Chinese Communist interrogators in the early 1950s also demanded compliance in their brainwashing program, but they "sought ideological conversion through a process of intense indoctrination" into the new teachings of Mao (Schefflin and Opton, 1978: 88). Finally, the North Koreans (during the Korean War in the early 1950s) "modified Chinese thought reform and Soviet

interrogation techniques into an effort to induce compliance and collaboration" as part of their efforts to denounce their Western enemies (Schefflin and Opton, 1978: 89). In contrast to all of these programs, The Family's brainwashing efforts demanded compliance as a means to achieve retention and/or re-conversion among people who already held various degrees of ideological commitment. As Lord Justice Ward concluded about the teen training camps:

they existed for the purpose of changing the children and shaping their lives in order to mould them to The Family's image. The cost to the children was to rob them of their personal identity. It was an invasion of personal freedom (Ward, 1995: 157).

Specifically regarding The Family, the goal of its teen brainwashing program was to make adolescents compliant and dependent upon the older leaders and the group's fundamental doctrines, since these young people soon would be moving into administrative and management responsibilities in the organization.

As Berg himself argued in 1985, "[i]f we don't start training the teenagers now, who are going to be the teenage leaders of tomorrow?" (Berg, 1985). In essence, by the mid-1980s The Family experienced the crisis of the second generation—young members who held differing amounts of commitment to the organization and its leaders, but who never had undergone the intense conversion experiences of their parents. Family leaders, therefore, attempted to force these conversion experiences on their teens through intensely coercive and abusive programs around the world. In so doing, they reinvented techniques that other ideologues have used over the centuries in attempts to mould the wills of captive populations.

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