Gurus&Co LWS 3

What makes a cult a cult? Do people follow a cult to make a difference? Is it a "road paved with good intentions"? Do you think it is possible to brainwash a person to the extent they can't leave the cult? Do you think some people just have "natural predisposition" to join a cult-following?

Listen to this snippet with a voice of Jim Jones, a notorious leader of Peoples Temple cult. What is going on in the two parts of the clip? _____

1. **Reading.**

Let's read a little bit more from the article *What Makes a Cult a Cult* by Zoë Heller.

2. Drag and drop each phrase next to its synonym

strongly criticized

the autonomy of able grownups

ignited the psychosis

a reliable approach

viewed the word with reluctance

stoked the paranoia – _____

regarded the term with some skepticism – _____

strenuously objected – _____

the self-determination of competent adults – _____

a foolproof method – _____

The term "brainwashing" was originally used to describe the thought-reform techniques developed by the Maoist government in China. Its usage in connection with cults began in the early seventies. Stories of young people being transformed into "Manchurian Candidate"-style zombies stoked the paranoia of the era and, for a time, encouraged the practice of kidnapping and deprogramming" cult members. Yet, the scientific

WHERE DOES MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE COME FROM?



The Manchurian Candidate was a 1959 political thriller by Richard Condon. The book details a conspiracy where a US soldier, Raymond Shaw, is captured during the Korean War and brainwashed by Chinese and Soviet agents. His brainwashing is later activated by the Communists to lead Shaw to assassinate a US presidential candidate so that his running mate, Senator Iselin, will win overwhelming support.

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community has always regarded the term with some skepticism. Civil-rights organizations and scholars of religion have strenuously objected to using an unproven—and unprovable—hypothesis to discredit the self-determination of competent adults.

Attempts by former cult members to use the "brainwashing defense" to avoid conviction for crimes have repeatedly failed. Methods of coercive persuasion undoubtedly exist, but the notion of a foolproof method for destroying free will and reducing people to robots is now rejected by almost all cult experts. Even the historian and psychiatrist Robert Lifton, provided one of the earliest and most influential accounts of coercive persuasion, has been careful to point out that brainwashing is neither "all-powerful" nor "irresistible." In a recent volume of essays he writes that cultic conversion generally involves an element of "voluntary self-surrender."

3. Find the correct place for each piece.

of malevolent claptrap more coercive

of violition more difficult

If we accept that cult members have some degree _____ , the job of distinguishing cults from other belief-based organizations becomes a good deal _____ . We may recoil from Keith Raniere's brand _____ , but, if he hadn't physically abused followers and committed crimes, would we be able to explain why NXIVM is inherently _____ or exploitative than any of the "high demand" religions we tolerate?

4. Ask questions for the "answers" in bold.

Acknowledging that joining a cult requires an element of voluntary self-surrender also obliges us to consider whether the very relinquishment of control isn't a significant part of the appeal. In HBO's NXIVM documentary, "The Vow," a seemingly sadder and wiser former member says,


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"Nobody joins a cult. Nobody. They join a good thing, and then they realize they were fucked." The force of this statement is somewhat undermined when you discover that the man speaking is a veteran not only of NXIVM but also

of Ramtha's School of Enlightenment, a group in the Pacific Northwest led by **a woman who claims to channel the wisdom of a "Lemurian warrior" from thirty-five thousand years ago**. To join one cult may be considered a misfortune; to join two looks **like a predilection for the cult experience**.



"Not passive victims, they themselves actively sought to be controlled," Haruki Murakami wrote **of the members of Aum Shinrikyo**, the cult whose sarin-gas attack on the Tokyo subway, in 1995, killed **thirteen** people. In his book "Underground" (**1997**), Murakami describes most Aum members as having "deposited all their precious personal holdings of selfhood" in the "spiritual bank" of the cult's leader, **Shoko Asahara**. Submitting to a higher authority—to someone else's account of reality—was, he claims, their aim. Robert Lifton suggests that **people with certain kinds of personal history** are more likely to experience such a longing: those with "an early sense of confusion and dislocation," or, at the opposite extreme, "an early experience of unusually intense family milieu control." But he stresses that the capacity for totalist submission lurks in all of us and is probably rooted **in childhood**, the prolonged period of dependence during which we have no choice but to attribute to our parents "an exaggerated omnipotence."

Listening. Back to Sounds Like A Cult podcast.

1. Listen to the snippet once _____. What four abstract concepts does Kate list? Listen again and join the chunks.

people are unwilling

human experience

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they're holding	to even joke about it
no concrete	about yourself
are not provable	actually never getting there
the messy	abstract concepts
small incremental	the equation
benefit from you	solutions to
your boilerplate intro	or disprovable
that know	levels

2. Listen to the snippets, shadow them and translate

_____ [Totally!] Yeaaah...Seven figures... like, not everyone can make seven figures, that's just a fact of life, unfortunately. But they like dangle it in front of everyday people like it's something that they can achieve.

_____ Yeah, let's look around you, do you think every single last person in this room is going to make seven figures? Because the promises that they will. But that just doesn't check out, that's impossible. [Yeah] [Right]



_____ That's a huge issue of why people like Rachel Hollis will frustrate me because it's that sort of curated authenticity and relatability like 'I'm just like you' and then you prompt people who are struggling, and they 'Oh, I'm just like you and if you did this, then I can do this.'

_____ Just for a little background: Rachel Hollis is one of these like self-improvement/life-style influencer types who wrote a book Go Wash Your Face and encountered some controversy when she said some insensitive things on the Internet about how she became so successful.

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3.Listen and fill the gaps with verb forms _____

- I'm a person who can't _____ . I don't like when people say 'I just _____ it.' I don't know how _____ it, I'm just out of skills and I think that in a life-style /self-help sense people will follow her formula, and she's _____ , you know, having a Disney-executive husband, how much help she has in the home. A lot of the audiences have matters, and people are generally _____ with financial stuff. That's the piece that _____ me because the bottom line of any entrepreneurial venture and that sort of cultish or self-help guru is like you need time, you need money, you need both.
- Yeah, these culty leaders generally like ignore or _____ their own privilege, they _____ - _____ you with like hope and inspirational quotes 'you can do this, you can do that', but they fail to _____ all of the things that they already had in their life and the privileges that they came from.

Can you recall any other context we came across the term love-bombing?

Here is a short snippet from an episode of Bad People podcast devoted to Jonestown (Peoples Temple) cult. The programme is hosted by Dr. Julia Shaw (a criminal psychologist) and Sofie Hagen (a Danish stand-up comedian, author, and activist). Listen to the clip and fill the gaps _____



- And there are also probably aspects of something that has been _____ love bombing.
- _____ a person with, well, love, attention, and sort of warm, welcoming, and safe environment which makes the person _____ and gives them _____ .
- That's so interesting because love-bombing is also used in relation to _____ and sort of abusive people. Like, you meet someone new and they are immediately like 'oh my god, you're the one, I can't believe I've met _____, I can see we spend the rest of our lives together...'
- Cause we also call that love-bombing, like a way to manipulate people into feeling _____ .
- So gross, I just _____ so many people who have done that.
- Oh, yeah, I've _____so many time.

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