

Cults and Sects

by

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I won't assume that everybody here disagrees with the idea of cults, because sometimes I find when I'm speaking to audiences that I have some very unexpected surprises. We find that there are members in the audiences from very well known groups, so I will be careful of what I say because I really don't want to get another flurry of legal letters with which I could probably paper my walls by now, and I'm sure Penguin won't want any more either. "Dangerous Persuaders" was a very difficult book to write and we went through months of hell just getting it published, and it hasn't stopped and yet the book was published three years ago. It's been a trying time.

I would like to expand the theme a little because the title of tonight's talk was to be "Cults and Sects." If you talk about cults and potentially dangerous groups, then you're probably only talking about a hundred in Australia, fairly well known ones, and the people who belong to those groups tend to change quite a lot. People tend to join and then leave the group. It's only a very small group of people in terms of the total population. But I'm going to tell you a story, a true story, which I think will illustrate that we are facing a far bigger and more serious problem that is really undermining many values that we hold in this country.

The story is about a family in Melbourne, the father was a barrister, the mother a doctor. They had a very strongly functioning family of five children. The eldest was 21 and the youngest was 9. I'm going to talk about Sara, who is the 21 year old. I have changed the names to protect people. Sara left school with a very high TER, she got into medicine, which was her first preference and the family naturally were quite delighted. However Sara very quickly realised that perhaps medicine wasn't really her forte and although she hadn't any undue pressure from her parents she put a great deal of pressure on herself to keep going but once she got into the hospital system she realised that it just wasn't for her.

She was feeling pretty lost and pretty desperate and not quite knowing what to do, and a young man she met at university, David, introduced her to a group. They got married within a few weeks and within 9 months they had a delightful little girl called Sunshine.

David, however, was involved with a man called Soon, who was about 50 and had a group of people that he called his followers. It turned out later that Soon was an ex-member of a very well known group, which I won't mention, an extremely well known member of a group which is renowned for having ex-members that go off and start their own little groups. He knew a lot of tricks of the trade, but he wasn't

ambitious, he was quite happy to keep it a fairly small, intimate affair with about 20 followers who all happened to be from particularly well-off backgrounds. Soon started to have quite an influence on Sara and David. David was a very, very sensitive young man, who had a great deal of trouble just coping with the real world and just how tough life was. He'd been very protected as a child and had never developed the skills you need to get you by.

Over a period of time the influence started to increase. David had become very uncomfortable with many of the things that Soon was saying and the increasing control he seemed to be having over Sara. David left the group and came to see his parents, very upset at the things that he'd observed going on in the group, at the way Soon would choose particular women in the group to become his partner for a while, and he was forming a particular attachment to Sara. About this time Soon decided that Sara needed therapy, and as you well know there are no controls whatsoever in this State of who can conduct psychotherapy; anybody, a washing machine mechanic can set themselves up as a psychotherapist if they want to. Very quickly Sara made allegations that she was starting to have memories that her father had molested her as a child.

This is a very common ploy and it's becoming more and more common. It is frightening how easy it is to change a person's history or to implant false memories, and this is done now more and more by these groups as a way of isolating a person from their family, immediately causing a rift between the family and the particular person involved in the group.

The father and the family were absolutely devastated by this; there was absolutely no evidence whatsoever. What was extraordinary was that she was supposed to have been molested until she was 18, and these were memories that were supposed to have been suppressed. There was a contradiction in terms there going on. It got to the Family Law Court, the grandparents wanted custody of the little girl because they were extremely worried about her development, but they were advised they would have no hope. David was frightened of making a stand because Soon started to say that anybody outside the group was of the devil and he was frightened he would be put into that category and he would lose any contact with his daughter. This is a very common practice, particularly with Jehovah's Witnesses. Anybody outside the church is the devil and if a parent leaves then it's a very successful way of stopping the child seeing the absent parent.

It's a very sad ending to the story. The younger brother could not cope with what was going on, became extremely depressed and confused and committed suicide. The father had a complete breakdown and could not function at all, and lost his practice, and the siblings are still trying to come to terms with what happened. The really tragic thing is that Sara changed her story after some counselling from the Family Law Court counsellors who said they didn't believe a word she was saying. She was trying to stop the child having any access to any other family members, grandparents, anybody, she was trying to control the whole situation. They pointed out to her what memory is and what memory isn't. But it was too late for her brother, too late for her father. Photographs of the father now show a completely shattered, broken man surrounded by a completely shattered family.

That's a personal story, but it illustrates that we're not just talking here about cults. We're talking about dangerous persuaders, and that's title of my book, "Dangerous Persuaders". The reason the book was so threatening to so many different groups within the community, political groups, multi-level marketing groups and motivational forces was because unlike most books in this area which tend to focus on a particular group, so everybody who wasn't in that group says, "Oh but we're all right," my book exposed the techniques that they all use and also described the psychological process. It was the first time that went beyond the beliefs and started to look at what was happening to people psychologically. Of course an awful lot of organisations in the communities who were using these techniques became very angry, and felt very threatened.

What are we going to do about this? I don't think it's too much to say that we do have a problem, even if you are a member of a group. I have absolutely no problem whatsoever with any belief that anybody wants to hold as long as it sees itself as equally accountable as everybody else in the community for what it does and what it does to its members, and that people participate with informed consent. The groups that I am concerned about are those where those two factors are not operating, and that is what distinguishes these groups, the dangerous groups, from the ones that we perhaps more commonly see. We may not agree with their beliefs because their beliefs may seem a little bit strange, but that's what happens when you live in a surrealistic multicultural society. They are the fundamental issues that we have to address.

We are not only looking at an individual problem and how to fix the individual who is involved, but we also have to realise that we are also

talking about the families. We are also talking about the community. A lot of these groups are now becoming quite politically active and they have an agenda to start to have some political clout. That's okay, as long as everybody who's voting for them knows what they're really on about. The single word that best describes these dangerous groups is "deception". You really don't know what they're on about often until you've been involved for months, and even then it is really hard to find out exactly what it is that you're dealing with, or who you're dealing with.

We're also beginning to have some other problems because we are a multicultural society, and I'd just like to make a few comments on multiculturalism. As a clinical psychologist and somebody who has a great deal of training in neuro-dynamic techniques and the use of language and the impact of language subliminally, I have grave problems with that word professionally and also as an Australian citizen. I have no problem with the policy of multiculturalism, being married to a migrant and having a daughter who has a relationship with one of the most wonderful young men I have ever met who is Filipino. I have no problem with the word "cosmopolitan" or "multiracial". The difference with the word "multicultural" is that it doesn't describe what we're on about. If we were truly a multicultural society the Irish living here would not be able to get divorced or you could just live to kill. The Americans would be able to arm themselves to the teeth and risk what happened -in the school in America in only the last couple of days. If you were from the Middle East and you felt that it was your cultural practice or your cultural right to kill your disobedient daughters you would be allowed to do so. Now that is not the case.

We do not live in a multicultural society. Because culture, if you look at the word in the dictionary is defined as "a body of knowledge," but in common usage and the way the average person understands it, culture also incorporates the laws of a country. And this is something that really has not been successfully grappled with or understood.

If you look at the TV on any night you can see why the average Australian is starting to become a little disturbed by that concept of multiculturalism, not necessarily the policy but the word. Why even people who agree with the policy feel unsettled by it. And the reason is because when they watch their TV they see a culture on the other side of the earth with laws which are intimately entwined. Laws and culture go together. And what they're seeing is the denial of human rights or the denigration of women, or things that are totally un-Australian, and what's wrong with being Australian culture anyway? The word

itself even implies to the average person - there's some very interesting research being done on this, that there's something wrong with being Australian. It's not good enough to be Australian culture. We've somehow got to be multicultural.

The reason I bring up this issue is because it's starting to have quite an impact in the sorts of groups that are beginning to form. A lot of the groups now forming - and often they're very small groups - are off-shoots of different culture groups in Australia. They think that because they claim this is their culture it is therefore okay to practice whatever their beliefs may be and it's also okay to promote them, and they believe the law will protect. The lawyers amongst you will be familiar with this. Why is it that anyone would think they would have a chance of mounting a defence of cultural practice if it isn't that we have this incredible confusion in the community about who the hell we are? Later on I'll explain just how important identity is and why that's starting to push people off into a lot of these little splinter groups.

We're starting to face a very serious problem, because we don't have any laws to protect who can set themselves up as therapists and also we have very limited control of what we call "new religious movements." They're called "NRMs" - it's no longer politically correct to talk about cults, we now talk about NRMs. In the past to monitor and control and curtail the negative consequences of some of these groups there has been a variety of approaches tried, and what I'm going to talk about tonight is some of the approaches that have been tried, why they're a problem, and suggest another way that perhaps we could be tackling it.

One of the most common things is negative media. Media have a field day with the cults, particularly when they all decide to swallow green cordial laced with poison, or whether they decide that they're going to catch a space ship behind Haley's Comet. Negative media tends to demonise these groups. The trouble is that it also tends to bond these groups together. That was very evident when my book came out. A copy of the book was obtained and a particular group then got together with all the groups and individuals mentioned in my book and mounted a concerted effort to try and get the book stopped. Fortunately they weren't successful.

A cult is defined as a hierarchal structure where you usually have one person at the top who believes they either are God or they are in direct communication with God, or gods, and there is a great deal of control and influence over the members of the group. In itself that is not necessarily harmful either to the community or to the individual.

Similarly, a sect is a breakaway group from a mainstream religion which wants to follow a particularly fundamentalist viewpoint.

The other way of trying to control these groups is to try and discredit them. There are a lot of derogatory terms being used in the literature and in the media. Brainwashing is actually a technique that was described back in the 1950s, and it was used to describe what was happening to the American prisoners in the camps of China and in the Korean War, but it is really not relevant in terms of dangerous persuaders, because usually these people are captive in some way. The minute that they are released their ideas and their personality revert to where they were before.

The other very popular phrase, which was used in about 1960, is the idea of coercive persuasion. This is a result of a book by Shien, where he talked about how you unfroze a personality and then there was the process of changing the personality and then you refroze it. Which is a greatly simplistic idea. The book was a lot more complicated than that, but that is basically what he was saying. It isn't very accurate because what we're talking about is a much more fluid process. People tend to change, even on an hourly basis, within these groups, and these groups have lots of techniques to try and keep people with the personality that they want them to maintain. So it's not as simple as you unfreeze it, you change it, you freeze it and it's stuck.

The idea of expressing this process is now called 'Mind controller thought performer' and this is based on work by a psychologist, Margaret Singer, who was very involved with helping people and families after Jonestown. As a consequence she's done an enormous amount of research in this area. Steve Hassen, who is an ex-Moonie has also become a psychologist and has done quite a bit of research. This term describes what happens when you deliberately inhibit a person's ability to think clearly or critically in order to change their beliefs or their perceptions. It's done by constantly manipulating their behaviour, what they're thinking, their emotions and their access to information. That's quite important. The person who controls your access to information controls you. That's what many of these groups do; they start to control. Whether you're allowed to watch TV or if you're allowed to read a newspaper. Often many of these groups have Bible classes that go on for hours and hours and hours and you're expected to be reading the scriptures. Often they don't make any sense and people spend hours trying to work out what the hidden meaning is, but they don't realise that it is a hypnotic confusional technique, that the

group deliberately makes things confusing, and they deliberately have them not make sense. What happens is that the mind struggles so hard to try and make sense of it, but after a while it just gives up. It's just too hard. From that point on you're very accepting of the information that is given to you.

Unfortunately it's often been left to the legal profession to try to work out what's harmful and what isn't, and I think that's got us into a lot of trouble. I think it's been an attempt to try and say, well this group's good, or this group's bad. That doesn't focus on the real issue. I've just read a paper that was sent to me by Ian Freckleton and I think it's going to leave a very valuable contribution to this whole area. Ian pointed out in his article a judgment in England where a judge is asked to decide whether a child should be brought up in The Children of God, or whether custody should be given to the grandmother. What he did, instead of trying to necessarily denigrate the group as a whole, though he did do that in parts, was start to look at the individual practices of the group. I believe as a clinical psychologist, that that's going to be a far more fruitful way of trying to have some measure of control than trying to denigrate particular groups, or trying to define cult, or trying to define coercive persuasion or mind control.

That whole area is in its infancy in terms of research, and one of the problems with the research being done is there's often a strong vested interest by those doing the research. Either they're being paid for by groups who want it to be seen to be harmless, or you've got ex-members who are starting to do research who want to vindicate their reasons for leaving the group. The whole area is fraught with problems.

How could the law bring some control into this whole area? We have some laws that we could start to use. Some of the areas that I think haven't been looked at sufficiently are things like consumer laws. One of the things that stands out with all the groups that are a problem, whether you're talking about an individual guru, or whether you are talking about somebody who's an ex-criminal who sets themselves up as a sex therapist, or whether you're talking about a new religion, is that they are extremely deceptive. People do not know what they're really getting into and the Deceptive Trade Practices would have been one way of getting action. Taxation laws have been one of the most successful ways of pulling some groups into line in America. In terms of individual gurus and amateur therapists that could be a very, very fruitful avenue in Australia.

The other way that hasn't been looked at enough is children's rights. When I talk about children's rights, Australia is party to a convention,

part of which says that, "Children are entitled to be brought up in a way that enables them to live in the wider community." In other words, they are allowed to get an education. Many of these groups deliberately stop their kids getting an education; particularly at around 15 or 16, they just disappear from school. They are also brought up with the belief that everybody outside the organisation is of the devil. Having dealt with some of the people who have left these organisations, one of their biggest problems is the phobia that they have about living in the outside world, and this has been implanted from a very early age.

The other issue is abuse of children, and I wouldn't have thought that anybody would agree that it was appropriate that a baby be tied to their high chair so that they got used to sitting still and mute, listening to hours and hours of sermons, which is a common practice, and is actually written down by the Jehovah's Witnesses. I think there's much more could be looked at in terms of how these practices impact on children and their life.

The criminal laws should be used. Assault is very common, sexual abuse and physical assault is extremely common in some of these problematic groups. That isn't an avenue that is investigated very well. There is also the duty of care. Duty of care becomes an issue wherever you have two people in a relationship where there's a large differential in the power between those people, and that is exactly what these groups are on about. One person claims a great deal of power within the group and in using that power often abuses the relationship they have with that person. Particularly when you're talking about different forms of therapy that these groups become involved in.

The existing research should also be compared, particularly regarding hypnosis and disassociate states within these groups. Unfortunately on January 1st the State government abolished all regulation on hypnosis, and when I give you the definition of hypnosis you will see how that now means open slather for all these groups. There are no controls whatsoever on what they do.

I have done a few shows for Lateline, and one I did was on the topic of accountability. The two people who appeared with me were David Millikin, who is very well known in Australia and regards himself as an expert in new religious movements and cults and James Richardson from America who is a great defender of new religious movements and has appeared in court for them many, many times in America. There are many rumours circulating about Richardson's supposed links to some of these organisations, but he is a highly regarded academic and he strongly defends them.

When we were having this debate I pointed out that I had no difficulty or problem whatsoever with any belief that anybody wanted to have, as long as those two issues of accountability and informed consent were operating. Neither David Millikin nor Richardson would answer or would agree. They evaded the question and no matter how often Kerry O'Brien waved his little green pen and tried to pin them down, they would not agree that these religious movements should be accountable for what they do or nor should people necessarily participate with informed consent. They just evaded the issue.

I think that's a real worry. For instance, one of the leaders of the Church of Scientology in Australia told me point blank that as far as they were concerned they should not be accountable for anything that they do to any of their members or to the wider community. Even the Catholic Church has got to be accountable to the laws of the country, and that has been a very painful experience for them with the allegations of sexual abuse, but nevertheless I don't think they would ever say that they don't believe they should be accountable to the wider community for what's been happening, and they have co-operated quite well.

The need for accountability is crucial, and what's happening now is that you've got a situation where the only people who are accountable are those who are qualified to do some of the things that they're doing. A clinical psychologist or a doctor or a dentist or a lawyer, -we're all accountable for what we do. We can be sued, we can be struck off and we're all on tenterhooks as professionals to make sure we do the right thing. But if you haven't got any qualifications you can pretty well do what you like. That's the state of affairs now in Victoria and throughout most of Australia. If you don't have any qualifications, do what you like; you're virtually untouchable.

I'll show you a definition of hypnosis because it's particularly pertinent to what we're talking about here. This definition has evolved relatively recently. There have been many problems with defining hypnosis because of the lack of research into exactly what the phenomenon is, but in the last few years particularly with the work of Milton Erickson and Rossi we now have a much better understanding of what we're talking about when we talk about hypnosis. Hypnosis can be a natural, spontaneous state that happens in people several times a day. But what we're talking about here is the process of hypnosis where a practitioner induces or attempts to induce in another person an altered state of attention or degree of awareness. These

phenomena include alterations in consciousness or memory, increased susceptibility to suggestion, the production in the subject of responses to ideas unfamiliar to him in his normal state of mind. And this is the crucial one. Or the changes in behaviour, perception or physiological processes of that person. That is exactly what happens in these problematic groups and where you have individuals conducting therapy sessions. If we did have regulations on hypnosis it would give us a very good way of having some measure of control over who was doing what to whom in our society. I can only urge all of you to think carefully about this and perhaps you'll be able to have some influence on politicians where clinical psychologists and hypnotherapists have not.

The process of hypnosis, how does it happen? How can somebody go into an information evening and come out a few hours later, walk home and say, "Well dear, it's been a good 20 years but I've left you behind now and I'm moving out. I've found this new way of thinking, this new way of doing things and you're holding me back."

Most physical thinking or critical thinking tends to occur in the left side of the brain. Hypnosis is actually a process where there is a whole range of techniques designed to deliberately dampen down your ability to think clearly or critically, and when you do that you heighten the activity in the right side of the brain where beliefs and emotions and feelings are located. That is why by using this process you get access to a person's beliefs and emotions and feelings in a way in which it's much easier to change them. They can not think critically, and in fact many of the groups and gurus that conduct these sessions quite openly say, "You've two brains, stop using your left brain." Your left brain is there for damn good reason. It's there to protect you; it's there to compare new information with old information and ask yourself, does this work given the information I've had in the past? Will this work in the real world? All these people happen to believe this in this room, but will this work when I go out and resume my normal life? Will this work with my family, will this work with my job? That's not to say that we shouldn't be open to new ideas and we shouldn't be open to looking at things differently. I think we all need to. But we must do that with an active critical brain as well. Left brain is not a dirty word, although you wouldn't believe that if you read the new age literature and then go to some of these groups.

There are many ways of doing hypnosis. It is not necessarily putting people into trance. You don't have to be particularly relaxed. It is the

same state or a very similar state to when you drive the car and you get somewhere and you can't remember driving there. You think, I hope I didn't knock anybody down because I can't remember, or how many red lights did I go through, or how many of those awful cameras did I go through, because I can't remember. Now you've just driven a car so you must have been pretty alert. But your mind is elsewhere. Your critical thinking is suspended while you turn over other interesting things.

That's what is called a dissociate state, a spontaneous state that we go into, where your mind is in two places at once. Hypnosis is where that state is deliberately induced. You can induce this state by dampening down people's arousal, but the most effective way of doing it, and this is something that's only just started to be understood with the new research in hypnosis, is to heighten arousal. That's why you have all that singing and chanting and "isn't this wonderful," loud music, cramming people into small spaces and not letting them out, invading their space, and lump bombing where you walk into the room and people just grab you. The easiest way of elevating someone's level of arousal is to invade their personal space. As soon as you do that you can't think straight. You think, "Oh my God it's like being assaulted," and you literally can not think clearly.

There are many other techniques which are outlined in the book. But that's the underlying process. This is what motivational speakers are all on about. Most motivational speakers have also learned a process called neuro-linguistic programming, which is a very sophisticated study of language based on actually filming people such as Milton Erickson and other well known clinical psychologists at work and analysing what is it they do that makes them so effective. A linguist and a computer programmer created this, I think. Or a real estate salesman. They have done what they say is research and now have this wonderful system called neuro-linguistic programming that they go around selling to the world and people pay different amounts of money. First of all you learn a certain amount and you become a master and then you become a trainer, and the higher up you go the more you can then go out and teach other people. The trouble is that there is no screening of the people getting involved in this, and there is a very well-known criminal in Melbourne who operates neuro-linguistic programming and who has wreaked untold damage on so many families, as well as physically assaulted those who don't agree with him.

NLP is a very sophisticated use of language and the lawyers here will all know how vital language can be, but suffice for the rest of you

it's the difference between saying to someone, "You've got to have this surgery and there is a 50 per cent chance it will kill you" or saying, "Well the good news is that this surgery has got a 50 per cent chance of allowing you to survive." The person will have a totally different experience, even though you've given the same information.

Many of these groups can set up a school. Our politicians seem to think that if we encourage anybody to start up a private school we will have all these mini Melbourne Grammars and mini Scotch Colleges all over the place. Unfortunately that's not the case. We now have a School of Scientology, and remember this is the group that have stated categorically that it doesn't believe it should be accountable to the wider community for what it does to their members. We have a local bikie gang which has decided it is going to start up its own school for its kids as well. We have another group that has a school that believes the women are inferior to the men and they have to ask permission of the swami if they want to have a child. If they don't ask permission and they have a female child then that's considered to be a punishment of God.

These schools are not accountable in any way for what they teach or how they teach it. All they have to do is account for the dollars, to make sure the dollars went into a building or paying a teacher. Now I, as an Australian, find that deeply disturbing. Also as a clinical psychologist and as a parent, I find it deeply disturbing because we are now fostering schools where values that are directly opposed to our own laws can be promoted and we are now paying for it as well. I think there has to be a big rethink about the consequences of some of these policies. You are encouraging and promoting an education policy where virtually anybody can set up a school now. There is a minimum of 50 students to get federal money, but you don't even need 50 if you really wanted to be seen to start up a school, since they have announced that schooling is no longer compulsory. Apparently, we're all under an illusion, we all used to think schooling was compulsory. If you want to keep your kids at home and teach them whatever you feel like, that's okay.

We started off talking about cults, but I hope that I have perhaps broadened that a little and got you to realise that this is a much more serious and much more insidious problem. I think the law could be looking more carefully at the issue of informed consent in relation to religions. If you were going to join the Catholic Church you only have to go into any bookshop, buy a copy of the Bible and you will have a pretty good idea of what you're going to get when you join the Catholic

Church. Similarly if you want to become a Muslim you can get a copy of the Koran and get a pretty good idea. The trouble with most of these groups is you have no idea of what you're getting into and no one is under any obligation to tell you what you're getting into either

I'd like to look at the flip side now. The flip side is to consider, why do people join these groups? We can't just protect the community and the individuals by focusing on demonising different groups and saying, well we don't believe what you believe. There's some very interesting research done recently which has now located what they call "The God Spot" in the brain. This is an area of the brain that seems to be stimulated by being involved in some kind of practice involving belief. It seems to be a very, very important part of our physiological makeup. This "God Spot" is often bigger and more powerful in some people than it is in others, though some people may be more vulnerable than other people.

We also have to ask ourselves, why are people attracted to these groups? This led to my last book that came out last year after receiving hundreds of letters from people saying, "Look this nearly destroyed my life and all I wanted was to be healthy or happy. There must be a less hazardous way of doing it." I thought, yes, that's not a bad point. I started to look at some of the books that were on the shelves, and some of the research, and realised that there were tens of thousands of articles about misery, but there was very little about happiness. When I started to look at the research I found that there had been some very interesting research done on happiness and well-being, and they'd come up with 12 crucial factors that seemed to be vital for happiness, and this is cross-cultural. All over the world all people seem to need these things in order to be healthy and happy. If you look at some of these things you can see why people at a vulnerable time in their lives join these groups, and the most vulnerable people are those with above average intelligence. These groups do not usually influence people who are borderline or low intelligence. In fact the groups usually kick them out because they undermine the authority of the leaders because they can't concentrate on what he's saying. The kinds of things that these groups really appeal to are things like the joy in the doing. That's one of the most important things to being happy. To enjoy doing something you think is important. One of the things that these groups do is say, "Look you have been specially chosen. You and nobody else can do this." People are really hooked in to that idea that yes, they can do something worthwhile. There's also a need in people to network with other people. People may feel isolated for some reason, maybe their marriage doesn't have

the intimacy that they really need in their life or maybe they've just left home and they're trying to find all new connections, new social networks. This is why so many of these groups recruit on campuses. Because it is the time when a young person's identity is quite fluid, they're trying to work out who the hell they are. These groups say, "Come with us we'll tell you who you are."

There's a very important need in people to feel that they belong and to feel that they are involved with something that is bigger than themselves. One of the things that these groups also foster very strongly is the idea of just being content with what you've got not with what you haven't got, and of course, give us all those things that you don't really need. So people often get a feeling of great contentment.

There is another way that we can use this research that's telling us what people need now for health and happiness and that is to use it as a guide when we're trying to assess whether a group or an individual is harmful or not. Is this group, or is this school, or is this guru, is he allowing people that he has control or power over to achieve these things? It may be quite a useful way of ticking off how they measure up and how they compare. In the business world if you've seen what's happened with the restructuring of companies, outsourcing and the new cult of deregulation then you can see what happens to people who suddenly lose their purpose in life, their role in life. A job is one of the most important ways that people can feel fulfilled. We have to ask ourselves what kind of community are we creating, what kind of schools are we creating for our kids? And is that going to fulfil people's needs for all those things, because if our community doesn't then people will just go off to these little groups in droves where they do feel that those needs will be fulfilled.

Our aim is to try and prevent individuals being abused, the community values being undermined, and the consequent terrible social cost and financial loss. And also the political consequences. In America some of the most influential groups are those coming out of the right wing Christian fundamentalist groups. The Pentecostal Church in particular has an enormous amount of political power and is very heavily aligned with -both the gun lobby and the repealing of the abortion laws. Theirs is quite a strong political connection and a lot of these groups are, as I said, becoming more politically active. I think it was the transcendental meditation group that stood members at the last election and have got a policy world-wide of getting as many people as possible involved in local elections.

If they're damaging we need to be thinking about doing something about it, and in summary, rather than trying to define good versus bad groups and individuals it may be more productive to focus on the practices. I think that's going to get us further, because these groups change their names like leopards change their spots. They get a bad name; they just change their name. Their ideas keep changing, their beliefs keep changing, and so if you're try and demonise a group you're not going to get very far, it's a bit like trying to sort of grapple with blanchmange, it just keeps oozing and moving all over the place.

What does have to be remembered though, is that all the practices that I'm talking about such as the processes of heightening arousal and dampening down arousal, hypnosis et cetera, depending on the circumstances and the conditions, can either be extremely beneficial or they can be devastatingly damaging. Just like chemotherapy, it can kill you in the wrong hands, or it can cure you. That has to be remembered because sometimes the processes used by quite a legitimate religious group can be exactly the same as the practices used by harmful groups, but what is different are the conditions under which they are used.

QUESTION: Our intellectuals seem to be amongst the most vulnerable. Have you any advice for students who are going to university?

DR SAMWAY. This research into this "God Spot" that we all seem to have probably supports the idea that we all do need to have some set of beliefs that helps us cope with the world. It gives us a structure for how to encounter the world and how to interact with it. Now it may be Christian beliefs, it doesn't have to be religious beliefs, it might just be the golden rule, "Do unto others as you do unto yourself," but yes, it is a good idea for all of us to grow up with a structure or a set of beliefs that helps us deal with the world, and hopefully it is an honourable set of beliefs that is congruent with the values of your community.

The Moonies divided people up into different groups, and would approach different people along different lines, depending on what groups they fell into. One of the groups was the intellectual group and they would have one kind of sales pitch for them. The other was the group that wants to be involved in something that was very meaningful and they would have another sales pitch for them. The other was the type of person who really needs to feel intimate with other people and they would have another sales pitch for them. It's really a matter of finding out from these groups' point of view, which spot it is, which

button you need to push and then push that button. Definitely the one common thing is above average intelligence.

Mind you, some groups do appeal more to some people than other groups do. Some of the motivational type groups that are around might be based on business principles; they might appeal to the very strongly left brain person who tends to be very conscientious or have a very strong sense of responsibility. Whereas your flower child will not be drawn in to a group like that. There's some evidence that the Scientologists - and I'm not saying that they are cult or they're not a cult, I'm just saying they're an interesting group of people - do seem to appeal to men. Mainly because of the machinery and electronic gadgetry that they tend to use.

QUESTION:MR BAILLIEU. The real problem in what you're saying is that the same techniques can be good or bad, depending on the context, and that really is jelly on the wall for regulation isn't it? The same person might have an off day or an on day, and do good one day and harm the next. I read your book with great interest when it came out; I thought it was a very interesting topic. I was a little disappointed at one point, when you condemned a couple of groups that I'd participated in, and I couldn't see any of the problems that you are raising in those particular groups, at least in my experience of them. You hadn't been to those groups yourself, so I wondered whether you were projecting an anxiety on to groups which was derived from your experience of some that are really harmful, but not taking into account that some do some good.

DR SAMWAY. All the groups in the book only got a mention if I had consistent stories from a number of people who felt that whatever had been done to them in the group was harmful.

You spoke about the conditions; this is where the duty of care comes in. If you are offering any kind of personal development or any kind of therapy and if you are registered professionally you have a duty of care not to have a bad day. Not to have an off day. And if you do have a bad day, an off day, you can be sued for it. The problem with these groups is that they are not accountable for what they do and they don't think they should be accountable for what they do. The other thing to remember is that I wouldn't dispute for a second that many people who went to some of the groups, even the groups that I've mentioned in the book, said it was the best thing that ever happened to them. But the trouble is, that if they are using such powerful techniques that can turn a person's life around in such a short period of time, it also has a down side.

As I said before, it's like chemotherapy; it can kill or cure. And it shouldn't be a matter of Russian roulette, whether it's going to be the best thing that ever happened, or something that devastates your life. You should be screened before you go into those groups. Often people are screened to the extent of "Have you been depressed?" Considering that depression is one of the conditions most missed by the average GP, I think it's a little unfair to ask people to diagnose themselves for a psychological or psychiatric condition. Many people who have gone into those groups have had psychiatric histories and many of the problems that developed were because of that.

I make no apologies whatsoever for any group that is mentioned in the book, and I'm glad that you feel your experience was positive and I would certainly not deny that that is possible. But if you get 100 people in a room and usually 100 people going to a personal development course of some kind are skewed in a certain direction anyway, I am concerned that they are not screened. In other words they're often more vulnerable than the average population. The law of averages say that about 10 of those people are going to be seriously depressed and are at risk of that depression getting worse. Two or three of those people will be latent schizophrenics, and the techniques used by most of these groups can trigger off schizophrenia, psychotic episodes, or depression. If you are going to conduct a group I think you have an obligation to make sure that you do no harm. Just like all those professionals out there who have to do no harm.

QUESTION: MS BOLING. I ran the NewsCorp magazines in Australia for over 10 years and I used my formidable resources to target the cults, and after a lot of personal pain and expense, the death threats, the bombings, the letterbox bomb that I had, members of my staff physically attacked, living in a home so full of security it was like a prison, in the end I thought, what have I achieved after 10 years? I achieved a lot of public awareness and I felt that was probably the best that I could do. You can never bust a cult. As you say, they'll turn up elsewhere and they're very insidious. Do you feel that's the right way for the media to go? To go out after them and expose them, or to inform the public as to what they are, in the hope that vulnerable people are perhaps not sucked into these groups?

DR SAMWAY. I think the difficulty is that if you focus on particular groups all the people who aren't in that particular group tend to say to themselves, well I'm okay. It's that particular group. The other thing that happens is they tend to just change their name. And that's happened

with quite a few groups. If the publicity gets too bad they just change their name, or they dissolve and then they pop up somewhere else.

I think that while it is useful to alert people quickly to the more dangerous cults, if you're talking long term in terms of influence it's probably more helpful for the media to expose the techniques, and that's really what I tried to do in the book. To say, this is the underlying psychological process. It doesn't matter whether you're invited to an afternoon tea party, or a meeting for those interested in world peace, or a new way to make a million dollars, if these techniques have been used, then be on guard. And recognise what those techniques can do, so that if you decide to participate you do so with informed consent. But I think what's been missing is this overall underlying education of the public; "buyer beware." We have -consumer education in schools and we teach our kids how to watch out for the shysters in the car sale yards, but we don't teach them how to look after their minds, or how to protect themselves emotionally. I think it's probably a two-pronged approach.

QUESTION: MR MARSHALL. Is this a modern phenomenon, or is it something that flows back through the history of magic and religion?

DR SAMWAY. It is very ancient. Cults and -have been known right back in ancient times, even the Pharaohs had their problems with their off-shoots and their little rogue groups and secret societies. But what has changed in the last 40 years is that it's no longer a matter of a charismatic leader happening to hit on what he means to do. Since the 50s when the KGB and the CIA put so much money into researching how you can manipulate people, how you could systematically change their beliefs, you've now got organisations and individuals who have whole manuals on how to do this stuff. They can do it a lot faster, a lot more effectively and a lot more dangerously, and of course what you're combining that with is the information aids and the Internet. Access to people is greater, access to communication is greater. The access to things that can be so much more damaging to the community as a whole, is so much greater.

QUESTION: MS IMBER. America has been pointed to as, not a hot bed but almost a forerunner in cults. To what extent are cults widespread in Australia? And to what extent are we at the same level or ahead or behind the countries like America and England?

DR SAMWAY. It's interesting that there seem to be more cults now developing in Russia and even in Japan than in America. Cults are becoming a symptom of lots of things going wrong with our

communities in terms of meeting people's needs. People need to belong, people need to be involved in meaningful activity; people need to feel that they are important. And that's what cults do. It's been estimated that there are about 100 cults and sects in Australia, but that's only an estimate. Because as I said before, there are so many that never come to the light of day, that could be operating in the house next door and you wouldn't even know, and some of them are very, very small.

I don't think there have been any really comparative studies done on different countries. Mainly because it's so difficult to get information, and also because countries which previously didn't have cults are now starting to create masses of cults. So let's just say that it's an exploding problem globally.

QUESTION: MS MARUM. "Dangerous Persuaders" was a very exciting book for me. The fundamentalist groups that you referred to in the United States of America affecting American politics are very public and you can see it very, very well, but here in Australia can you describe any groups that are affecting Australian politics?

DR SAMWAY. I'd only be talking rumour now, but I have been told by members of the Pentecostal Church that they were making a concerted effort to get their members to join the Liberal Party. But it's not very visible. One of the reasons that these groups have been able to get so much influence in America is because of non-compulsory voting. When you have non-compulsory voting you end up with only those that have extreme, or very strongly held views tending to be bothered to be involved in politics or bothering to turn out to the polls. If you have organisations that have a very strong interest and influence in policy in a certain direction, whether it be anti-abortion or the gun lobby, then they can mobilise their members very easily to make sure that they all vote.

Various sociologists have suggested that one of the reasons that we don't have the degree of problem in Australia in terms of strong lobby groups that seem to have a lot of power, is because we do have compulsory voting, which means that their influence of these groups is diluted because you have moderate views at the ballot box as well as extreme views. But if we do away with compulsory voting then I think we have to ask ourselves what that may do for social cohesion, considering the fragmentation that's going on in the community at the moment with multiculturalism and all these little groups popping up like mushrooms everywhere. That's something that we have to consider very carefully. Everybody thinks, oh why should you vote it's supposed to be a democracy, you should be able to do what you like. Well, it

ain't that simple. We all drive on the one side of the road, what are you supposed to say, well, all drive on any side of the road we feel like? Once you start talking about freedom in that sense you start to deny other people's freedoms. There's been quite a bit of study on the impact of non-compulsory voting and the power that lobby groups can achieve if they organise themselves. And in America, as I said before, there is very strong alliance which has developed between the gun lobby, the right wing Christian fundamentalist groups and the anti-abortion groups.

QUESTION: MS MARUM. My business is entirely involved with conference management, conference creation and business development and I use and ask speakers to use every technique they can to convert the audience to a better way of doing business. I'm very interested in what your opinions might be of the growth of conference programs for the corporate area, where you're not only influencing individuals, but holistic areas as well as business areas. Do you have any opinion about how successful the conference area is becoming in converting these individuals?

DR SAMWAY. That's actually quite a complex question. I think that a lot of companies have been conned into spending an awful lot of money and are getting very bad value for money. I also know very well that there's an awful lot of damage being done to the individuals in those companies -in some of those companies, and it's damage that the company never realises is happening. I see it in my private practice. But they will never tell a company because of the effects it would have on their job prospects. So, companies are not getting very good feedback about exactly what is going on in these groups and the outcome.

I don't have a problem at all with personal development, I mean, that's my business. But I do think there have to be safeguards in place as to what you're doing and how you're doing it, and I think that often people are put into those groups particularly in the corporate area, where there is an invasion of boundaries which is not appropriate or fair. People are being asked to participate in things for the good of their job, which oversteps the boundaries into personal space and personal areas. I think there are real ethical questions there.

I do have a big problem with the culture being promoted with some of these groups. It is one of individual versus individual, but at the same time we want you to work as a team. Contradictory messages are being given out there. Now it doesn't really matter what people want to believe, the fact is that human beings really want to collaborate with

each other. They don't really want to compete. It's only a freakish few - and I know most of them are probably in this room - who really want to compete with other people. Most people just want to get on with others. They want to co-operate, they want to collaborate, and they want to make sure there's a solution focus. Not a "I win, you lose focus." And unfortunately so much of what's happening in the corporate world is "I win, you lose" It's extremely destructive. The pathetic thing about it is that they realised this is in America and England 15 years ago and they all lost their jobs over there, couldn't get any business, so they came to Australia and thought well, we'll go out to the colonies and we'll do what we want to do out there now. The philosophy of competition and downsizing to the point of self destruct is old hat. That's not what they're on about in America. They realise that the way to get the most productive long-term result is to get people working together and co-operating. And if you do that then you get the loyalty to the company. It's quite frightening how easy it is to manipulate people. People will follow you off the end of the pier, or into a live volcano, if you treat them well. But as a clinician, seeing the results of these high fliers and these CEOs and these 38 to 41 year olds being told, as one management consultant said to me the other day, "If they're not burnt out by the time they're 38 they haven't been working hard enough." No wonder people are going off to join cults where they're made to feel like they're valued and they belong. For a little while anyway

QUESTION: You mentioned that you had a problem with multiculturalism, as in representing individual cultures within or under one flag, and what's wrong with being Australian. I'd be interested in your concept of being Australian.

DR SAMWAY. Now you've put me on the spot haven't you. I don't know if I'm presumptuous enough to answer that question. I'm fifth generation Australian myself. I'm of good rebellious Irish stock; maybe that's why I wrote the book. I've got a mixture of English and Scottish and French and German in there as well. So I guess I'm what you call multicultural in myself.

I think the thing I like about Australia is that concept, and it's a much hackneyed phrase, of a fair go. I quite understand that there are people who are going to be more able than others in the community, but I do think that for the social cohesion I'd like there to be a flattening of the curve, not a steepening of the curve in terms of access to what the community provides and what it produces. But I think probably it is that concept of a fair go, that you treat people the way you'd like to be

treated yourself, that your children can grow up in a relatively peaceful, harmonious, cohesive kind of environment. I'm quite comfortable with the idea of being multi-racial, a blend of a whole lot of different value systems and a whole lot of different beliefs from all over the world. But I do believe that everybody should be equally accountable under the law. I guess that's a little bit of what I'd say Australia to be.

