Religious Conversion and the Concept of Socialization: Integrating the Brainwashing and Drift Models*

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Brainwashing and drift models of religious conversion appear contradictory, but each carries a partial truth, and both rely on a faulty model of socialization as internalization. We offer a revised conception of socialization (the creation and incorporation of novices in a group) as a resource for integrating those models and explaining how strong proselytization and weak commitment are joined in cult conversion. Using the new conception to analyze Moonie socialization, we show that their recent success resulted from combining strong social incorporation of converts with weak creation of new belief systems, a pattern which simultaneously fostered strong initial commitment and created blocks to long-term affiliation. Applied to the study of conversion, this concept of socialization suggests new research strategies and generates new questions to be investigated.

Attempts to explain why people join unconventional religious groups rely mostly on one of two general models of conversion. The first, promoted by psychiatrists and clinical psychologists, is known as the *brainwashing* model (cf. Schein *et al.*, 1961; Enroth, 1977; Stoner & Parke, 1977; Conway & Siegelman, 1978; Clark, 1979; Singer, 1979). According to this view, cult members use coercive means and deprivation to exercise mind control over new converts — "stripping" their previous identities, neutralizing their powers of will, creating dependence on the cult, and programming them with cult beliefs, etc. Converts are thought to be so radically and permanently transformed that only "deprogramming" will sever their allegiance to the cult.

The second model, favored more by sociologists, we shall call *social drift*, a designation stimulated by Matza's (1964) image of "delinquent drift" (cf. Lofland & Stark, 1965; Lofland, 1977a,b; Richardson & Stewart, 1977; Balch & Taylor, 1977; Lynch, 1977; Richardson *et al.*, 1981; Downton, 1979, 1980). First elaborated by Lofland and Stark, the social drift model suggests that people become converts gradually, even inadvertently, through the influence of social relationships, especially during times of personal strain. Conversion is viewed as precarious and open to change in response to shifting patterns of association.

Most observers consider the two models contradictory, the truth of the one entailing the falsity of the other. Both scholarship and public debate on cult conversion have polarized around the merits of these divergent theorems. Proponents of each viewpoint find encouragement in evidence which supports some facet of their empirical claims. Neither model has been perfected, but each has been refined, revised and elaborated sufficiently

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to rule out technical problems of theory construction as the obstacle to resolution of the debate. Current scholarship thus finds itself at an impasse, and the polarization of opinion has intensified as these issues have become matters of legal dispute (Delgado, 1980; Robbins, 1980).

The evidence on both sides, though quite uneven, is reliable enough overall to sustain the judgment that each model has identified a central, but only partial, aspect of cult conversion processes. Neither model by itself is capable of comprehending the apparent duality of cult life, for each is built on a fundamental denial of the reality perceived by the other. The task now facing social scientists is *to develop a more general model of conversion which integrates the seemingly contradictory phenomena of brainwashing and drift.*

This paper argues that a logical starting point is a general theory of *socialization* on which both conversion models implicitly rely. Past scholarship has obscured this connection by treating cult conversion as an unusual phenomenon requiring its own special explanation. Drift models set conversion apart from socialization by emphasizing the "deviant perspective" of religious movements; for brainwashing models, the conversion process itself is (also) deviant.

There are very real differences in content and in emphasis between religious conversion and other forms of socialization, but *the basic process and variables involved are the same.* Becoming a Moonie and becoming a physician, for example, both involve the socializing transformation of nonmembers into members of a group. In tacit recognition of that fact, these conversion models highlight two central aspects of the socialization process: group efforts to *mold new members* (brainwashing model) and new members' *journey toward affiliation* with the group (drift model). Indeed, the analytic viability of these models owes primarily to the fact that they are in that regard genuine socialization theories. Incorporating them into a more general model of socialization, then, is the best way to preserve and extend their partial insights.

Because the validity of each model defines the vulnerability of the other, though, their reliance on socialization theory also undermines them both. For it is their common allegiance to the core theorem of socialization, the equation of socialization with internalization, that creates the opposition between their partial truths. Strong conversion practices and precarious commitment appear contradictory because the internalization theorem will permit only one (or the other) conclusion. To admit them both, as we believe the evidence warrants, is to invalidate that general conception of socialization as a paradigm for conversion (Hadden & Long, 1978).

Thus, adequate comprehension of the double reality of conversion requires a revised general conception of socialization. Wentworth's (1980) seminal work, *Context and Understanding,* lays the foundation for an adequate general theory of socialization. The reconstruction of the socialization concept presented here follows his arguments as well as our own research on physician socialization (1978), which led us to reformulate the general concept itself.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how this reconstructed conception of socialization can integrate the divergent assumptions and findings of the brainwashing and social drift models of conversion and, thus, provide a guide for future research. Pursuit of this task requires that we outline some basic features of the reconstructed socialization framework.

SOCIALIZATION AND RELIGIOUS CONVERSION: CONCEPTUAL PROBLEMS

Socialization. The continuing thread in the socialization concept is the premise that society successfully shapes new members toward compliance with and adjustment to societal requirements. That assumption, which sociologists carried over intact from lay usage, incorporates a fundamental duality of meaning. On the one hand, it included the process of training and making, the *activity carried out* by group members, though it did not specify the substance of that activity. At the same time, however, it also defined socialization as the *production of desired results,* namely the social adjustment, fitness and conformity of those subjected to training. That was no mere ambiguity, permitting the choice of one meaning or the other. Rather, *both* the *activity* of socialization *and* its *results* were fused as a unitary reality; the novice's fitness issued naturally from the members' training activity.

In contemporary scholarship, that postulate is expressed by the *equation of socialization with internalization and social learning.* The two terms are now used interchangeably, with socialization commonly defined as the process by which new members internalize/learn the norms and values of a social group. In that formulation, socialization and internalization denote *both a process and a result,* just as earlier definitions did (cf. Parsons, 1951; Merton *et al.,* 1957; Clausen, 1968; Inkeles, 1968; Berger & Berger, 1975; Hadden & Long, 1978; Wentworth, 1980).

This current definition, however, departs from prior social scientific usage in one important respect, its primary object of interest. Earlier conceptions, developed out of a concern for the problem of melding diverse and undisciplined individuals into a cooperative social order, emphasized the *social molding* of persons, the *training members gave* to novices. As scientific interest later shifted to fitting malleable individuals to an already well-integrated society, the first emphasis gave way to the current focus on the *novice's acquisition* of social ideals.

The core conception of socialization favors neither concern, for the basic assumptions contained in the idea are consistent with both. Still, observers are free to concentrate on one or the other according to their particular interests. That choice, when it occurs, has important consequences. It deflects analytic attention away from the other half of the socialization process, and it permits, even encourages, the extension of the socialization concept to include influences and processes which are only tangentially relevant to socialization.

Religious Conversion. Having identified the underlying assumptions of the socialization concept, we can see how they both sustain and debilitate the two models of religious conversion. Notice first that the *major differences between the brainwashing and drift models* develop from their *different objects of interest.* The brainwashing approach concentrates on cult members' efforts to convert outsiders, while the drift hypothesis focuses on the experience those outsiders have as they become converts. To be sure, empirical studies from each perspective often include descriptions of both elements in the socialization process. But theoretically, each concentrates on just half the process, not only rejecting the interests of the opposition but also neglecting its own empirical findings.

Intellectual trends in the different disciplines created considerable momentum for these

choices. In sociology, where drift models are popular, the study of socialization has for a generation focused primarily on the novice. In psychology, reliance on the medical model of personal pathology deemphasizes willful deviance in favor of extraordinary external influences, like cult brainwashing tactics (Robbins & Anthony, 1980).

It is also important to note that these choices are linked to political interests as well. The brainwashing model seems to attract a disproportionate share of those who believe cults are a menace to them, their families or other citizens. In contrast, those disposed to a civil-libertarian viewpoint more often gravitate to the social drift model. In short, these theories are animated in part by the perception of potential harm cults or anticultists may perpetrate on converts.

The combination of scholarly bias and political interest generated both advantages and disadvantages for the development of two models. To their advantage, these forces supplied a large fund of ideas from which proponents of the models developed persuasive explanations, and through which they perceived important facets of religious socialization that others missed. At the same time, though, these biases were sufficiently strong on each side to block out the reality of the matters raised by the opposing theory. As a result, both models are incomplete and vulnerable.

Though not often recognized explicitly, each model accounts for its silent partner by the application of socialization theory's core assumption equating training and learning. By that logic, the finding that cults employ strong recruiting and training practices leads brainwashing theorists to assume that converts thoroughly internalize commitment to cult beliefs. Given the absence of consistently strong and stable internalization in its findings, drift theory relies on the same principle to underwrite the conclusion that cult proselytization is weak and relatively ineffective. In both cases, *the application of socialization's central theorem to empirical findings yields conclusions which deny the central findings of the other model.*

Since these denials are "logical," neither model has to confront the other's facts. Each can simply rule them out as a logical impossibility and concentrate on identifying methodological flaws, the only remaining explanation for facts claimed by the opposition. If there is a benefit here, it is to sustain the truth in these views and to make us more watchful of the evidence on this topic. But more importantly and unfortunately, this reliance on socialization theory leads both models to defend assertions contrary to fact and to avoid the necessary task of developing a satisfactory explanation for the dual reality of cult conversion.

Conceptual Problems. To develop such an explanation requires investigation of the complex and problematic interaction between training and learning, between member and novice. But it is precisely this relationship that the conventional idea of socialization takes for granted. The problem is that it assumes the convergence of process and outcome. The concept thus excludes from scientific scrutiny any other possible relation between these two variable factors. The most crucial subjects for analysis have thus been shunted aside by theoretical fiat.

As we have demonstrated elsewhere in the case of medical training (Hadden & Long, 1978), this current conception of socialization elevates to the status of a universal defining principle what is actually a *theory* expressing the relationship between two variables. But because the theory is *treated as a definition,* its empirical adequacy is not a matter for

investigation; it is "true" by definition.

A second problem with this conception of socialization is reflected in the tendency of both conversion models to expand the scope and range of the phenomenon in a rather open-ended fashion. Conversion becomes an infinite global process. Brainwashing, it is said, can happen anywhere to anybody, and the social drifter's conversion career remains always open to the shifting pushes and pulls of social relationships. Any and all events thereby become conversion events, or at least potentially so. Thus expanded, conversion loses its distinctive quality as a transformative exchange between members and novices, one or the other being largely eclipsed by being included in a much larger collection of relevant forces or subjects.

To choose either object of interest, training or learning, inevitably expands the phenomenon so as to include anything and everything. In the former case, virtually all learning can be conceived as the result of socialization; in the latter, socializing activity comes to include virtually all human action. This expansion tends to occur in socialization studies and is the consequence of failing to delimit the phenomenon conceptually.

SOCIALIZATION RECONCEIVED

Any adequate definition of socialization must be careful to identify the distinctive activity which constitutes it, apart from whatever outcomes it may generate. This activity inevitably involves an *interactive process* between members and novices, but the special character of the process is defined by what members *do to* novices, not something novices *receive from* members. In addition, the distinctive character of socialization rests on its being a process of transforming newcomers into *bona fide* members of a group. Instruction may extend its effects far and wide, and learning may continue for a lifetime, but that does not mean that socialization is an open-ended process. We propose to view it as temporally and organizationally bounded by the relation of the novice to group membership. Likewise, the content of socialization also is specific, both to the culture and organization of the group in question and to the specific requisites of membership in that group.

To limit this unproductive expansiveness and to provide a useful definitional guide to conversion research, we offer the following reconception of socialization, originally developed in response to similar problems we encountered in our study of medical socialization. Socialization is *the social process of creating and incorporating new members of a group from a pool of nonmembers, carried out by members and their allies.*

This is a more narrow conception of socialization than one usually finds, but it thereby overcomes the dual deficiencies we have identified. Thus conceived, socialization is less likely to be confused with other activities currently included in the concept. This narrower conception also jettisons internalization and all other potential outcomes as defining characteristics of socialization. It assumes nothing about the novices' knowledge, competence or commitment to the group.

Our definition involves three central components: (1) the *nature and requirements of membership,* (2) the *participants in the socialization process* and (3) *creating and incorporating activities.* We shall deal briefly with each of these components, focusing somewhat more on the creating and incorporating activities, for it is there that we begin to see the utility of this framework for studying the recruitment and proselytization

activities of members of new religious groups.

Membership. Membership in any group has both *cultural* and *social organizational* aspects, the former defining the distinctive traits of members as opposed to nonmembers, the latter differentiating types of members within the group. Consisting of a system of rules putatively shared by all members, the culture of a group constitutes a set of integrative principles around which members forge a common bond and carry out their activities. In contrast, social organization consists of a system of social positions by means of which groups divide their tasks and differentially allocate them among members.

The conferral and continuation of membership in any group rests on the plausibility of three assumptions about the members' relation to the group: (1) that they *know and understand* the requisites of membership (2) that they are *competent and skilled* in their use and application, and (3) that they are *committed* to following them as guides for action. In many cases, members actually will possess the requisite knowledge, skill and commitment, but strictly speaking, *membership status is an attribution* made by others on the basis of their confidence that the member in question possesses these qualities, whatever the case in fact. The determining factor in becoming and remaining a member, thus, is not the actual degree of knowledge, skill and commitment possessed but rather the *degree to which confidence can be sustained* among those who confer membership.

Participants in Socialization. In its most rudimentary form, socialization is a phenomenon which occurs between socializing agents and novices to be socialized. The prototypical agents of socialization are the "certified" and "practicing" *members* of the group to which novices are being socialized. Like the designation "member," *"novice"* constitutes a conferred status. But whereas members have their status conferred independently of their socializing activity, novices occupy their position only by virtue of their engagement with socialization. *Members define who is a novice* by directing their socializing action toward some people and not others.

The social bond uniting members and novices involves a double set of relations. With regard to their membership standing, they interact as *insiders and outsiders.* With regard to their standing in the socialization process, they interact as *superordinates and subordinates.* The attitudes of each to the other shape these bonds in important ways. Religious "seekers," for example, are both pliable to authority and eager — sometimes overeager — to become insiders. On the other side of the relationship, "love bombing" cultists create a greater sense of belonging and equality, the latter often falsely — than do more formal and detached recruiters.

All participants are entangled in additional social worlds beyond those of socialization and group membership. Ties to the wider society, loyalties to families and friends, work, other associations, etc., engage the commitment and time of members and novices to varying degrees. Their precise influence on socialization will differ by the degree to which they are segregated or integrated with socialization, the degree to which their commitments compete with socialization, and the particular aspects of socialization with which they interact.

Creating and Incorporating Activities. The aims of socialization from the members' perspective are to create persons who can sustain confidence that they meet the requisites of membership *and* to incorporate them into membership. *Socialization consists of action taken toward those aims, not their realization, which is empirically problematic.* Indeed,

creat*ing* and incorprat*ing* activites are major contingencies in accomplishing successful crea*tion* and incorpora*tion*. Novices interact with and are complementary to members in the socialization process, but novices can only affect and respond to socialization, not define it.

Creating activity includes two forms of action we call *showing* and *shaping*. Both are employed to meet all three requisites of membership — knowledge, skill and commitment — but in general, socialization to knowledge and skill requirements emphasizes showing, while socialization to commitment gives a larger role to shaping. Showing consists of displaying the requisites of membership for novices. Socializing agents also influence novices' appropriation of their world so as to foster conformity. This shaping activity consists of the *application of sanctions,* positive and negative, to novices' behavior.

Incorporation is characterized by three distinct forms of action: *recruiting, certifying* and *placing*. Recruiting consists of the identification and selection of novices from a pool of candidates or potential candidates. Certification is a quality control activity. It consists primarily of evaluating novices' development and then approving their progress through the process. Placing novices is the distributive activity of socialization. It consists of directing novices to certain positions, sponsoring and recommending them for those positions, and in some cases actually securing positions for them.

It is useful to see placing as the organizational complement of recruiting, both involving movement of people across social boundaries. Recruitment brings people into socialization as novices, and placement sends them out into the members' world. At the same time, recruitment to socialization involves a complementary process of placing in the status of novice, and placement likewise involves a recruitment to membership positions.

One aspect of our approach to socialization relevant to studying religious conversion is *socializing interaction*, the *medium for training and conversion efforts*. Both the brainwashing and social drift models implicitly make the assumption of one-way determinism which characterize classic assumptions in socialization theory. Analysis of interaction directs attention to both members and novices as active, creative participants in the conversion-socialization process. On first appearance, the drift model may not appear deterministic. In recent reflections on his conversion studies, however, Lofland (1977a: 817) criticizes his early formulation of the model for embodying a "thoroughly 'passive' actor" treated, in Blumer's words, as a "neutral medium through which social forces operate." The model appeared nondeterministic only because those social forces competed for the novice's commitment, creating a tug-of-war which made conversion precarious. But the outcome was no less determined, only more complex to analyze.

Finally, we should mention one important aspect of the whole process as it relates to life as a member. The more differentiated the socialization process from life as member and the longer its duration (as in medical training), the more well developed and distinct the social world of socialization itself will be and the more likely it will exert an independent influence on novices' behavior by offering another set of criteria for guiding action. On the other hand, the less differentiated socialization is and the shorter its duration, the less powerful it is in guiding behavior as a member, which then is based more on the exigencies of day to day life in the group. In groups where these conditions obtain, as in many new religions, much of the group life itself may be concerned with monitoring and reinforcing commitment on a continuing basis.

EXPLAINING THE DUAL REALITIES OF CULT CONVERSION

An immediate contribution of this conception is to provide a framework adequate to comprehend the dual realities of conversion in new religious movements. Already the impasse between brainwashing and drift models has been opened by repudiation of the socialization-internalization equation. It was this formula which guided both parties to the conclusion that the other's claims contradicted their own. Now there is no reason to believe that strong proselytization and weak commitment are incompatible phenomena. What remains is to explain *how they came to be joined* in the cult conversion process.

In this section, we attempt to construct a plausible answer to that question, using the Unification Church (UC) as an illustrative case. For factual material on the UC, we rely primarily on the studies by Lofland (1977b) and by Bromley and Shupe (1979). For conceptual resources, we draw on our brief sketch of the components of socialization, and we offer this case analysis as demonstration of the utility of the new conception. The adequacy of that formulation, of course, does not depend on the validity of this particular illustration. In fact, the illustration depends far more on the conception, for we mean to change the terms in which cult conversion is analyzed. Merely combining the brainwashing and drift models would preserve both those one-sided ways of thinking and the value biases associated with each perspective. Framing conversion studies in terms of socialization avoids those biases and establishes a more unified perspective on those partial truths.

After considerable floundering in the 1960s, the UC in America gained many new members and flourished in the 1970s. Among the most prominent factors cited to explain this dramatic growth are the appearance of Reverend Moon, the development of highly effective fundraising techniques, and the collapse of the counter-culture. Important as these factors are, however, they are still insufficient to explain the group's success. Had it not been for their ineptitude at socializing new members, the UC could have achieved far greater success in the sixties. And without their new acumen in socialization, it is hard to believe they would have made it, even in the 1970s. Indeed, more effective socialization may well be the most powerful and proximate force responsible for UC growth and success.

As brainwashing theorists have made clear, UC socialization is now very forceful, and that is certainly a key factor in its success. But that is hardly the whole story, for it does not make clear *what* the Moonies do so forcefully or *how* they gain a hold on novices. In addition, it also obscures the fact that they do some things very *weakly* or poorly. In fact, some of their methods for producing short-term commitment appear to backfire on them in the long run.

To better understand how this can happen, we need first to view UC socialization activity during the 1960s. Lofland (1977b) describes their proselytization efforts as thoroughly inept. Part of their difficulty lay in the fact that they tried virtually everything, but perfected nothing. In *recruiting* potential converts, their efforts ran the gamut from media advertisements ("disembodied access") to personal invitations ("embodied access"), and they reached out to everyone from vagrants to respectable churchgoers. Mass advertising alternated between the apocalyptic and the cryptic, neither of which drew much interest. Personal contacts were centered on "religious place," where they almost always found themselves out of place and out of luck. For all their efforts, very few people came to their meetings; most of those who did failed to return.

What people were staying away from was the UC belief system — its *culture* — the primary content of these early socialization efforts. Overt or covert, the effort to *create* members emphasized *showing* novices Moonie culture to develop the *knowledge* required of members. "Listening to the tape" and the "study group" were the two major "promotion vehicles" for this purpose. Far less attention was given to incorporating novices into the *organization* of the group, to developing *skill and commitment,* and to *shaping* behavior toward group ideals. Lofland observed some attempts at what later would become love-bombing, but they were haphazard and always secondary to the primary effort to inculcate belief. In addition to their failure to shape behavior, those proselytizers also failed to control the *environment* and the novices' side of their *interaction.* Novices were free to come and go at will, and they were encouraged to take their time and to think about the "Precepts" before committing themselves.

In the 1970s, Moonie socializing efforts changed dramatically and so did their results. Bromley and Shupe (1979) show that their recruiting concentrated on those *available* for experimentation and new commitment and/or those already *attuned* to the Moonie message — mainly young adults. Unlike their predecessors, they gathered novices effectively from this population primarily by face-to-face contact in what Lofland would call "secular places." At the same time, they also changed the content of their message, emphasizing the "communal" or *social organizational* requirements of membership. So thoroughgoing was this emphasis that many members of some duration had only "sketchy knowledge" of UC beliefs, and some did not even find those beliefs valuable to them. "Intellectual conversions" were clearly secondary to the task of *incorporating* novices in organized group activity (Bromley & Shupe: 170).

That does not mean the Moonies neglected the *creation* of acceptable members, but they did alter their emphasis in that activity. Bromley and Shupe make clear that they were preoccupied with creating *commitment,* even to the neglect of knowledge. Accordingly, Moonie socializers concentrated much more on *shaping* novice behavior than on showing them how to behave. Moreover, their near legendary "love-bombing" put the burden of that task on *positive* sanctions, not negative ones. In the process, of course, the Moonies showed their novices how to behave even as they mobilized their affect in support of that life-style. What they seem to have done best, on both counts, was teach the novices *to display signs of commitment, not necessarily to be committed.* The process of creation was so geared to the certification of novices, in fact, that socialization seemed often to neglect the reality of commitment for its appearance.

The power and impact of their basic pattern of socialization was intensified by four related factors. First, the Moonies effectively segregated socializing activity from the competing influence of the *social environment* by isolating novices at weekend workshops and week-long seminars. Second, they abandoned the permissiveness of early days in favor of tight control of novices' responses in *interaction.* No longer encouraged to think about things, novices were rarely even given the chance to do so as members sought to make interaction follow the behaviorist stimulus-response model religiously. Third, they wasted little time making novices members, pushing constantly for commitment displays sufficient to warrant *certification* and *placing* of novices in group roles as soon as possible. Finally, they had something for these new members to do. Street hawking made the organization financially viable, but it first served the UC by solving the problem of *placing* new members.

As financial success underwrote new operations (e.g., fishing, restaurants), those new organizations created additional opportunities for placing members, and the reality of a career as a Moonie emerged.

Melded together in a system of socialization, these practices were unusually successful in producing strongly-committed converts to the UC. By rotating its strategy almost 180 degrees from earlier efforts, the movement recruited more and better novices, retained more, incorporated them faster, and enjoyed greater allegiance from them. But those very practices also sowed the seeds of later defection, which usually matured within two years. Several features of the process stand out immediately in this regard.

1. Moonie socialization is well insulated from the outside world, but *not from life as a member* of the group. It is short and deeply interwoven with other movement activities. The advantages of that quick immersion carry the cost of uncertainty about commitment. Accordingly, the group submits its members to frequent commitment tests, which undermine trust, make member status insecure, and drain energy from the more fulfilling tasks of real life as a member.

2. The overwhelming attention to commitment displays for certification encourages novices to give a good show, which they do. While attitudes often follow action, though, they can only follow so far without their own sustenance. The neglect of *subjective commitment* on matters of such fundamental personal significance eventually creates a strain between character and appearance. (The dilemma of belief and action discussed by Lofland is related, but not identical to this problem.)

3. That strain is exacerbated when converts finally take the time to think about things. In highly controlled settings, vigilant socializing agents can subdue novices' reflective urges by making them emit standardized responses to stimuli on the spot and at every turn of *interaction*. To subdue reflection, however, is not to extinguish it, and when novices gain membership, they have more time to engage their reflective powers. If commitment has not been grounded in reflection, as seems to be the case with the Moonies, converts will eventually experience serious doubt about their membership.

4. The power of doubt to generate disaffection is greatly increased by weak *cognitive socialization* to the UC world view. When affective bonds become uncertain, converts' moral commitment to the group has no backing in cultural belief; they have no taken-for-granted Moonie ontology to sustain them. Instead, they are likely to rely on the more deeply embedded conventional culture to interpret their participation, on which the Moonies ironically relied to make organizational commitment plausible for novices in the first place. In addition, weak cognitive socialization may itself help create doubt as Moonies confront the outside world. For example, among "Pioneer Witnesses sent in 1975 on an individual basis to separate areas of the country, the drop-out rate . . . was more than fifty percent" (Bromley & Shupe: 184). Absent the supportive "plausibility structure" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) of fellow believers, an insufficiently developed or weakly internalized world view will eventually find itself unable to account satisfactorily for the complex realities of the world at large. Competing ideologies may thus gain a foothold on Moonie consciousness.

5. Finally, the Moonie *placement system* encouraged quick but short-lived commitment. Their rapid placement of novices in various enterprises which contributed to the movement encouraged conversion. But the few opportunities for hierarchical career

mobility in those endeavors eventually would discourage converts schooled from birth to the ideology of upward mobility. Further, the transience of member assignments does not permit converts to develop a coherent life plan within the group. And the three-year proscription of marriage for converts in culturally prime marriage age probably works against the solidification of adult social identity.

None of these factors alone would seriously undermine commitment in the movement, but as part of an interlocking system of socialization, they combine to create a major stumbling block to *long-term affiliation* for most converts. At the same time, though, the UC system of socialization has also proven relatively successful in *fostering strong initial commitment.* In the UC at least, "brainwashing" and "drift" are actually "brothers under the skin," both the natural product of Moonie socialization practices.

NEW DIRECTION FOR THE STUDY OF CONVERSION

Our analysis of conversion to the Unification Church offers a plausible account for the dual reality of brainwashing and drift. It demonstrates the utility of the revised conception of socialization in achieving that breakthrough. In addition, our new definition of socialization both implies a new *strategy* for analyzing conversion and proselytization and it generates new questions and hypotheses to be investigated.

Strategy. The strategic implications of our new conception of socialization, while very basic, have been largley neglected in conversion research. As we discussed earlier, this neglect arose from the confusion of theory and definition in previous conceptions of socialization and conversion. This new conception of socialization guides the study of conversion "back to basics" in three important ways.

First, the new conception *focuses analytic attention on proselytization.* Most fundamentally, that means it avoids the open-ended association of almost everything with socialization (and conversion) by delimiting the phenomenon and drawing its boundaries carefully. It still includes a lot, but far from everything, and it thus provides a more useful and reliable guide to inquiry. It breaks the presumed convergence of proselytization and subjective commitment which has guided inquiry thus far, centering attention on proselytization as a topic in its own right and providing conceptual resources for its systematic analysis.

Second, these revisions open *new possibilities for theory-building* in the study of conversion. Conventional conceptions discourage theorizing because they assume a theory. In consequence, many scholars get "hung up in trying to determine if the . . . model is 'right' as regards the group they have studied" (Lofland, 1977a: 816). On the contrary, the new conception requires theorizing because it only stipulates a set of categories, not a theory relating those categories. In short, it makes proselytization a variable whose relation to other phenomena is problematic and requires analysis. In addition, the new conception suggests this theory-building effort should align itself with the general sociological theory of socialization. This strategy overturns the view of conversion to religious movements as a "deviant" phenomenon requiring special explanation in favor of one considering it simply as one type of normal social phenomenon. In so doing, it makes differences between cult proselytization and more conventional socialization a matter for empirical demonstration, and it integrates the theory of conversion with general social theory.

Third, the new conception establishes a solid *base for comparative analysis.* Linking conversion with the theory of socialization makes obvious the need to compare systematically religious movements with non-religious socializing agents and processes. In addition, we should also compare proselytization among different religious groups and within single religions over time. What makes these comparisons viable and useful is the establishment of a set of categories which identify the observable and measurable elements of socializing activity. For each group we can now describe and enumerate the details of creating and incorporating activities in terms of showing, shaping, recruiting, certifying, and placing — individually or in profile. When matched against the success (or failure) of groups in gaining adherents, this comparative analysis can provide a powerful tool for developing explanatory theories of conversion.

Questions and Hypotheses. Our reconceptualization of the problem of proselytization and conversion in terms of socialization theory raises a number of new questions for investigation and suggests a variety of hypotheses. To illustrate, consider the issue of getting and keeping members. To adherents of the brainwashing model, this is likely to sound like an innocuous problem. This is so because they are likely to assume that to get them is to keep them, unless intervention to rescue and "deprogram" is forthcoming from the outside. Or, conversely, if the "cult" in question doesn't keep them, they never really ever had them. By contrast, our analysis suggests the possibility that winning adherents depends on different practices than does keeping them. Achieving the first does not guarantee the second, and failure to keep adherents does not imply a failure to win them in the first place. That tentative conclusion makes traditional assumptions problematic and calls for further investigation to determine which factors are operative in each process.

Assume that different factors produce each phenomenon. Which ones are associated with gaining adherents and which with retaining them? Here the distinction between socialization and its results pays dividends. We saw earlier that changes in socialization practices yielded more converts for the Unification Church but not necessarily any greater commitment in the long run. We might hypothesize, then, that *socialization influences gaining* more than it does retaining members. Our analysis suggests further that among socialization practices, it was the Moonies' social *incorporation* of novices into the group ("love-bombing," commitment rituals, hawking) that underwrote their membership gains. The creation of members competent in UC culture (teaching the "precepts," etc.) appears to have failed as a method of securing converts. But we may also hypothesize that the cognitive content was the key missing ingredient that was necessary to retain those who dropped out.

Given these apparent differences, it is worth inquiring whether gaining and retaining members are mutually exclusive processes or whether it is possible to maximize both in the same group. In the Moonies' case, at least, the methods which were successful in gaining members almost seemed to contribute to their failure in retaining them. Here comparative analysis shows the importance of the Moonies' cultural deviance, for conventional groups, like the medical profession, usually keep those they get. The same is generally true for established religions, though they may not get as many as they want and they still suffer some defections. In conventional groups, gaining and retaining appear allied, but in deviant organizations they appear at odds.

An alternative hypothesis implied in our analysis focuses on the apparent contradiction between creating and incorporating activities. In UC socialization, incorporating worked to gain members where creating efforts were far less successful. The Moonies' failure to create strong cognitive worlds among their members appears to be a significant factor which has undermined their retention. While attrition is high, it is clear that some recruits have remained for considerable periods of time. This suggests that both creation and incorporation work, but for different reasons and different times in the life cycles of the recruit/member. In the UC case, the location of successful incorporation activity seems clear — during the period of recruitment. The empirical task remaining is to identify *how* and *where* successful creation activity takes place. When this is understood, we will have important insights both about gaining and retaining members. An important implication of this knowledge for religious movements is the prospect of retaining committed members even when they abandon intensive involvement and career hopes within the group.

These ideas are speculative and far from fully developed, but we believe they display the potential fruitfulness of the new directions we propose for the study of religious conversion. Those possibilities rely on three main conclusions we have argued for in this paper. First, conversion should be considered as one type of socialization activity. Second, our revised conception of socialization provides more precise and complete tools for the analysis of conversion as socialization. Third, when we employ that conception, we can see how brainwashing and drift, which appear to be contradictory, are both actually integrated in cult conversion processes. From those foundations, we can build a much stronger analysis of conversion, one that will not only advance understanding of cultic religion but also of socialization in the wider society as well.

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