

**Review: Margaret Singer: *Cults in Our Midst: The Hidden Menace in Our Everyday Lives*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, CA, 1996**

Pages: 373

**Essential Psychological Defence**

This methodical work covers history, key characteristics, recruitment tactics, and escape and rehabilitation. Each of these contributes to self-awareness and cult-identification in any area of life; an invaluable tool to avoid being taken in. For readers inside a cult though, it may not be enough to break through their new conditioning.

The most disturbing thing is susceptibility to the different manipulations, contra the “blame the victim” way of thinking.

Given the date of writing, some of the cults are more obscure, but this doesn't take away from their usefulness in pattern recognition. Individual cults come and go, but their *modus operandi* remain the same.

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**Foreword (pp. xi-xiii)**

Totalism is said to emerge in times of social dislocation.

All cults have a self-appointed charismatic leader, conduct “thought reform”, and pressure from below using idealism.

**Introduction (pp. xvii-xxiv)**

**I) Defining Cults (pp. 1-28)**

The Oregon Rajneesh cult tried to poison the Dalles water supply.

Cult manipulation techniques are infinite.

The dual purpose of a cult is recruitment and fund raising.

An estimated 2-5M are involved in cults in the U.S.

Cult categories include: Christian; Eastern; Occult; UFO; racial; psychological; political; and self-help.

Only 5-6% had psychological problems prior to joining a cult.

Recruiters target lone travellers, backpackers, and students at career centres and counselling services. Most are under thirty.

*Just world concept*: people believe in crime immunity if they simply “follow the rules”. However, crime, natural disaster, sickness, terrorism, and civil torts all affect the ‘innocent’.

*Blaming the victim*: cultists have no one else to blame for being gullible (“only the demented and crazy get involved in cults”).

## **II) A Brief History of Cults (pp. 29-51)**

Cults burgeoned after the fall of Rome, during the French Revolution, and in the Second Great Awakening of 1820-60.

John Humphrey founded the Oneida cult in 1848, NY, age 20. The practised Bible-communism and “complex-marriage”, and taught Sinless Perfection.

“The notion that we could psychologise life in America was widespread in the 1970s. The psychologising of our society was based on the hope that each of us would become sensitive to cultural, racial, and ethnic differences and help to create a more integrated, genuine melting-pot society.” [p41]

## **III) The Process of Brainwashing, Psychological Coercion, and Thought Reform (pp. 52-82)**

The key to manipulation is to keep the target unaware.

In 1949, Chairman Mao implemented ‘ideological remodelling’.

Edward Hunter coined the term “brainwashing” in this 1951 book on Red China.

Undermining consciousness, reality, beliefs, worldview, and defence mechanisms are critical.

Cult’s *double agenda* means there is no informed consent in their activities.

“Put forth a closed system of logic and an authoritarian structure that permits no feedback and refuses to be modified ... you are not allowed to question or doubt a tenet or to call attention to factual information that suggests some internal contradiction within the belief system.” [p68] Q5.10.

Confession is used as a weapon to induce fear, guilt, and leader forgiveness.

The first ‘unfreezing’ step is losing one’s identity. This is followed by change, and then ‘refreezing’.

#### **IV) What’s Wrong With Cults? (pp. 83-102)**

A common ‘test’ is to have young members lie to their parents.

“Jesuits ... do not brainwash people.”

#### **V) Recruiting New Members (pp. 103-124)**

66% of first contacts are made via friends or relatives. Front Bible, social, and hobby groups are also important.

“Lovebombing” and surrounding new recruits with experienced member ensures no negative thoughts can arise in them.

Cultists often sever relationship ties, change their appearance, or may become vegan.

“The gold is with the old”; Bible cults promising eternal life are appealing to the elderly.

CBJ (Charles, BernaDeane, and James): “We have the ability to continuously renew, regenerate, restructure, and recreate our physical bodies so that we can remain here forever. As immortals, we have the ability to acclimate ourselves to any situation, to prevent ourselves from being subject to aging and death ... and not go into the grave.” [p123]

“Cultists control building light, heat, and sound to produce a form of mass hypnosis.” [p123]

## **VI) Physiological Persuasion Techniques (pp. 125-149)**

The first wave of cults in the 1960s were based on Eastern mysticism.

Hyperventilation, swaying, Sufi dancing, eyeball pushing, ear pressurising, and painful ‘body work’ manipulations are some techniques.

Eight AAs are essential to eat fro RBC production, available only via meat products.

RIA: Relaxation-Induced Anxiety. Meditators may feel light-headed and either floating or sinking. Some feel extreme temperatures, others have sensory experiences. There are jerks and a range of emotion. Cultists label such phenomena “unstressings”. Despite there being “no religious implications”, “I was effectively made into a Hindu believer by the time I was finished with my training nine and a half years later.” [pp,140-141]

Meditation duration and complaints are dose-related.

Derealisation: as if one is self-watching (i.e., an OBE).

Meditation consequences include: blackouts; anxiety attacks; altered states; short-term memory loss; emotion outbursts; jerking; emotional flatness; seizures; hallucinations (“I saw little creatures with wings ... They’d tell me things.”) [p147]

## **VII) Psychological Persuasion Techniques (pp. 150-181)**

GRO: Generalised Reality Orientation

One's GRO may be altered by: hypnosis; medication; guided imagery [e.g., childhood regression therapy]; drugs; fatigue; and sensory deprivation.

*Vibhuti* is sacred Hind ash.

Chairman Mao: "every kind of thinking is stamped with the brand of class." [p165]

"I became convinced that I had had a miserable childhood."

"Almost every past life told to me was filled with either extreme tension and fear or considerable violence."

Compliance principles: consistency; reciprocity; social proof; authority; likeability; scarcity.

The Sullivans (est 1957) taught the nuclear family was the root of all evil.

The Center for Feeling Therapy lasted ten years and had 350 patients. "The leaders claimed that patients could reach the next stage of human evolution by following the leaders' dictates". A judge: "The therapists preyed on young and credulous persons who were in a unique position to be misled ... [to] solicit money, sex or free labor." [pp176,1777]

### **VIII) Intruding Into the Workplace (pp. 182-208)**

Common New Age phrases:

"Achieving ultimate reality."

"Death is the final stage of growth."

"Your beliefs are what stand in your way."

"Transformation through psychotechnologies."

"Myths must be eliminated before new consciousness is achieved."

LGAT: Large Grout Awareness Training. These usually last four days:

Day One: leader imposes authority.

Day Two: new philosophy is delivered.

Day Three: practice exercises

Day Four: group sharing.

### **IX) The Threat of Intimidation (pp. 209-239)**

Jim Jones used Thorazine, Quaalude, Demerol, Valium, and morphine.

Cults often have unlimited funds for lawfare.

### **X) Rescuing the Children (pp. 240-265)**

People' Temple children were sexually abused. By 1975, Jones began 'White Night' suicide drills. Infants had yellow cyanide drinks, children pink, and adults purple. Nurses would squirt cyanide down the throats of babies.

### **XI) Leaving the Cult (pp. 266-294)**

The 5Ds: Deception; Debilitation; Dependency; Dread; Desensitisation.

The Cult Indoctrinee Syndrome: sudden value hierarchy change; reduced cognitive flexibility; blunted emotion; childlike regression; appearance changes; pathology.

Only 10% of ex-cultists return, and only 40% will remain.

People in religious cults will have been taught all mainline clergy are evil.

### **XII) Recovery: Coming Out of the Pseudopersonality (pp. 295-333)**

Most cults assign a daily fundraising quota.

Guru: "my heart is where your money is."

**Postscript: The Millennium, Cults, and the End of the Century (pp. 334-337)**

Jouret of the Order of the Solar Temple urged cultists to prepare for the end.