**CHILDREN IN CULTS**

**A testimony from a psychological/new age cult  
led by a woman guru, Maud Pison.**

In order to understand the problems children in cults may experience, it is important to analyse how their parents operate. Children usually get involved in cults because their parents belong to one, although some might get involved in a cult through some other family member, a teacher, a coach or whoever might have an influence upon them. The parents who are members of a cult are themselves manipulated and mentally controlled by their leader or guru.

Having myself experienced an unfortunate encounter with a woman guru with my husband and our two small children, I have had the experience first hand. I have written and analysed my experience in a book, *Mon Voyage avec la Vierge de l’Apocalypse*("my encounter with the Virgin of the Apocalypse") that I wrote originally in French as the guru and the group were situated in France. I am a sociologist (M.A. in Social Sciences) and a linguist so I analysed my experience and wrote about it in a matter that will hopefully help some others to understand the techniques of mental manipulation and thus avoid being themselves manipulated. Since I left the group, ten years ago, I’ve moved to Sweden (I recently moved back to Paris though and travels back and forth) and I have since then helped other victims and their families. I’ve been the President of Sesam, an organisation that consisted only of ex-adherents, and created a newspaper, *Sesambullen,* and we became members of the European umbrella-organisation: FECRIS (www.fecris.org); we had also counseling with groups of victims. Sesam’s board eventually decided to become an under-organisation of the bigger Swedish organisation to help cult-victims and their families, FRI ([http://www.fri-sverige.se](http://www.fri-sverige.se/)). I now represent Scandinavia, and especially Sweden within FECRIS.

In Stockholm, FRI lately had an important conference about children in cults. The subject was of particular interest, as we, at the same time, could follow the lawsuit against the leader of a small Christian cult, Knutby, where children were involved, in the media. The leader had three children with his first wife, the mother of the children who died mysteriously; he then had a relationship with the nanny, at the same time as with another woman. He was eventually condemned for having been proven to manipulate the nanny into killing his new wife and trying to kill the husband of what seemed to be his other lover’s husband. His children have thus been deprived of their mother, then of their stepmother and the nanny and now are faced with a father serving a jailterm. There had been complaints about the school where some of the adherents were teaching, as some of them had abused and hit some children. The question was raised as how well the children actually are protected although attending a public school and how mental manipulation can drive people to murder.

**MENTAL MANIPULATION IN A DESTRUCTIVE CULT**

**Mental manipulation,**as used in a destructive cult, and certainly used by Maud Pison, is the influence a person or a group of persons have on an individual, through systematic mind control in order to achieve a change in the person’s:

* Feelings
* Thoughts
* Intelligence
* Behaviour
* Will

It can be difficult to understand how a person’s mind and thoughts can change so much. We are usually not educated to believe that ALL of us can be so easily manipulated. We like to think of ourselves as immune to manipulation, especially those among us who have an academic background, as I have, and who are thus used to analyse and to think critically. However, it is conceited to think that we are always governed by our thoughts. Actually, it is quite the opposite. Humans ALWAYS have feelings but usually we don’t let them govern our thoughts. However we can all of us become confronted with problems (death, divorce, disease…) when we momentarily become vulnerable. In such times, it is easy to let our emotions guide our thoughts instead of the opposite.

A cult leader, through systematic mental manipulation, is able to put an individual in such a stressful situation that he cannot use his mind correctly anymore. This stress or psychosis makes the cult member:

* Mentally unstable
* Psychotic
* Emotionally unstable
* Cognitively unstable

This stress leads to a chemical reaction in the brain that then starts to produce endorphins, or "happy hormones" that calm down the individual. But as soon as the stress diminishes, the member experiences abstinence problems. The member then becomes nervous, scared, anguished, irritable, sleepless and finally depressed and neurotic. In order to ease his pain, the member goes back to the group. This syndrome is called the Sisyphus syndrome (after the Greek god).

Another way for the member to numb himself is to meditate for hours, alternatively pray, say a mantra, talk in tongues. This syndrome is called "the empty room syndrome", i.e. no brains no pain. The member becomes also exhausted mentally and physically. Thus, the individual has become totally pacified. He is now his own slave. The cult leader manipulates him easily.

The guru, Maud Pison, which I met through a contact, hypnotised me very quickly into such a state. I had family problems and I needed some help. This olderly lady, living with her Labrador and what I thought was her maid (actually another adherent who still, although the guru is dead, is in her mind at the grips of her crazy ideology) in a big house outside of Paris, was presented to me. I had at the time, in 1990, never heard of cults except for the strange looking individuals one saw sometimes in the streets of Stockholm, dressed in funny robes, playing music and with their heads shaved, and wouldn’t have dreamt that this elderly, a bit religious woman, would be destructive and manipulative. On the contrary, I thought that I had met some saint who spent her life helping others. At least that was what she told me.

She had an Institute also, *l’Institut de Recherches Psychanalytiques,*the Institute for Psychanalytical Reserch, where she trained people. It wasn’t until a year later that I met other adherents that I thought were her "patients" and "students"; at least that’s how she presented them to me. Neither did I know then that she’d already been condemned by the French courts, but never put in jail unfortunatly. I was soon put under her spell, swearing only by her words, her ideology of New Age (reincarnation, negative vibrations and people, the pendulum etc).

**CHILDREN IN CULTS**

**Birth:**

After having manipulated the future parents into "robot like" individuals, some will be matched together by the leader in order to get children. Maud Pison thus "married off" individuals who usually would have nothing to do with each other (she also created several divorces). In some cults, the members are allowed to choose a partner (but in any case not outside of the group); sometimes the members are not allowed to get married at all. The women in some cults are told to get pregnant with different members, with the leader or with a stranger. In the most extreme cases, the leader hopes to be able to clone "robot babies".

The parents are, in all different cults that I’ve encountered, infantilised by the leader. I was told, along with the other adherents, that I should "become a child of God and of Her" (being his "wife" and "the reincarnation of the Virgin Mary"), and that I should abdicate my role as an authority and as an example for my children. Maud Pison was our mother and thus the mother of our children; she used to tell us that we were totally useless as parents and that without her they would have become misfits and would even have died of some horrible desease that she used to invent. As a mother, I "unconsciously homosexualised" them, among others, I was told! Instead of helping the parents and especially the mothers to become strong, loving parents, she destroyed our egos and "kidnapped" our children.

The children growing up in cults don’t have any real parents. They belong to the leader and to its ideology. They are modeled to become ideal robots. This is a phenomenon that we’ve seen in Nazi Germany with the creation of the Hitlerjugend, in the Red Army and among children soldiers in different parts of the world etc. It’s unfortunatly a phenomenon that is used by most tyrants, and gurus are nothing but tyrants.

In some cults, the children are separated from the parents immediately after birth and sent abroad, to the cult’s boarding school, to an orphanage, or given illegally to a childless couple within the same cult. From birth, those children are deprived of all their basic rights as human beings.

They are deprived of their:

* Parents
* Extended family (that is not part of the cult)
* Mother tongue
* Nationality
* Country
* Existence (for those who are never registered)
* Name (often the leader gives them a name different from their parents).

**The child’s first year:**

If the child is lucky, his mother will be allowed to nurse it. But in most cults, the leader disapproves of the mother/child relationship becoming too close. Thus I was breastfeeding my youngest child when I was told to stop immediately because of some obscure reason that I’ve forgotten now, but that Maud Pison told me. It was always about me harming my own children through some unconscious forces… Anyways, I had to stop from one moment to another and every woman who has breast-fed her child knows how terribly painful it is and that one should always stop gradually. Any excuse was good enough to make us break the bondage with our infants.

Often also the mothers in destructive cults are undernourished which makes it difficult for them to nurse. The constant stress the mother lives under doesn’t promote good health. In several cults, they are also vegetarians. The leader doesn’t want to spend any money on good and expensive food. He has to keep his slaves as cheap as possible. This is of course also true for the children who in some cases don’t even get any milk. They then experience similar symptoms as the starving children in the Third World. I was lucky enough not lo live with the guru so I did what I pleased when not around (although with a constant bad conscience).

In several cults the children don’t get enough sleep either. They are awakened at night along with their parents to pray, read a mantra, clean or whatever excuses the leader might find to awaken them. Children who don’t get enough sleep don’t grow as well as others. They also become irritated and slow. They also get infections easier, which in some cases can even be deadly. In several cults, medicine and doctors are forbidden. The members shall get well by healing, prayers or homemade herbs. Several unexplainable infant deaths have been reported from cults. Vaccines are also forbidden in most cults. Maud Pison was no exception to this, she was a "healer" with "godly powers" so who needed a doctor when around God himself/herself! My children got their shots anyhow but without her knowledge…

However, she "treated" others that reportedly became very ill, some died because of negligence I’ve heard after I left her and started my enquiries.

So many children in cults get during their first year:

* Insufficient nourishment
* Insufficient sleep
* Insufficient care and vaccines
* Sick

**The school years:**

My children weren’t allowed to attend nursery school. They would supposedly have died of all the "negative vibrations" present in the school. Being deprived of peers, living in the country, we surrounded ourselves with animals. Fortunatly we left the group when time came to going to school, but with no prior communication with others, it was a hard task to get back to normal life, especially for my eldest son who had to repeat his first year.

If the children are allowed to attend the communal school, they consider themselves different than the other schoolchildren; they belong to an "elite" with "the true message". They are constantly afraid also, as they have learned that society is evil. So instead of making friends in school, they become isolated which may lead to psychosis and even suicidal behaviour. We all know how important it is for children to "fit in" and make friends in school.

These children don’t either have any motivation to study, as the world "will anyways collapse" and their leader become its True Master! Maud Pison talked of the creation of a "New World" where only a few, i.e. her followers, would survive and she would reign…

The language is also a problem: one and the same word means something different in the cult and in the society. Each cult creates its own "language" to distinguish itself and its members from the "outside" world. Thus Maud Pison talked about "ufos", "vibes", "new world", "listen to God" etc, all concepts that only her adherents knew of, in order to create a closed mini-society.

The language codes also make the members confused and hypnotised. Keeping in mind that their brains should function as little as possible, to make them concentrate on trivial things is a way to numb their minds in order to manipulate them. It is difficult for small children to understand the difference between the same word being used differently in school and in the cult.

The children belonging to cults have to learn early on to fool the teachers, to manipulate them and to lie. They are taught in the cult, that it is okay to do so in the "evil world of school". Thus they aren’t even ashamed of what they are doing. They are already being drilled to believe that the leader’s "law" is above society’s law. They are trained to become small criminals. Let us not forget that these destructive cults are fraudulent, they very seldom pay their taxes, they destroy people’s lives, they use individuals as slaves, they often sexually abuse their followers, just to take a few examples from my experience as a counselor and as a victim of all these offenses and more so.

Several cults have their own schools where they can indoctrinate the children as they wish. These schools are supposed to follow the school plan but, as the teachers belong to the group, they can indoctrinate the children as they wish. Then there are all the children that have been sent abroad to the cults’ schools where nobody checks them, as in India or in Africa. These children grow up in an environment where they have hardly any access to a normal life and to societal norms. If they manage to get out of the cult after schooling, they have to relearn nearly everything about how our society at large functions and the norms prevalent in a democratic society, where choices are part of everyday life, based on personal experience, taste, but also on what most of us have learned to be a correct way of behaving.

For the cult-children who are going to public schools the result is:

* Isolation, as they are not allowed to get friends outside of the cult
* Language barrier: different definitions of the same word
* Deceit: they are taught by the cult leader to cheat
* No study motivation (the world as we know it will anyhow dissapear)
* Fear of demons/negative vibrations/spirits

**Teenagers:**

What happens then with rebellious teenagers in a cult? When the hormones are in turmoil and they’re supposed to rebel? Against whom should they rebel? Their parents are infantilised; they are themselves like small children. The leader being the Parent. If they do rebel, there are camps in several cults where they are drilled into becoming obedient servants.

The teenagers growing sexuality is another problem. In some cults, the children are taught early on to have intercourse with their parents, with the leader or with each other. There have been several pedophile scandals within cults. In other cults, sexuality is a totally forbidden area. Either way it is going to create problems for the young cult member.

One of Sesam’s boardmembers grew up in a cult. She was told that the guru was her fatherfigure as well as her lover when he wished to. She had to do whatever he told her to do. As a result, her relationships, once out of the cult, have been based on domination. Eventually, she managed to escape from those grips on her, but she now surrounds herself only with cats and is still undergoing therapy after more than ten years outside of the cult.

The cult-teenager has learned to live in two cultures. In "society" where he doesn’t have to say the truth at all or respect its rules as they are undermined by the cult-leader, and in the cult where everything is strictly regulated from the way he should dress, eat, sleep, to whom he should talk to and what he is allowed to say. The youth thus lives in a fusion with the leader, in a sort of incestuous relationship. The leader is like the overwhelming mother figure that doesn’t allow the member any freedom. The father figure, present in most families, is non-existent. The triangle: father, mother, child is erased in a totalitarian group. The child is entirely in the hands of the guru. The only thing he can do is either to deny his aggressiveness or to identify himself with the aggressor (the Stockholm syndrome).

The youth’s total dependence and love to the leader makes him experience a trauma like the one of an incestuous trauma independently if it has truly occurred or not. The teenagers in a cult:

* Cannot rebel
* They experience an incestuous relationship with the leader
* They are infantilised: they are thus prohibited the normal growing up procedure

**Battered children in cults:**

Battered children in a cult, experience a different situation than the ones battered in a "normal family" where usually spanking is a result of the parent’s loosing its temper. In a totalitarian group, the violence (verbal or physical) is systematised. It is part of the structure of the group. The children are being indoctrinated through the violence. It is also through the violence that the leader can measure the indoctrination of the parents. A non-manipulated parent would never just leave his child to another family, send him abroad, lock him up in a wardrobe or whatever the leader has told him to do. The parent’s submissiveness is an indication of the degree of pacification of the member.

The children also get used to the parents love being shown in the form of punishment. They are told that punishment is essential for expulsing demons/ toxins/ negative energy … No children may disobey.

Every day life in a cult implies hard work often even for small children; with lots of work, little sleep and food, there is no time left to play. The children must early on be indoctrinated and drilled so that their personalities cannot develop and so that they learn humility. Otherwise they are severely punished. The parents think that it is for their best as their fear of eternal death or exclusion is greater than the revulsion of punishing their children. They are taught that it is a necessity in order to reach the ultimate goal: to create a new world at the image of the leader and his ideology.

In some groups the children are taught to be self-critical and "confess" publicly. Children are also encouraged to accuse other children. The informer system is excellent to use to manipulate and control the members. They are even taught to accuse their own parents and sometimes to punish them. They thus become the parents’ parent.

Within the totalitarian groups or cults there exits:

* Systematised violence
* Punishments
* Self-criticism
* False accusations

**Conclusion**

A totalitarian movement, or a cult, hinders the child to develop into a fully responsible adult and citizen. The cult denies the child’s right to his identity, his personality, a structure, an intellect and a critical thinking.

The guru creates a fictive or virtual world in which the child is locked into as if it lived in a videogame where the leader decides all the rules. The child becomes robotized and cannot move without the cult as a prothesis. If he one day dares to leave the cult, he has no identity, no past of his own and is more or less stateless.

It is very difficult for a child who has grown up in this weird, close, manipulative cult-world to become a normal citizen again. What is considered right and wrong for most of us isn’t at all that obvious for a former cult-member. After having been taught that the world is black and white, it is difficult to learn how to choose. The brain has to start to work again. However, the brain is like a muscle and, even after years of slumbering, it can be trained to think critically again. But, for a child that has grown up in a cult, he has to relearn almost from scratch what our democratic societies stand for, basic human rights, womens’ and childrens’ rights, morals, just to mention some basic rules.

Trust is another problem for the former member. After years of indoctrination that the world outside the cult is "evil", after having been tricked by the cult-leader, the former member must learn to trust himself, to trust society and to trust other people.

Having myself had the experience with a totalitarian cult, where also several teenagers were involved, having had my own children in a cult although young when we left, and having been counseling many others, I know how terribly destructive a manipulative cult is for everyone involved and especially for those who’ve had no prior experience of living a "normal life". I do believe however, that it is an experience that can be turned into a learning-experience if the former adherent can be helped to understand the manipulative techniques behind this very insidious way of terrorising it’s members, to accept to go forward in life and not to become bitter and angered, to learn again to trust in oneself and in one’s own judgment.

I do believe though that it should be a basic right for every child to grow up protected from such abuses. Children have no religious or political ideas of their own. They should be allowed to be just children and have a normal schooling at least. I am therefore not an adherent of confessional schools in any form. I think that religion or belief should be a private matter and that children when old enough to understand what it is all about should be allowed to choose if they want to belong to their parents religion, or to another, or to no religion at all. I think that the schools, within the framework of the history classes for example, should teach all the major religions, their rituals, beliefs etc. as well as talk about the existence of manipulative groups such as the ones I, and thousands of others, have encountered.

*Written by Anne Edelstam  
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