

Coercive Persuasion and Attitude Change

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By Richard J. Ofshe, Ph.D.

Coercive persuasion and thought reform are alternate names for programs of social influence capable of producing substantial behavior and attitude change through the use of coercive tactics, persuasion, and/or interpersonal and group-based influence manipulations (Schein 1961; Lifton 1961). Such programs have also been labeled "brainwashing" (Hunter 1951), a term more often used in the media than in scientific literature. However identified, these programs are distinguishable from other elaborate attempts to influence behavior and attitudes, to socialize, and to accomplish social control. Their distinguishing features are their totalistic qualities (Lifton 1961), the types of influence procedures they employ, and the organization of these procedures into three distinctive subphases of the overall process (Schein 1961; Ofshe and Singer 1986). The key factors that distinguish coercive persuasion from other training and socialization schemes are:

1. The reliance on intense interpersonal and psychological attack to destabilize an individual's sense of self to promote compliance
2. The use of an organized peer group
3. Applying interpersonal pressure to promote conformity
4. The manipulation of the totality of the person's social environment to stabilize behavior once modified

Thought-reform programs have been employed in attempts to control and indoctrinate individuals, societal groups (e.g., intellectuals), and even entire populations. Systems intended to accomplish these goals can vary considerably in their construction. Even the first systems studied under the label "thought reform" ranged from those in which confinement and physical assault were employed (Schein 1956; Lifton 1954; Lifton 1961 pp. 19-85) to applications that were carried out under nonconfined conditions, in which nonphysical coercion substituted for assault (Lifton 1961, pp. 242-273; Schein 1961, pp. 290-298). The individuals to whom these influence programs were applied were in some cases unwilling subjects (prisoner populations) and in other cases volunteers who sought to participate in what they believed might be a career-beneficial, educational experience (Lifton 1981, p. 248).

Significant differences existed between the social environments and the control mechanisms employed in the two types of programs initially studied. Their similarities, however, are of more importance in understanding their ability to influence behavior and beliefs than are their differences. They shared the utilization of coercive persuasion's key effective-influence mechanisms: a focused attack on the stability of a person's sense of self; reliance on peer group interaction; the development of interpersonal bonds between targets and their controllers and peers; and an ability to control communication among participants. Edgar Schein captured the essential similarity between the types of programs in his definition of the coercive-persuasion phenomenon. Schein noted that even for prisoners, what happened was a subjection to "unusually intense and prolonged persuasion" that they could not avoid; thus, "they were coerced into allowing themselves to be persuaded" (Schein 1961, p. 18).

Programs of both types (confined/assaultive and nonconfined/nonassaultive) cause a range of cognitive and behavioral responses. The reported cognitive responses vary from apparently rare instances, classifiable as internalized belief change (enduring change), to a frequently observed transient alteration in beliefs that appears to be situationally adaptive and, finally, to reactions of nothing less than firm intellectual resistance and hostility (Lifton 1961, pp. 117-151, 399-415; Schein 1961, pp. 157-166).

The phrase situationally adaptive belief change refers to attitude change that is not stable and is environment dependent. This type of response to the influence pressures of coercive-persuasion programs is perhaps the most surprising of the responses that have been observed. The combination of psychological assault on the self, interpersonal pressure, and the social organization of the environment creates a situation that can only be coped with by adapting and acting so as to present oneself to others in terms of the ideology supported in the environment (see below for discussion). Eliciting the desired verbal and interactive behavior sets up conditions likely to stimulate the development of attitudes consistent with and that function to rationalize new behavior in which the individual is engaging. Models of attitude change, such as the theory of Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger 1957) or Self-Perception Theory (Bern 1972), explain the tendency for consistent attitudes to develop as a consequence of behavior.

The surprising aspect of the situationally adaptive response is that the attitudes that develop are unstable. They tend to change dramatically once the person is removed from an environment that has totalistic properties and is organized to support the adaptive attitudes. Once removed from such an environment, the person is able to interact with others who permit and encourage the expression of criticisms and doubts, which were previously stifled because of the normative rules of the reform environment (Schein 1961, p. 163; Lifton 1961, pp. 87-116, 399-415; Ofshe and Singer 1986). This pattern of change, first in one direction and then the other, dramatically highlights the profound importance of social support in the

explanation of attitude change and stability. This relationship has for decades been one of the principal interests in the field of social psychology.

Statements supportive of the proffered ideology that indicate adaptive attitude change during the period of the target's involvement in the reform environment and immediately following separation should not be taken as mere playacting in reaction to necessity. Targets tend to become genuinely involved in the interaction. The reform experience focuses on genuine vulnerabilities as the method for undermining self-concept: manipulating genuine feelings of guilt about past conduct; inducing the target to make public denunciations of his or her prior life as being unworthy; and carrying this forward through interaction with peers for whom the target develops strong bonds. Involvement developed in these ways prevents the target from maintaining both psychological distance or emotional independence from the experience.

The reaction pattern of persons who display adaptive attitude-change responses is not one of an immediate and easy rejection of the proffered ideology. This response would be expected if they had been faking their reactions as a conscious strategy to defend against the pressures to which they were exposed. Rather, they appear to be conflicted about the sentiments they developed and their reevaluation of these sentiments. This response has been observed in persons reformed under both confined/assaultive and nonconfined/ nonassaultive reform conditions (Schein 1962, pp. 163- 165; Lifton 1961, pp. 86-116, 400- 401).

Self-concept and belief-related attitude change in response to closely controlled social environments have been observed in other organizational settings that, like reform programs, can be classified as total institutions (Goffman 1957). Thought-reform reactions also appear to be related to, but are far more extreme than, responses to the typically less-identity-assaultive and less- totalistic socialization programs carried out by organizations with central commitments to specifiable ideologies, and which undertake the training of social roles (e.g., in military academies and religious-indoctrination settings (Donbush 1955; Hulme 1956).

The relatively rare instances in which belief changes are internalized and endure have been analyzed as attributable to the degree to which the acquired belief system and imposed peer relations function fully to resolve the identity crisis that is routinely precipitated during the first phase of the reform process (Schein 1961, p. 164; Lifton 1961, pp. 131-132, 400). Whatever the explanation for why some persons internalize the proffered ideology in response to the reform procedures, this extreme reaction should be recognized as both atypical and probably attributable to an interaction between long-standing personality traits and the mechanisms of influence utilized during the reform process.

Much of the attention to reform programs was stimulated because it was suspected that a predictable and highly effective method for profoundly changing beliefs had

been designed, implemented, and was in operation. These suspicions are not supported by fact. Programs identified as thought reforming are not very effective at actually changing people's beliefs in any fashion that endures apart from an elaborate supporting social context. Evaluated only on the criterion of their ability genuinely to change beliefs, the programs have to be judged abject failures and massive wastes of effort.

The programs are, however, impressive in their ability to prepare targets for integration into and long-term participation in the organizations that operate them. Rather than assuming that individual belief change is the major goal of these programs, it is perhaps more productive to view the programs as elaborate role-training regimes. That is, as resocialization programs in which targets are being prepared to conduct themselves in a fashion appropriate for the social roles they are expected to occupy following conclusion of the training process.

If identified as training programs, it is clear that the goals of such programs are to reshape behavior and that they are organized around issues of social control important to the organizations that operate the programs. Their objectives then appear to be behavioral training of the target, which result in an ability to present self, values, aspirations, and past history in a style appropriate to the ideology of the controlling organization; to train an ability to reason in terms of the ideology; and to train a willingness to accept direction from those in authority with minimum apparent resistance. Belief changes that follow from successfully coercing or inducing the person to behave in the prescribed manner can be thought of as by-products of the training experience. As attitude-change models would predict, they arise "naturally" as a result of efforts to reshape behavior (Festinger 1957; Bem 1972).

The tactical dimension most clearly distinguishing reform processes from other sorts of training programs is the reliance on psychological coercion: procedures that generate pressure to comply as a means of escaping a punishing experience (e.g., public humiliation, sleep deprivation, guilt manipulation, etc.). Coercion differs from other influencing factors also present in thought reform, such as content-based persuasive attempts (e.g., presentation of new information, reference to authorities, etc.) or reliance on influence variables operative in all interaction (status relations, demeanor, normal assertiveness differentials, etc.). Coercion is principally utilized to gain behavioral compliance at key points and to ensure participation in activities likely to have influencing effects; that is, to engage the person in the role training activities and in procedures likely to lead to strong emotional responses, to cognitive confusion, or to attributions to self as the source of beliefs promoted during the process.

Robert Lifton labeled the extraordinarily high degree of social control characteristic of organizations that operate reform programs as their totalistic quality (Lifton 1961). This concept refers to the mobilization of the entirety of the

person's social, and often physical, environment in support of the manipulative effort. Lifton identified eight themes or properties of reform environments that contribute to their totalistic quality:

1. Control of communication
2. Emotional and behavioral manipulation
3. Demands for absolute conformity to behavior prescriptions derived from the ideology
4. Obsessive demands for confession
5. Agreement that the ideology is faultless
6. Manipulation of language in which cliches substitute for analytic thought
7. Reinterpretation of human experience and emotion in terms of doctrine
8. Classification of those not sharing the ideology as inferior and not worthy of respect

(Lifton 1961, pp. 419-437, 1987).

Schein's analysis of the behavioral sequence underlying coercive persuasion separated the process into three subphases: unfreezing, change, and refreezing (Schein 1961, pp. 111-139). Phases differ in their principal goals and their admixtures of persuasive, influencing, and coercive tactics. Although others have described the process differently, their analyses are not inconsistent with Schein's three-phase breakdown (Lifton 1961; Farber, Harlow, and West 1956; Meerloo 1956; Sargent 1957; Ofshe and Singer 1986). Although Schein's terminology is adopted here, the descriptions of phase activities have been broadened to reflect later research.

Unfreezing is the first step in eliciting behavior and developing a belief system that facilitates the long-term management of a person. It consists of attempting to undercut a person's psychological basis for resisting demands for behavioral compliance to the routines and rituals of the reform program. The goals of unfreezing are to destabilize a person's sense of identity (i.e., to precipitate an identity crisis), to diminish confidence in prior social judgments, and to foster a sense of powerlessness, if not hopelessness. Successful destabilization induces a negative shift in global self evaluations and increases uncertainty about one's values and position in society. It thereby reduces resistance to the new demands for compliance while increasing suggestibility.

Destabilization of identity is accomplished by bringing into play varying sets of manipulative techniques. The first programs to be studied utilized techniques such as repeatedly demonstrating the person's inability to control his or her own fate, the use of degradation ceremonies, attempts to induce reevaluation of the adequacy and/or propriety of prior conduct, and techniques designed to encourage the reemergence of latent feelings of guilt and emotional turmoil (Hinkle and Wolfe 1956; Lifton 1954, 1961; Schein 1956, 1961; Schein, Cooley, and Singer 1960). Contemporary programs have been observed to utilize far more psychologically sophisticated procedures to accomplish destabilization. These techniques are often adapted from the traditions of psychiatry, psychotherapy, hypnotherapy, and the human-potential movement, as well as from religious practice (Ofshe and Singer 1986; Lifton 1987).

The change phase allows the individual an opportunity to escape punishing destabilization procedures by demonstrating that he or she has learned the proffered ideology, can demonstrate an ability to interpret reality in its own terms, and is willing to participate in competition with peers to demonstrate zeal, through displays of commitment. In addition to study and/or formal instruction, the techniques used to facilitate learning and the skill basis that can lead to opinion change include scheduling events that have predictable influencing consequences, rewarding certain conduct, and manipulating emotions to create punishing experiences. Some of the practices designed to promote influence might include requiring the target to assume responsibility for the progress of less-advanced "students," to become the responsibility of those further along in the program, to assume the role of a teacher of the ideology, or to develop ever more refined and detailed confession statements that recast the person's former life in terms of the required ideological position. Group structure is often manipulated by making rewards or punishments for an entire peer group contingent on the performance of the weakest person, requiring the group to utilize a vocabulary appropriate to the ideology, making status and privilege changes commensurate with behavioral compliance, subjecting the target to strong criticism and humiliation from peers for lack of progress, and peer monitoring for expressions of reservations or dissent. If progress is unsatisfactory, the individual can again be subjected to the punishing destabilization procedures used during unfreezing to undermine identity, to humiliate, and to provoke feelings of shame and guilt.

Refreezing denotes an attempt to promote and reinforce behavior acceptable to the controlling organization. Satisfactory performance is rewarded with social approval, status gains, and small privileges. Part of the social structure of the environment is the norm of interpreting the target's display of the desired conduct as demonstrating the person's progress in understanding the errors of his or her former life. The combination of reinforcing approved behavior and interpreting its symbolic meaning as demonstrating the emergence of a new individual fosters the development of an environment-specific, supposedly reborn social identity. The person is encouraged to claim this identity and is rewarded for doing so.

Lengthy participation in an appropriately constructed and managed environment fosters peer relations, an interaction history, and other behavior consistent with a public identity that incorporates approved values and opinions. Promoting the development of an interaction history in which persons engage in cooperative activity with peers that is not blatantly coerced and in which they are encouraged but not forced to make verbal claims to "truly understanding the ideology and having been transformed," will tend to lead them to conclude that they hold beliefs consistent with their actions (i.e., to make attributions to self as the source of their behaviors). These reinforcement procedures can result in a significant degree of cognitive confusion and an alteration in what the person takes to be his or her beliefs and attitudes while involved in the controlled environment (Bem 1972; Ofshe et al. 1974).

Continuous use of refreezing procedures can sustain the expression of what appears to be significant attitude change for long periods of time. Maintaining compliance with a requirement that the person display behavior signifying unreserved acceptance of an imposed ideology and gaining other forms of long-term behavioral control requires continuous effort. The person must be carefully managed, monitored, and manipulated through peer pressure, the threat or use of punishment (material, social, and emotional) and through the normative rules of the community (e.g., expectations prohibiting careers independent of the organization, prohibiting formation of independent nuclear families, prohibiting accumulation of significant personal economic resources, etc.) (Whyte 1976; Ofshe 1980; Ofshe and Singer 1986).

The rate at which a once-attained level of attitude change deteriorates depends on the type of social support the person receives over time (Schein 1961 pp. 158-166; Lifton pp. 399-415). In keeping with the refreezing metaphor, even when the reform process is to some degree successful at shaping behavior and attitudes, the new shape tends to be maintained only as long as temperature is appropriately controlled.

One of the essential components of the reform process in general and of long-term refreezing in particular is monitoring and limiting the content of communication among persons in the managed group (Lifton 1961; Schein 1960; Ofshe et al.] 974). If successfully accomplished, communication control eliminates a person's ability safely to express criticisms or to share private doubts and reservations. The result is to confer on the community the quality of being a spy system of the whole, upon the whole.

The typically observed complex of communication-controlling rules requires people to self-report critical thoughts to authorities or to make doubts known only in approved and readily managed settings (e.g., small groups or private counseling sessions). Admitting "negativity" leads to punishment or reindoctrination through procedures sometimes euphemistically termed "education" or "therapy." Individual

social isolation is furthered by rules requiring peers to "help" colleagues to progress, by reporting their expressions of doubt. If it is discovered, failure to make a report is punishable, because it reflects on the low level of commitment of the person who did not "help" a colleague to make progress.

Controlling communication effectively blocks individuals from testing the appropriateness of privately held critical perceptions against the views of even their families and most-valued associates. Community norms encourage doubters to interpret lingering reservations as signs of a personal failure to comprehend the truth of the ideology; if involved with religious organizations, to interpret doubt as evidence of sinfulness or the result of demonic influences; if involved with an organization delivering a supposed psychological or medical therapy, as evidence of continuing illness and/or failure to progress in treatment.

The significance of communication control is illustrated by the collapse of a large psychotherapy organization in immediate reaction to the leadership's loss of effective control over interpersonal communication. At a meeting of several hundred of the members of this "therapeutic community" clients were allowed openly to voice privately held reservations about their treatment and exploitation. They had been subjected to abusive practices, which included assault, sexual and economic exploitation, extremes of public humiliation, and others. When members discovered the extent to which their sentiments about these practices were shared by their peers they rebelled (Ayalla 1985).

Two widespread myths have developed from misreading the early studies of thought reforming influence systems (Zablocki 1991). These studies dealt in part with their use to elicit false confessions in the Soviet Union after the 1917 revolution; from American and United Nations forces held as POWs during the Korean War; and from their application to Western missionaries held in China following Mao's revolution.

The first myth concerns the necessity and effectiveness of physical abuse in the reform process. The myth is that physical abuse is not only necessary but is the prime cause of apparent belief change. Reports about the treatment of POWs and foreign prisoners in China documented that physical abuse was present. Studies of the role of assault in the promotion of attitude change and in eliciting false confessions even from U.S. servicemen revealed, however, that it was ineffective. Belief change and compliance was more likely when physical abuse was minimal or absent (Biderman 1960). Both Schein (1961) and Lifton (1961) reported that physical abuse was a minor element in the theoretical understanding of even prison reform programs in China.

In the main, efforts at resocializing China's nationals were conducted under nonconfined/ nonassaultive conditions. Millions of China's citizens underwent reform in schools, special-training centers, factories, and neighborhood groups in

which physical assault was not used as a coercive technique. One such setting for which many participants actively sought admission, the "Revolutionary University," was classified by Lifton as the "hard core of the entire Chinese thought reform movement" (Lifton 1961,p. 248).

Attribution theories would predict that if there were differences between the power of reform programs to promote belief change in settings that were relatively more or less blatantly coercive and physically threatening, the effect would be greatest in less-coercive programs. Consistent with this expectation, Lifton concluded that reform efforts directed against Chinese citizens were "much more successful" than efforts directed against Westerners (Lifton 1961, p. 400).

A second myth concerns the purported effects of brainwashing. Media reports about thought reform's effects far exceed the findings of scientific studies--which show coercive persuasion's upper limit of impact to be that of inducing personal confusion and significant, but typically transitory, attitude change. Brainwashing was promoted as capable of stripping victims of their capacity to assert their wills, thereby rendering them unable to resist the orders of their controllers. People subjected to "brainwashing" were not merely influenced to adopt new attitudes but, according to the myth, suffered essentially an alteration in their psychiatric status from normal to pathological, while losing their capacity to decide to comply with or resist orders.

This lurid promotion of the power of thought reforming influence techniques to change a person's capacity to resist direction is entirely without basis in fact: No evidence, scientific or otherwise, supports this proposition. No known mental disorder produces the loss of will that is alleged to be the result of brainwashing. Whatever behavior and attitude changes result from exposure to the process, they are most reasonably classified as the responses of normal individuals to a complex program of influence.

The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency seems to have taken seriously the myth about brainwashing's power to destroy the will. Due, perhaps, to concern that an enemy had perfected a method for dependably overcoming will -- or perhaps in hope of being the first to develop such a method --the Agency embarked on a research program, code-named MKULTRA. It became a pathetic and tragic failure. On the one hand, it funded some innocuous and uncontroversial research projects; on the other, it funded or supervised the execution of several far-fetched, unethical, and dangerous experiments that failed completely (Marks 1979; Thomas 1989).

Although no evidence suggests that thought reform is a process capable of stripping a person of the will to resist, a relationship does exist between thought reform and changes in psychiatric status. The stress and pressure of the reform process cause some percentage of psychological casualties. To reduce resistance and to motivate behavior change, thought-reform procedures rely on psychological

stressors, induction of high degrees of emotional distress, and on other intrinsically dangerous influence techniques (Heide and Borkovec 1983). The process has a potential to cause psychiatric injury, which is sometimes realized. The major early studies (Hinkle and Wolfe 1961; Lifton 1961; Schein 1961) reported that during the unfreezing phase individuals were intentionally stressed to a point at which some persons displayed symptoms of being on the brink of psychosis. Managers attempted to reduce psychological pressure when this happened, to avoid serious psychological injury to those obviously near the breaking point.

Contemporary programs speed up the reform process through the use of more psychologically sophisticated and dangerous procedures to accomplish destabilization. In contemporary programs the process is sometimes carried forward on a large group basis, which reduces the ability of managers to detect symptoms of impending psychiatric emergencies. In addition, in some of the "therapeutic" ideologies espoused by thought reforming organizations, extreme emotional distress is valued positively, as a sign of progress. Studies of contemporary programs have reported on a variety of psychological injuries related to the reform process. Injuries include psychosis, major depressions, manic episodes, and debilitating anxiety (Glass, Kirsch, and Parris 1977, Haaken and Adams 1983, Heide and Borkovec 1983; Higget and Murray 1983; Kirsch and Glass 1977; Yalom and Lieberman 1971; Lieberman 1987; Singer and Ofshe 1990).

Contemporary thought-reform programs are generally far more sophisticated in their selection of both destabilization and influence techniques than were the programs studied during the 1950s (see Ofshe and Singer 1986 for a review). For example, hypnosis was entirely absent from the first programs studied but is often observed in modern programs. In most modern examples in which hypnosis is present, it functions as a remarkably powerful technique for manipulating subjective experience and for intensifying emotional response. It provides a method for influencing people to imagine impossible events such as those that supposedly occurred in their "past lives," the future, or during visits to other planets. If persons so manipulated misidentify the hypnotically induced fantasies, and classify them as previously unavailable memories, their confidence in the content of a particular ideology can be increased (Bainbridge and Stark 1980).

Hypnosis can also be used to lead people to allow themselves to relive actual traumatic life events (e.g., rape, childhood sexual abuse, near-death experiences, etc.) or to fantasize the existence of such events and, thereby, stimulate the experience of extreme emotional distress. When imbedded in a reform program, repeatedly leading the person to experience such events can function simply as punishment, useful for coercing compliance.

Accounts of contemporary programs also describe the use of sophisticated techniques intended to strip away psychological defenses, to induce regression to

primitive levels of coping, and to flood targets with powerful emotion (Ayalla 1985; Haaken and Adams 1983; Hockman 1984; Temerlin and Temerlin 1982). In some instances stress and fatigue have been used to promote hallucinatory experiences that are defined as therapeutic (Gerstel 1982). Drugs have been used to facilitate disinhibition and heightened suggestibility (Watkins 1980). Thought-reform subjects have been punished for disobedience by being ordered to self-inflict severe pain, justified by the claim that the result will be therapeutic (Bellack et al. v. Murietta Foundation et al.).

Programs of coercive persuasion appear in various forms in contemporary society. They depend on the voluntary initial participation of targets. This is usually accomplished because the target assumes that there is a common goal that unites him or her with the organization or that involvement will confer some benefit (e.g., relief of symptoms, personal growth, spiritual development, etc.). Apparently some programs were developed based on the assumption that they could be used to facilitate desirable changes (e.g., certain rehabilitation or psychotherapy programs). Some religious organizations and social movements utilize them for recruitment purposes. Some commercial organizations utilize them as methods for promoting sales. Under unusual circumstances, modern police-interrogation methods can exhibit some of the properties of a thought-reform program. In some instances, reform programs appear to have been operated for the sole purpose of gaining a high degree of control over individuals to facilitate their exploitation (Ofshe 1986; McGuire and Norton 1988; Watkins 1980).

Virtually any acknowledged expertise or authority can serve as a power base to develop the social structure necessary to carry out thought reform. In the course of developing a new form of rehabilitation, psychotherapy, religious organization, utopian community, school, or sales organization it is not difficult to justify the introduction of thought-reform procedures.

Perhaps the most famous example of a thought-reforming program developed for the ostensible purpose of rehabilitation was Synanon, a drug treatment program (Sarbin and Adler 1970, Yabionsky 1965; Ofshe et al. 1974). The Synanon environment possessed all of Lifton's eight themes. It used as its principle coercive procedure a highly aggressive encounter/therapy group interaction. In form it resembled "struggle groups" observed in China (Whyte 1976), but it differed in content. Individuals were vilified and humiliated not for past political behavior but for current conduct as well as far more psychologically intimate subjects, such as early childhood experiences, sexual experiences, degrading experiences as adults, etc. The coercive power of the group experience to affect behavior was substantial as was its ability to induce psychological injury (Lieberman, Yalom, and Miles 1973; Ofshe et al. 1974).

Allegedly started as a drug-rehabilitation program, Synanon failed to accomplish significant long-term rehabilitation. Eventually, Synanon's leader, Charles

Diederich, promoted the idea that any degree of drug abuse was incurable and that persons so afflicted needed to spend their lives in the Synanon community. Synanon's influence program was successful in convincing many that this was so. Under Diederich's direction, Synanon evolved from an organization that espoused non-violence into one that was violent. Its soldiers were dispatched to assault and attempt to murder persons identified by Diederich as Synanon's enemies (Mitchell, Mitchell, and Ofshe 1981).

The manipulative techniques of self-styled messiahs, such as People's Temple leader Jim Jones (Reiterman 1982), and influence programs operated by religious organizations, such as the Unification Church (Taylor 1978) and Scientology (Wallis 1977; Bainbridge and Stark 1980), can be analyzed as thought-reform programs. The most controversial recruitment system operated by a religious organization in recent American history was that of the Northern California branch of the Unification Church (Reverend Mr. Moon's organization). The influence program was built directly from procedures of psychological manipulation that were commonplace in the human-potential movement (Bromley and Shupe 1981). The procedures involved various group-based exercises as well as events designed to elicit from participant's information about their emotional needs and vulnerabilities. Blended into this program was content intended slowly to introduce the newcomer to the group's ideology. Typically, the program's connection with the Unification Church or any religious mission was denied during the early stages of the reform process. The target was monitored around the clock and prevented from communicating with peers who might reinforce doubt and support a desire to leave. The physical setting was an isolated rural facility far from public transportation.

Initial focus on personal failures, guilt-laden memories, and unfulfilled aspirations shifted to the opportunity to realize infantile desires and idealistic goals, by affiliating with the group and its mission to save the world. The person was encouraged to develop strong affective bonds with current members. They showed unflinching interest, affection, and concern, sometimes to the point of spoon-feeding the person's meals and accompanying the individual everywhere, including to the toilet. If the unfreezing and change phases of the program succeeded, the individual was told of the group's affiliation with the Unification Church and assigned to another unit of the organization within which re-freezing procedures could be carried forward.

Influence procedures now commonly used during modern police interrogation can sometimes inadvertently manipulate innocent persons' beliefs about their own innocence and, thereby, cause them falsely to confess. Confessions resulting from accomplishing the unfreezing and change phases of thought reform are classified as coerced-internalized false confessions (Kassin and Wrightsman 1985; Gudjonsson and MacKeith 1988). Although they rarely come together simultaneously, the ingredients necessary to elicit a temporarily believed false

confession are: erroneous police suspicion, the use of certain commonly employed interrogation procedures, and some degree of psychological vulnerability in the suspect. Philip Zimbardo (1971) has reviewed the coercive factors generally present in modern interrogation settings. Richard Ofshe (1989) has identified those influence procedures that if present in a suspect's interrogation contributes to causing unfreezing and change.

Techniques that contribute to unfreezing include falsely telling a suspect that the police have evidence proving the person's guilt (e.g., fingerprints, eyewitness testimony, etc.). Suspects may be given a polygraph examination and then falsely told (due either to error or design) that they failed and the test reveals their unconscious knowledge of guilt. Suspects may be told that their lack of memory of the crime was caused by an alcohol or drug induced blackout, was repressed, or is explained because the individual is a multiple personality.

The techniques listed above regularly appear in modern American police interrogations. They are used to lead persons who know that they have committed the crime at issue to decide that the police have sufficient evidence to convict them or to counter typical objections to admitting guilt (e.g., "I can't remember having done that."). In conjunction with the other disorienting and distressing elements of a modern accusatory interrogation, these tactics can sometimes lead innocent suspects to doubt themselves and question their lack of knowledge of the crime. If innocent persons subjected to these sorts of influence techniques do not reject the false evidence and realize that the interrogators are lying to them, they have no choice but to doubt themselves.

Tactics used to change the suspect's position and elicit a confession include maneuvers designed to intensify feelings of guilt and emotional distress following from the suspect's assumption of guilt. Suspects may be offered an escape from the emotional distress through confession. It may also be suggested that confession will provide evidence of remorse that will benefit the suspect in court.

Thought reform is not an easy process to study for several reasons. The extraordinary totalistic qualities and hyperorganization of thought-reforming environments, together with the exceptional nature of the influence tactics that appear within them, put the researcher in a position roughly analogous to that of an anthropologist entering into or interviewing someone about a culture that is utterly foreign. The researcher cannot assume that he or she understands or even knows the norms of the new environment. This means that until the researcher is familiar with the constructed environment within which the reform process takes place, it is dangerous to make the routine assumptions about context that underlie research within one's own culture. This problem extends to vocabulary as well as to norms and social structure.

The history of research on the problem has been one in which most of the basic descriptive work has been conducted through post-hoc interviewing of persons exposed to the procedures. The second-most frequently employed method has been that of participant observation. Recently, in connection with work being done on police interrogation methods, it has been possible to analyze contemporaneous recordings of interrogation sessions in which targets' beliefs are actually made to undergo radical change. All this work has contributed to the development of an understanding of the thought-reform phenomenon in several ways.

Studying the reform process demonstrates that it is no more or less difficult to understand than any other complex social process and produces no results to suggest that something new has been discovered. The only aspect of the reform process that one might suggest is new, is the order in which the influence procedures are assembled and the degree to which the target's environment is manipulated in the service of social control. This is at most an unusual arrangement of commonplace bits and pieces.

Work to date has helped establish a dividing line between the lurid fantasies about mysterious methods for stripping one's capacity to resist control and the reality of the power of appropriately designed social environments to influence the behavior and decisions of those engaged by them. Beyond debunking myths, information gathered to date has been used in two ways to further the affirmative understanding of thought reform: It has been possible to develop descriptions of the social structure of thought-reforming environments, of their operations, and to identify the range of influence mechanisms they tend to incorporate; the second use of these data has been to relate the mechanisms of influence present in the reform environment to respondents' accounts of their reactions to these experiences, to increase understanding of both general response tendencies to types of influence mechanisms and the reactions of particular persons to the reform experience.

As it is with all complex, real-world social phenomena that cannot be studied experimentally, understanding information about the thought-reform process proceeds through the application of theories that have been independently developed. Explaining data that describe the type and organization of the influence procedures that constitute a thought-reform process depends on applying established social-psychological theories about the manipulation of behavior and attitude change. Assessing reports about the impact on the experiences of the personalities subjected to intense influence procedures depends on the application of current theories of personality formation and change. Understanding instances in which the reform experience appears related to psychiatric injury requires proceeding as one would ordinarily in evaluating any case history of a stress-related or other type of psychological injury.