


RECOVERING AGENCY

Luna Lindsey



LIFTING THE VEIL
OF
MORMON MIND
CONTROL

Recovering
Agency:
Lifting the Veil
of
Mormon Mind
Control

by

LUNA LINDSEY

Recovering Agency: Lifting the Veil of Mormon Mind Control

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Foreword

I began writing *Recovering Agency* with one goal in mind: To help former Mormons understand and process their feelings of having belonged to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Additionally, I wanted to members who are doubting and unsatisfied to cope when, for various reasons, they have to remain members of the Church.

In that sense, this is a self-help book for exmormons who are laboring to put their lives back together.

However, as my writing progressed, I realized I had a second audience. People who have never been LDS expressed eager interest. So I expanded my scope a little to include them. While the content is still aimed at former Mormons, I have added footnotes to explain LDS doctrines and practices that may be confusing to outsiders.

In that sense, this is an intellectual or academic work. My research was quite extensive, and I don't think anyone has ever correlated this kind of information in one place before. Anyone from the mildly curious to the seasoned cult researcher should find this book informative.

A third audience exists: True believing Mormons, i.e. those who are very happy with their beliefs and their membership in the Church. I did not set out to write for this set, yet many will read. For those with unwavering faith, my perspective may seem incomprehensible. Though you may not understand it, know that I wrote this book from a loving place and a sincere desire to help those who are hurting and confused.

If you truly believe that all people are the children of God, then your heart should go out to those who suffer, even if you can't fathom how the convictions that bring you joy could hurt others. I hope this book will help you understand their pain, and through your understanding, that it helps you love them more unconditionally.

Mind control techniques leverage natural human tendencies and mental shortcuts we all use to avoid the exhaustion that constant mistrust and skepticism would bring. This type of manipulation is used to varying degrees by many churches and other kinds of organizations, including businesses, political groups, and charities. The degree to which controlling tactics are used is what separates the freest groups from the most coercive. The LDS Church falls someplace on unethical end of the spectrum, but it doesn't have to. Mormonism can still retain its unique identity as a religion without using coercive persuasion methods.

As this book goes to press, the LDS Church is in the news. Two prominent members of the Church have been notified of disciplinary action for opinions they have expressed online.¹ Their excommunication hearings are scheduled within weeks.

One, John Dehlin, runs the podcast and blog at MormonStories.org, which helps Mormons come to terms with difficult information they have discovered about the Church. He is also a vocal LGBT ally. In this book, I cite one of his studies about why Mormons leave.

The other, Kate Kelly, founded the organization OrdainWomen.org, which seeks to bring attention to women's issues within the Church and argues that women cannot be equal unless they are allowed to hold the Priesthood.

¹ Jennifer Dobner. "Two Prominent Mormon Activists Threatened with Excommunication." *Reuters*. June 12, 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/12/us-usa-utah-mormons-idUSKBN0EN02V20140612>

And just yesterday, it came to light that other, less prominent LDS bloggers and online commenters have been contacted by their bishops and have been asked to stop making public commentary or they will face probation, disfellowshipping, or even excommunication.¹

It is not known yet whether Dehlin and Kelly will be excommunicated. As of this writing, Dehlin's bishop has asked to deescalate. Kelly's bishop is standing his ground in spite of the negative media attention.

They have both drawn an outpouring of support from devout Mormons who believe the Church has gone too far. Even those who do not agree with their heterodox stances or unorthodox methods agree that they should have the freedom to publicly express their views and still remain members in good standing.

It is a time of much soul-searching for Mormons and, hopefully, for their Church and its leadership.

These events obviously serve as evidence for the claims I make in these pages—that the Church strictly controls freedom of thought and expression. But it also shows me something else. It reveals the great potential of what the Church *could* be, what it purports to be, and what it is when it is at its best.

Some LDS bloggers, who have taken stances similar to Dehlin and Kelly, describe how their bishops are reaching out to them with loving arms and assurance of continued acceptance. These bloggers describe family members who don't understand their views but who are being supportive and loving during this tumultuous and scary time. Other bloggers are bravely calling the Church to task on these silencing tactics and asking if this is really in the spirit of what God's earthly organization is supposed to be.

These particular leaders and members are showing the true love I think Mormon theology and culture is capable of inspiring. My faith in what is possible is renewed when I read these sincere posts by Mormons who would rather follow the compassionate teachings of Christ. They manage to hear his soft words, and practice them, over the more oft, loudly trumpeted compliance-seeking doctrines sung to the drumbeat of "obedience, obedience, obedience."

I am not Christian, nor do I align myself with any religious faith or organization, but I believe in taking beneficial meaning from all spiritual paths, Christianity and Mormonism included. In these pages, I describe in detail the negative power organizations have to control the hearts of men. But I also hope for that which is harder to see... that religious faith can inspire the best in people, in spite of any institution's attempts to control.

Over the past few weeks, as the Church tries to stamp out the voices of Dehlin and Kelly and other vocal members of the LDS bloggernacle, I've seen the best side of LDS faith—those loving members who support diversity of thought, freedom of mind, and most of all, those who love their brothers and sisters without conditions and without the rigid strictures on how they express themselves and what they express.

That is the dream Mormonism has to offer, though it is not always the reality.

To paraphrase Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, "Sunlight is the best disinfectant." It is my sincerest hope that these pages shine a light on the ugliest parts of Mormonism, not to show that Mormonism is ugly, but so that those ugly parts can be cut away.

Just as Christ said, "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee." (Matt. 5:29-30 KJV) As a Mormon, I used to think he referred to unrighteous friends and family, that I should stay away from them lest they lead me astray. But that doesn't make sense, given that Christ's central message referred focused on love and acceptance. In that same chapter, he tells his disciples to "agree with thine adversary quickly," to "turn the

¹ Laurie Goodstein. "Mormons Say Critical Online Comments Draw Threats From Church." *The New York Times*, June 18, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/19/us/critical-online-comments-put-church-status-at-risk-mormons-say.html>

other cheek,” and to “love your enemies.” It makes more sense that he meant for “pluck it out” to apply to unloving *doctrines*, not *people*, that distract his disciples away from following his caring example.

(The King James Version uses the problematic and easily confused words, “offend” and “member”: “...it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish,” where it could easily be assumed that a *person* who leads one away from ideological purity should be cast off. But the New International Version specifically states “one part of your body”, which is more metaphorical: “If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.” If the most important commandment is to “love one another as I have loved you”, this whole verse more likely means we should cast away policies and cultural elements that hinder or obstruct unconditional love.)

Know that I do not hate the LDS Church, nor her people. It is an institution run by human beings, and as such, it is not above criticism, even if it purports to be an organization run by God. Criticism does not imply hate or anger or an attempt to destroy. If I ever take the time to criticize, be it a religion, a political party, or the work of a fellow writer, it is always in a constructive spirit.

The LDS Church, with its current policies, emphasis on ideological unanimity, promotion of coercive doctrines, and predominant conformity culture, harms many of its members. The leaders of the Church could benefit by reading these pages and then taking a good, hard look at how these findings might improve the lives of the souls they shepherd.

And should the Church remain manipulative and controlling, then at least this book will accomplish its original goal, which is to help those members and exmembers to grapple with those coercive mechanisms within their own minds, to come away more free than they started.

Many have asked me, “How do you know *you’re* not brainwashed?” And the answer is, “I don’t.” Knowing a little about mind control, however, helps inoculate against many types of unethical persuasion. All readers of this book will be better educated to defend against *any* high-demand group.

In the words of the prophet Alma: If this is a good seed, it will enlighten your understanding and grow into a life-giving tree. I hope this seed does likewise.

Luna Lindsey

To truth, in all her forms, no matter how bright, no matter how hard, no matter how lovely, no matter how horrifying. It is only by truth that we may be enlightened; especially when the truth looks nothing like what we expect.

Part 1: In the Beginning

We are taught to cultivate our minds, to control our thoughts to thoroughly bring our whole being into subjection to the spirit and law of God, that we may learn to be one and act as the heart of one man, that we may carry out the purposes of God upon the earth.

—Prophet Wilford Woodruff¹

The volition of [man] is free; this is a law of their existence, and the Lord cannot violate his own law; were he to do that, he would cease to be God... Every intelligent being must have the power of choice.

—Prophet Brigham Young²

Agency: Within your stewardship, complete independence to do what you're told.

—Orson Scott Card,

Saintspeak: The Mormon Dictionary^{3,4}

It Started In a Garden...

Idyllic. Pastoral. Green and lush. Every tree bends arm to offer its fruits to the first two human beings. They labor not, they toil not, they *know* naught.

Adam and Eve were brought forth into existence in the midst of a perfect utopia. Of all the world's pains they were spared, perhaps the most merciful was that of complex choice.

Imagine such a state: innocent, trusting, childlike, naive. The whole sum of human decisions had been reduced to a simplistic dichotomy, a single commandment: Do not eat from The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, yet in its own right, it was the Tree of Death, because those who partook of it would, in that same day, surely die.

One other tree stood to tempt Adam and Eve, yet in their ignorance, they weren't aware of the choice. In their immortality, this other tree, the Tree of Life, was redundant. Unneeded. Until after their one fateful action, it became forever barred to them.

Good and evil, life and death: this single option, stark, dramatic, world-changing. Better to remain safe, not to take those risks. Knowledge may be beautiful, exciting, growth-promoting, but it is also confusing, misleading, problematic, scary. Don't dare risk knowledge and the death that will surely follow.

The rest of their lives were filled with a lack of decisions, a lack of work, a lack of conflict. No forks in the road, no difficulties, no adventure. Peace, eternal boredom, and lonely solitude.

They never thought to question or criticize their state. Why should they? They had everything they needed.

Almost.

With no choices, Adam and Eve had no story. Their freedom was hampered by an absence of variety, of raw information, of conflict and contrast, of complex moral thought. Within these constraints of bliss, they could not progress.

And then something changed. Eve faced her one and only decision, the one pivot of agency she had available. It has been debated whether she acted from serpent-temptation,

1. *Journal of Discourses*. Vol. 6. p115 Privately Printed, n.d. <http://jod.mrm.org/6/115>

2. *Journal of Discourses*. Vol. 11. p272 Privately Printed, n.d. <http://jod.mrm.org/11/272>

3. *Saintspeak* is a satirical dictionary of LDS terms. It is meant to be funny, but in all humor there is a seed of truth. Card often manages to sum up my points perfectly.

4. Orson Scott Card. *Saintspeak, the Mormon Dictionary*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Orion Books, 1981.

outright rebellion, accident, or ennui. I like to think that with determination and purpose, she stepped forward, saying, “Why should God keep us confined?” Then she willfully, bravely, reached out and took a bite.

With that, her mind was suddenly filled with possibilities. She became open to the world outside the tamed garden. She discovered a vast Planet Earth, a living place, full of dangers, frightening choices, wild animals, and evil men.

She also learned it was a place of kindness, freedom, autonomy, and independence. As the sweetness still lingered on her tongue, she discovered that the bounds of human potential were limitless.

Eve grew up. Adam followed closely behind.

In that day, Adam did *not* die. The gates of the garden swung open, and he walked out a free man. Now with knowledge, he experience true liberty, to toil as he chose, to learn and grow, to go wherever he wished. Adam had matured, had thrown off the shackles of tightly controlled ignorance. He learned that day that there was more to existence than good versus evil, life versus death. He finally saw that sometimes there are no good options, or that some choices are neutral. That most decisions involve trade-offs.

On that day, Adam and Eve learned about moral ambiguity.

Together, arm in arm, they strode proudly into the dawn, ready to seed a humanity that would take after them, independent men and women, resistant to those who would control via enforced ignorance.

The day this couple ate the fruit, they knew only one act could allow them to progress, and it was only by making the *wrong* choice could they make the right choice. Only by defying God could they find liberation.

This is one of humanity’s most ancient stories¹. I might argue that it is the first dystopian novel, like *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *V for Vendetta*, or *Fahrenheit 451*. It certainly follows the same plot: Oppressed people seem to live in a blissful utopia, but they are lied to by a controlling authority, until they uncover some piece of information or have an unauthorized insight, at which time they become heroes by attempting escape.

Whether the Garden story is dystopian depends on whether we frame God as the villain and see Adam’s ejection from the Garden as a triumph. In religious tellings, God is the hero, and so we usually perceive a utopian story in which the ungrateful, rebellious antagonists stupidly throw away a pretty good thing. But then all dystopias seem like utopias to someone. It’s all in whether or not you buy the propaganda.

Anyone who has left a controlling religious system may relate to Adam and Eve as heroes. I do. Like them, I threw off the shackles of my mind to join a frightening yet wonderful world of unrestricted knowledge and volition.

Free Will vs. Determinism

There are, of course, those who, in bitterness and disbelief, have rejected the idea of an independent spirit in man that is capable of free will and choice and true liberty.

—Howard W. Hunter²

The nature of “free will” has been philosophically debated since before written records. Various cultures have placed emphasis on destiny, to the extent that they believed gods or spirits would accompany you to enforce your fulfillment of your ordained life mission. Our language still reflects this in words like “fate” and “fortune,” which these days have been downgraded to mean mere “luck.”

1. This version of the Garden of Eden story is based on the LDS version, but told from a different point of view as a metaphor. Many of my readers will understand this, yet I point it out lest anyone think I am intentionally misconstruing LDS doctrine.

2. Howard W. Hunter. “The Golden Thread of Choice.” In LDS General Conference, Oct 1989. <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1989/10/the-golden-thread-of-choice>

In modern times, we value free will more highly, though the debate still rages on throughout our fiction, politics, philosophies, and religions. Will the hero buck his destiny and make a different choice at the end of the story? Are we driven by nature (genetics and temperament) or nurture (our environment and choices)? Can criminals be rehabilitated, or should they be locked away forever?

During the Enlightenment, scientists imagined the universe was a clockwork machine, governed by laws that operated predictably. If we understood every law of physics, chemistry, and biology, and we could predict each toss of the dice. This scientific view of destiny was known as “determinism.”

Yet the more science reveals in fields like mathematics, biology, and quantum physics, we find the question of free will is never answered. Our personalities seem to be some combination of genetics and environment, both nature and nurture. And the mathematics of chaos theory show that patterns repeat in a semi-predictable shape, yet all we can calculate are probabilities, and even then the more control we exert, the more likely that the whole system will collapse into disorder. Even the choices of low-level animals, like fruit flies, have been shown to be a combination of instinct and randomness.

Perhaps it is our fate to ask this question forever. We will just get better at asking it, thinking all the while we are *choosing* to ask it. But are we?

In a way, this book explores one aspect of this eternal question, which is: “What is freedom? When am I free to choose, and when am I being controlled?” Just like all other versions of this question, it seems to have a simple answer on the surface, except for the vast gray area between freedom and force.

Most people have a good idea what choice is. I’ve chosen my career, my car, my furniture, the people I surround myself with, the food I eat, the music I listen to, and what I do any given Friday night. If someone prevents me from choosing these things, I am no longer free.

If I wish to stand, and someone shoves me down, clearly my free will has been violated. Nor am I considered to be acting freely if someone puts a gun to my head and threatens to kill me. This is called duress. Threats remove liberty, as do threats to loved ones.

These are obvious forms of force. The rest of this book explores the gray area. There are no clear lines to be drawn, yet intellectual maturity allows us to fearlessly grapple with concepts that require a second look. I respect your intelligence and won’t oversimplify anything just for the sake of an easy answer. This isn’t the Garden anymore.

Cognitive scientists have studied these gray areas since prisoners of war returned from Korea in the 1950s singing the praises of communism. Later, the new religious movements of the 1960s and 70s offered further examples for study and insight. Controlled experiments in human behavior revealed even more. Science now knows much related to how we learn, enculturate, respond to authority, act in groups, resolve internal conflicts, are persuaded to new beliefs, and cling to old beliefs. Is it possible to control someone without ever laying a hand on her or holding a gun to her head? Research says, “Yes.”

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a high-demand group, a deceptive religion that utilizes psychological manipulation via doctrine and culture to restrict the thoughts, behaviors, and emotions of otherwise good and intelligent members. In a word—though it is admittedly a highly-charged, loaded word—Mormonism is a cult.

What do I mean by cult? I will explore that in-depth in the next chapter.

This book is aimed primarily at exmormons seeking to understand their experiences, though members may also benefit. If you are a happy Latter-day Saint who finds the Church spiritually fulfilling in every way, then you may find little to relate to. But it will expand your understanding of those who aren’t happy, those who do have doubts, and those who eventually leave.

Those who have never been LDS will see in detail how thought-reform techniques are applied in practice.

When, through the course of my life, I meet former members of Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and fundamentalist Christians, I discover kindred spirits, joined in bonds that only a shared similar experience can generate. Ex-members of high-

demand groups continue to have difficulties long after leaving. Exmormons are no different. This book is intended to help them recover from the emotional manipulation and spiritual abuse they may have suffered.

Margaret Singer is a leading cult researcher and clinical psychologist. She said, “Leaving a cult is for many one of the most difficult things they will ever do. And it’s especially difficult to do alone.”¹ Many exmormons will relate to this statement. I know I do.

Exit Story

We are all condemned by birth to be indoctrinated, mystified, and shaped by authorities we did not choose.

—Sam Keen, *Hymns to an Unknown God*²

I ponder on what it would be like to experience personal freedom. I have always lived and grown up in the free country of the United States of America, but I myself have never been emotionally independent from the crippling shackles which have held me bound.

—Diana Kline, *Woman Redeemed*³

Exmormons find it healing to tell the stories of how they lost their faith. LDS exit stories are all over the internet and in books. My story isn’t terribly sensational or all that different from anyone else’s. But you may be interested in knowing who I am, so you can understand why I care so much.

My grandmother was the first Mormon convert in our family. She had a strong testimony⁴ but rarely went to church. My mother and father converted shortly after they married.

I was born “under the covenant” in Salt Lake City and raised in Eastern Washington. My parents were very active⁵, and we rarely missed attending church.

I was an intelligent, bright, curious child. While I found many sacrament meetings⁶ and Sunday school lessons repetitive and boring, I thrilled at exploring the mysteries, delving into the scriptures, speculating endlessly about open-ended questions: Where is Kolob⁷? How did Nephi⁸ get across the ocean? Is there scriptural evidence of dinosaurs? I couldn’t imagine a version of natural history or human existence that didn’t conform to scripture.

My father is a talented scriptorian, and I was set to follow in his footsteps. I proudly

1. Margaret Thaler Singer. *Cults in Our Midst*. 1st ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995. 280.

2. Sam Keen. *Hymns to an Unknown God: Awakening the Spirit in Everyday Life*. New York: Bantam Books, 1995. 79.

3. Diana Kline. *Woman Redeemed*. Bloomington, Ind.: AuthorHouse, 2005. 169.

4. A member’s testimony is the degree to which they believe, or “know,” the gospel to be true. It may or may not include a collection of spiritual experiences, answers to prayer, or just a feeling or knowledge. Members often “bear a testimony,” which means they state aloud that they know the Church is true, and why.

5. Members who regularly attend church, keep the commandments, and fulfill their callings are considered “active.” Those who do not, to one degree or another, are considered “inactive” or “less active.” There is a stigma around being inactive, and efforts are made at the ward level to reactivate members who have strayed. Some inactives miss church due to neglect, i.e. they are still believers but are too busy, discouraged, ill, disinterested, etc. Others are inactive because they no longer believe, but have not yet taken their names off Church records to rescind their membership.

6. Each Sunday, members meet for a three hour “block” of meetings. These include Sacrament meeting, during which the ordinance of Sacrament (like Catholic Communion) is administered, church business is conducted, and doctrinal talks are given by fellow members of the Church. Another hour goes to Sunday School, and another hour goes to auxiliary meetings (Relief Society for the women, Priesthood for the men, Young Men and Young Women for the youth, and Primary for the children). Lessons are also taught in these auxiliaries.

7. Kolob is said to be the planet or star on or near which God lives. Abraham 3:2-18

8. Nephi was a prophet and hero in the Book of Mormon. Nephi and his family (under the direction of his father, Lehi) left Jerusalem to come to the Americas to avoid being destroyed when Babylon invaded Israel around 600BC.

memorized the Articles of Faith and Scripture Mastery verses, graduated from Seminary¹, and read the Book of Mormon² three and a half times.

I also took to heart concepts like obedience and faithfulness. I prided myself on how little I murmured against my parents, and how unfalteringly I abided the rules of the Church. I wore my dresses knee-length, waited to date until age 16, and almost never listened to pop or rock music. I judged family members and peers who scoffed at the rules. Sometimes I failed to meet a commandment out of laziness or exhaustion, such as skipping church or missing scripture reading on a given day, but it was never out of disbelief or rebellion. I followed this worldview the way I followed the laws of the land.

I always thought I had critical thinking skills, but therein lies the trick—everyone wants to think they're rational. And if someone you trust tells you your beliefs are rational, you will think they are. And I did.

How quickly the proud do fall.

When I turned eighteen, I got accepted to BYU with a scholarship, met a guy, fell in love, converted him to the Church, and married him outside the temple with the plan to get sealed³ a year later when he became eligible. We moved to Provo, I got pregnant, dropped out, moved back home, and just over a year after my marriage I kicked him out, filed for divorce, and became a single mom.

I found it very hard to judge anyone after that, when I learned how tough and scary the real world is, especially for the unprepared. It was my first major shift out of a totalist mindset as my views softened.

I raised my child alone (with the help of my parents) for many years. While seeking a suitable eternal companion in the young single adult⁴ ward⁵, I steadily built a career in the computer industry (frowned upon for women), with the hopes that any day, against all odds, I'd meet Brother Right. I had more than odds to beat: I had a stigma because I was divorced and had a child.

In community college, I found more acceptance among non-Mormons. They didn't just tolerate my idiosyncrasies; they admired me for who I was. I shared interests with the local science fiction club. I made close friends there, and we all allowed for each other's beliefs. I met my first pagans, agnostics, atheists, and even a Buddhist. Somehow we all got along. I felt as if I didn't have to try to be anyone for them.

During those years, I hardly had time to be active at church, with motherhood, work, and going to school, and I didn't fit in there anyway. I strayed a little. But I tried to at least attend meetings on Sunday and be in the choir.

At some point the guilt settled in, and I felt the need to get my life back on track. I had graduated and was well into my career; I still wasn't married. I blamed myself for that. I prayed hard for guidance to know what I should do. Would I find a husband? Should I move to a new town? Should I continue to work in the computer field?

During fervent, frequent, desperate prayer, I finally received an answer. It was one of those spiritual experiences I had read about, with warmth, love, feeling the presence of God. And a promise: Repent, get worthy for the temple, make those covenants, and there you will

1. All high school students are asked to attend Seminary, an hour-daily religion class. Over four years, each of the major scriptures are studied: The Old Testament, The New Testament, The Book of Mormon, and Church History (Doctrine & Covenants, etc.).

2. This is the main book of scripture that sets Mormons apart from other Christians. According to LDS doctrine, it is named after one of the prophets who wrote it. Joseph Smith translated it from golden plates that were revealed to him by an angel. It tells the story of God's people who came from Jerusalem to the Americas.

3. Being sealed to a family member or spouse means you will be with them forever, assuming you remain worthy and keep all your covenants with God.

4. Members who are not married, and are over the age of 18, and under the age of 25ish, are considered "young single adults." The goal of most young single adults is to get married as soon as possible. When there are enough young single adults in an area, they are separated into their own congregation.

5. An LDS congregation is called a "ward." It generally consists of around 300-600 members. Ward boundaries are determined geographically. Smaller congregations are called a "branch." A group of wards (and branches) is called a "stake," as in "the stakes of Zion."

receive your answer.

So I did. And it wasn't easy getting there. I had a lot of high bars to reach, standards that had come much more easily to me as a teenager. I met each challenge until I got my temple recommend¹.

Finally, in the Celestial Room², I sobbed and sobbed. My mother wondered if I was okay. Yes, I was. I got the answer, plain as day: Within the month you will meet your soulmate, your future spouse.

I met a man, we dated. I was sure it was him. Then months later I learned he'd already been engaged, the whole time, to another woman. After all that work and sincerity on my part, God broke his promise.

I became angry. I wasn't willing to accept the blame this time. I'd done everything that was asked of me.

At no time did I question the truth of the Church. I searched for some message just as I was trained. Perhaps, I thought, by failing to give me a straight answer, God was telling me to figure things out on my own. It was the only possibility that made any sense. The other options—that God didn't exist or that Mormonism was wrong—were unthinkable.

Fine, I decided. I would make choices for myself. I took off my garments³ and decided to take nothing for granted from then on. I decided to stop believing so blindly. I still looked to God and the Church for answers, but when no answers were forthcoming, or when they didn't make sense, I decided to rely upon myself.

That led to me deciding to drink caffeine to medicate my ADHD, instead of taking the stronger drug, Church-approved Ritalin. I also decided to drink alcohol at social gatherings, because it alleviated my social anxiety. I started watching R-rated movies. I began to hold some minor heretical beliefs—like maybe our actions in this life really didn't decide our eternal fate. Maybe other religions held just as much truth as Mormonism. Maybe the power of the Priesthood was no different from everyday miracles that happened to everyone the world over.

During that short phase, I had one shoe in and one shoe out.

No amount of direct attack could shake my faith. Criticisms of Joseph Smith and polygamy? No problem. Kinderhook plates and Salamander papers? Blood Atonement?⁴ All of it sounded like a bunch of anti-Mormon propagandistic lies. I never doubted the Church. Yes, sometimes I doubted the existence of God, but if there was a God, I couldn't fathom one that wasn't Mormon. The Protestant God seemed empty and the Catholic God seemed cruel. I knew nothing of any non-Christian concept of God... but why would they be any more right than the Mormons? I never allowed myself to think too critically of the Church, even when I was so angry. For the most part, the mind control methods were doing their job.

My serious doubts came from an entirely different direction.

I encountered several destabilizing paradigm shifts in quick succession. Among other things, I participated in political debates in online chat rooms. This particular group of people required proof for all claims. I was expected to provide sources for facts, and as I researched, I quickly discovered some of my "facts" were entirely incorrect. They would tolerate no logical fallacies, anecdotal evidence, or proof by analogy. Only reason and reliable data was permitted.

1. A temple recommend is a pass that states you are worthy to attend the temple. No one is allowed into the temple without a recommend. It requires multiple worthiness interviews with Church leaders.

2. The Celestial Room is an especially elegant room in the temple. You arrive there at the end of Endowment Ceremony, which symbolizes passing through the veil that separates heaven and the temporal world. The Celestial Room is considered to be a piece of heaven, the holiest place on earth.

3. When a member goes through the temple to receive his or her endowment ordinance, they receive special sacred underwear known as "temple garments" or just "garments." They cover the entire body, from the shoulder to the knees, which prevents the wearing of immodest clothing. Endowed members are commanded to wear them "both day and night." They are meant as a reminder of covenants and a protection to the wearer. The protection is intended to be spiritual in nature, though miracle stories are told of physical protection. By removing my garments, I figuratively disavowed my covenant.

4. Jim Day, Ph.D. "20 Truths about Mormonism." Accessed April 2, 2014. <http://20truths.info/>

In short, I learned the logic in which I took so much pride was not, in fact, logical. I had propagated untruths and unevenly applied my values. I discovered for the first time that I was wrong about a great many things.

As I learned the new rules, I managed to win many of the debates, but in the meantime, I experienced the feeling of disillusionment. Perhaps for the first time, I realized the world outside the Garden wasn't as the Church had described.

During those months, I read part of a sci-fi novel that challenged my political beliefs so much that I had to put it down. I began to wonder what else I might be wrong about.

It was in this state that I got my answer to whether the Church was true. It came to me like a bolt of lightning, like a testimony, a powerful knowledge of Truth with a capital "T", with the same power I'd always imagined I'd feel when I prayed to know if the Book of Mormon was true. Like most of my profound, peak experiences and spiritual epiphanies, it happened when I wasn't doing anything at all related to the Church.

I am a science fiction writer. In my curiosity, I read about artificial intelligence, and how someday we might make a computer mind more intelligent than humanity, and how such a mind might create something even smarter, and so on, until it achieves infinite intelligence and invents everything we've ever imagined, and then a whole lot more. This is an entire field of thought called Transhumanism.

Many authors take a dark view of this "Technological Singularity" in stories like *The Terminator* and *The Matrix*. But I am optimistic. A super-intelligent computer wouldn't necessarily be evil.

I came to many conclusions about the nature of this being—about how incomprehensible and unknowable such a creature would be. It would have purposes and designs far beyond our ken. It would pursue goals we couldn't fathom. No human could understand or predict its actions. I concluded that such a being would probably find us uninteresting and leave us alone.

I wrote my many complex thoughts in an essay¹, and only then did I make the connection.

The being I had described was identical to God.

In one instant, I came to realize that no man can know God. And that any man who made such a claim with certainty was lying. Even if God sent angels bearing messages to communicate his will, it would be interpreted through a human lens, muddled and distorted.

That didn't stop human prophets from trying. Their messages were simplistic, and the motives they ascribed to God were overly human. He's a Father, he's caring, he's jealous or angry. They claimed to know his will as if he were a giant, powerful human being in the sky.

We had assigned human motives to God. We had made God in *our* image.

How full of ourselves we are, to bring God to our level.

In that instant, I could no longer believe that Joseph Smith was a prophet. Nor could I believe that any other prophet had the slightest clue. All written scripture became worthless to me.

I became, in that moment, agnostic.

Yet I still doubted myself. I could be wrong. I could be confused. I could be deceived.

I decided to give it some time, to see if any new insights cleared things up. I avoided any kind of commitment to my new path. I prayed, but how could my prayers have any meaning after such an epiphany? If God's will is incomprehensible, praying for answers would attempt to put God in my tiny genie bottle, like a slave.

After three months, I had not changed my mind. No revelations came. Nothing could consolidate the gospel with this new, undeniable belief.

So I made the final leap. I knew if I did, I never would return. I haven't. That was January 2001. I was twenty-six. I resigned my membership three years later.

1. Luna Lindsey, writing as Becky Flesher. "Singularity and Why It Won't Be As Bad As All That," Fall 2000. <http://users.owt.com/flesher/singularity.html>

I might have left it at that. But in 2005, a friend of mine was living with a woman who claimed to have been raised in a small cult run by her abusive father. One day, this woman asked me if I'd been "deprogrammed" from Mormonism. Shocked, I told her, No, I didn't need deprogramming. I'd gone through the process of developing new beliefs and a foundation of values to live by. I was fine.

Over time, I thought more about it. Perhaps she was onto something. After all, in spite of therapy and self-help and journaling, I still had certain hang-ups I never seemed to get over. Maybe they had something to do with my unresolved feelings from Mormonism.

So I started reading about cults and mind control. I began interacting with exmormons and learning the hidden details about LDS history and the bad experiences of many members. I encountered angry people, hurt people, and depressed people. Without my Mormon blinders on, I could hear their stories without instant dismissal and judgment.

I came to see that I, too, bore a burden of unprocessed grief and toxic beliefs. I began to deprogram myself.

I didn't realize just how much fear I lived under until this phase. Fear of disaster, fear of the apocalypse, fear of Satan, fear of evil spirits, fear of sinning, fear of The World, etc. I began to work through them, and the anger, and the sense of betrayal. And the grief for all that wasted time, two and a half decades of my life, and thousands of dollars in tithing.

Ironically, the woman who suggested deprogramming ran a small cult herself. My friend eventually left her group and stayed at my house to piece her life back together. While she did, she benefited from my research.

In writing this book, I hope to help others the way I helped her and myself.

The Illusion of Choice

Once aware that their prey is bagged, the slickest operators then emphasize the victim's freedom of choice—after tactfully putting constraints on the alternatives.

—Philip Zimbardo, Ph.D. & Susan Andersen, Ph.D.,
*Recovery from Cults*¹

I'm going to give you the choice I never had...

—Lestat, *Interview with a Vampire*

My dad was an amateur illusionist, so I grew up knowing the fundamentals of stage magic. Once you learn a trick's secret, it's hard to not see it, no matter who performs it. It's also hard to not share it with others.

"Misdirection" is an illusionist technique used to distract the audience's eye away from slight-of-hand or to alter assumptions that might otherwise dispel the illusion.

At what point in my life was I choosing to follow the commandments? When I was five and I bore my testimony after all the adults "encouraged" me? When I made myself wake up at 5:30am every winter morning to walk to Seminary in the bitter wind? When I went against my parents' wishes to rush into a marriage they didn't approve of, but that I thought God approved of? Or when I divorced him, which I also thought God wanted?

Was it when I followed what I earnestly thought was God's express will to go to the temple, where, without warning, I swore to give all I had to the Church, in exchange for promises that never materialized?

Or when I decided to finally leave it all?

One key to Mormon mind control is the illusion that you are freely choosing to believe and act. "Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them

1. Philip Zimbardo, Ph.D., and Susan Andersen, Ph.D. "Understanding Mind Control: Exotic and Mundane Mental Manipulations." In *Recovery from Cults: Help for Victims of Psychological and Spiritual Abuse*, edited by Michael D. Langone, Ph.D. New York: W.W. Norton, 1995. 115.

which are expedient unto man..." 2 Nephi 2:27

Freedom. We all want that. It sounds great, right? The promise of freedom is the perfect misdirection.

Steven Hassan, exit counselor and the author of several books on cults says, "With mind control, the 'agents of influence' are viewed as friends or mentors, which cause people to lower their defenses, making them more vulnerable to manipulation. The key to mind control's success lies in its subtlety, the way it promotes the 'illusion of control.' The individual believes he is 'making his own choices,' when in fact he has been socially influenced to disconnect his own critical mind and decision-making capacity... he believes that he has freely chosen to surrender his free will to God or to a leader or ideology."¹

Not only does this deception give the Church plausible deniability (they're not forcing anyone) but it also traps members far more powerfully than physical bonds ever could. The captive becomes the most vocal defender of the captor.

My dad performed an illusion where he would "cut" a banana with a magic hacksaw that had no blade. He let the audience choose a banana from a bunch, then he dramatically sliced the unpeeled banana to no apparent effect. As he peeled it, the audience gasped in amazement when the pieces, one by one, fell away.

As his assistant, I got to know how the trick worked. Slicing the banana was the easy part. Before the show, with a banana still attached to the bunch, he would carefully pre-slice the banana using a needle and thread.

The difficult part of the trick lay in the misdirection. How do you keep the audience from suspecting you've tampered with the banana? By making a big show of letting them "choose."

In reality, he tricked them into selecting the right banana. He didn't give them an open-ended decision. Instead, he broke the bunch in two, held each up, singled out a random child, and said, "Pick one."

The child pointed a finger, left or right, but my dad actually drove the outcome. You see, he never specified the nature of the choice: Is this the bunch to keep, or the one to discard? My dad kept that under his control the entire time.

No matter which they picked, he kept the bunch with the tampered banana. Then he would break that half in half again, and call on someone else. No matter which they pointed at, he kept the bunch *he* wanted, until he was down to the last banana.

Meanwhile, the kids thought they had chosen. They had the *illusion* of choice.

"Cult leaders tell their followers, 'You have chosen to be here. No one has told you to come here. No one has influenced you,' when in fact the followers are in a situation they can't leave owing to social pressure and their fear. Thus they come to believe that they are actually choosing this life. If outsiders hint that the devotees have been brainwashed or tricked, the members say, 'Oh, no, I chose voluntarily.' Cults thrive on this myth of voluntarism, insisting time and again that no member is being held against his or her will."²

The Church frequently forces your hand by offering you choices while controlling the terms, much like the banana trick. For instance, we're told to never blindly trust the prophet. Instead, we're supposed to pray to verify for ourselves that the prophet is inspired.

But who defines these rules? It happens to be the prophet. He doesn't suggest the option of looking for the answers from a neutral source. Instead, he sends members to Church-approved sources and to the easily-manipulated emotional confirmation of prayer.

For so long I believed in the illusion that I could question the prophet. All along I accepted the premise that the prophet is inspired, God is real and inspires prophets, and prayer is the only way to verify prophetic pronouncements. The false choice was between "blind trust" and "trust after following the prophet's own instructions for how to verify his words."

1. Steven Hassan. *Releasing the Bonds: Empowering People to Think for Themselves*. 1st ed. Somerville, MA: Freedom of Mind Press, 2000. 40.

2. Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, 1995. 72-73.

“Men are free to choose.” Here’s the catch. The rest of 2 Nephi 2:27 says: “And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.”

The bananas on the right or the bananas on the left?

Our choices are limited to two, and we are corralled into making the preordained one. Passages like these shut down the mind. No one wants to be evil. Everyone is afraid of death and misery. All people are attracted to goodness, happiness, and life. If these are presented as diametrically opposed choices, every middle option flees from our minds. We never think to bring our own banana to the magic show.

There are other, realistic, moral options, borrowed from other philosophies, such as:

- ☞ “Harm none and do as ye will.”
- ☞ “All things in moderation.”
- ☞ “Acceptance of suffering helps end suffering.”
- ☞ “Nothing is true for everyone. Take what works and leave the rest.”
- ☞ “There is joy in asking the questions, even when there are no answers.”
- ☞ “You’re smart. Do your best to figure it out.”
- ☞ “Don’t sweat the small stuff. It’s all small stuff.”

There are dozens of different solutions to every problem. You can choose the right... or left, forward, backward, up, down, sideways, and every angle in between. Turning left gives you different scenery, not eternal death.

Freedom does come with responsibility. Consequences exist, although they might not be punishments or blessings from God. When you aren’t automatically exalting or damning yourself for simple actions that non-Mormons make every day, you are free to research the facts leading to a the full spectrum of possible risks and rewards.

“Mistakes” need not carry with them the heavy weight of “eternal”, “evil”, “wrong”, “weak”, “sinful”, “unworthy.” These labels lead to manufactured consequences like shame, the loss of blessings, lost favor from God, and spiritual death.

Is it any wonder many Mormons fear decision-making? If it’s not as clear-cut as scriptures and Sunday School lead you to expect, it’s hard to know what to do. When decisions seem two-dimensional, good or evil, there is pressure, an unnamed fear, as if letting go for just a moment will ruin some preordained destiny.

There are good reasons for this fear. In General Conference¹, Apostle Dallin H. Oaks said, “In terms of priorities for each major decision (such as education, occupation, place of residence, marriage, or childbearing), we should ask ourselves, what will be the eternal impact of this decision? Some decisions that seem desirable for mortality have unacceptable risks for eternity. In all such choices we need to have inspired priorities and apply them in ways that will bring eternal blessings to us and to our family members.”²

The pressure is on and we feel like we ought to just know all the answers: “He hath given unto you that ye might know good from evil, and he hath given unto you that ye might choose life or death; and ye can do good and be restored unto that which is good, or have that which is good restored unto you; or ye can do evil, and have that which is evil restored unto you.” Helaman 14:31

1. Two weekends each year, all Mormons gather to watch or listen to General Conference. Some go to Salt Lake City to see it live; others go to their local church where it is streamed, or watch it online or on TV. General Conference consists of four sessions (2 hours each), plus one session specifically for men, and another just for women. Conference talks are given by the highest leaders in the Church, usually general authorities, apostles, and the prophet. Also twice a year, each stake gives its own conference called “Stake Conference.” The contents of all General Conferences going back 30 years are available on the LDS.org website.

2. Dallin H. Oaks. “Focus and Priorities.” In LDS General Conference, April 2011. <http://www.lds.org/general-conference/2001/04/focus-and-priorities>

We are given these choices, but then we are corralled into choosing the tampered banana. And when we don't automatically know the right answer, we feel unworthy.

These are just a few aspects of the complex web of mind control used to limit choice under the illusion of agency.

As an apostle, future prophet Howard W. Hunter, said, "To fully understand this gift of agency and its inestimable worth, it is imperative that we understand that God's chief way of acting is by persuasion and patience and long-suffering, not by coercion and stark confrontation. He acts by gentle solicitation and by sweet enticement. He always acts with unfailing respect for the freedom and independence that we possess. He wants to help us and pleads for the chance to assist us, but he will not do so in violation of our agency."¹

These are admirable goals and complete deceptions. The Church's methods, while patient and long-suffering, are in fact choice-limiting, coercive, and in violation of free agency. The suppression of "stark confrontation" inhibits the free flow of opposing ideas and open debate, from which comes true freedom of thought.

There must be opposition in all things, including in free thought. Adam and Eve had to eat from the Tree of Knowledge before they could have agency. Yet a faithful Mormon is expected to be persuaded in a vacuum, casting aside all "contentious" debate, shelving serious doubts and questions, and shunning naysayers.

You cannot freely choose without considering all options. You cannot opt to believe when you cannot hear all the pros and cons. You cannot exercise agency while being prohibited from open deliberation. You cannot stave off fraud when you have been discouraged from researching alternate sources. And you cannot openly explore faith when you have been instructed to repress every doubt.

There's an exit sign hanging over the gate to Eden. Will you take it?

1. Howard W. Hunter. "The Golden Thread of Choice." In LDS General Conference, Oct 1989.

I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves.

—**Prophet Joseph Smith**¹

I realized that the lies that had long preserved my false beliefs were the lies that I told to myself. I awoke to the fact that I am the master of my own deceit.

—**Brad L. Morin, *Suddenly Strangers***²

Our culture had trapped us... Many Latter-day Saints lived in mental and social prisons that perpetuated precisely the kind of insanity with which I'd grown up. It wasn't slavery, but it was a powerful form of bondage: the belief that God had ordained a pattern of secrets and silence, that religious authority always trumped one's individual sense of right and wrong, that the evidence of the senses must bow to the demands of orthodoxy, no matter how insane. It was a kind of institutionalized madness, and its shackles were all the more confining for existing almost entirely in the human mind.

—**Martha Beck, *Leaving the Saints***³

When finally you surrender to us, it must be of your own free will. We do not destroy the heretic because he resists us... We convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him. We burn all evil and all illusion out of him; we bring him over to our side, not in appearance, but genuinely, heart and soul.

—**George Orwell, 1984**

What is Mind Control?

The terms “cult” and “mind control” are charged, full of assumption and emotion. How can we tell the difference between honest persuasion and manipulative exploitation?

Mind control is known by many names: brainwashing, coercive persuasion, thought reform, uninformed consent, exploitive persuasion, sociopsychological manipulation, exploitative manipulation, behavioral change technology, compliance-gaining influence, unhealthy group dynamics, and spiritual abuse.

Cults are also known as closed systems of logic, authoritarian structures, coercive organizations, high-demand groups, and ideological or psychological totalism.

If you were brainwashed, would you know it?

Author and former Moonie, Steven Hassan wrote, “I can't tell you how many times I've been on a talk show where the host asks a cult member, ‘Are you brainwashed?’ The cult member replies, ‘No, of course not.’ As if the cult member would actually say, ‘Yes!’ What the host fails to realize is that the mind-controlled member will not know that he has surrendered control until he is able to step away from the group and learn about cult recruitment and indoctrination.”⁴

A former member of International Society of Divine Love, Joe Kelly, describes his experience: “It was easy to see how Maharishi, Swami Prabhupada, and Reverend Moon had duped and controlled their followers, but my Swami was different... I told myself that

1. *Journal of Discourses*. Vol. 10. Privately Printed, n.d. <http://jod.mrm.org/1>. 57-58.

2. Brad L. Morin, and Chris L. Morin. *Suddenly Strangers: Surrendering Gods and Heroes*. Chula Vista, CA: Aventine Press, 2004. 30.

3. Martha Nibley Beck. *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith*. 1st ed. New York: Crown Publishers, 2005. 239.

4. Hassan, *Releasing the Bonds*, 2000. 86.

we were a legitimate alternative religion.”¹ In 2011, his leader, Prakashanand Saraswati, was convicted of 20 counts of child sexual abuse. Clearly, his Swami was not different.² Any Mormon reading about the Society of Divine Love would be quick to call it a cult. But he will probably have a hard time seeing his own subservience to a manipulative system.

Margaret Singer stated, “Brainwashing is not experienced as a fever or a pain might be; it is an invisible social adaptation. When you are the subject of it, you are not aware of the intent of the influence processes that are going on, and especially, you are not aware of the changes taking place within you...”

“Thus, thought reform is a concerted effort to change a person’s way of looking at the world, which will change his or her behavior.”³

Another cult researcher, Geri-Ann Galanti, observes, “[Thought reform methods] are not easily recognized because they are techniques utilized by all cultures—directly and indirectly—to socialize children and acculturate immigrants...”

“These techniques are used in socialization precisely because they are extremely powerful. They appear innocent, but when put to deceptive ends, they are no less potent.

“The confusion surrounding the brainwashing process stems from the fact that most people are looking for something overt and foreign... I went to Camp K [Moonies recruitment event] looking for something big and evil; what I found was very subtle and friendly, thus I didn’t recognize its power.”⁴

While the lines are sometimes blurry, ethical forms of influence include most kinds of therapy, education, mainstream religions, the military, and politics. When I visit my therapist, we both have the same goal. I give her money, and she listens to me and offers validation and, sometimes, good advice. The outcome is that usually I feel better and can manage my problems more effectively. The cost of the interaction is clearly stated up front, and she doesn’t try to get anything else out of me. If I don’t like the outcome, I am free to stop sessions at any time. I have no fear of doing so, and she won’t try to keep me.

Even the military, which clearly uses brainwashing methods, is open about their goals. We all know military recruits will be programmed to unquestioningly follow orders so they can kill people and break things. This training occurs under very strenuous conditions where individual wills are broken down and new personalities are built up. Some may debate whether this is useful or not, or whether war is ethical, but military training methods are no secret.

Advertising is considered by some to be a form of coercive persuasion. Marketers take advantage of the mild trance state that comes from watching TV, and they associate unrelated positive imagery with the product. Advertisers will also often exaggerate to make their product seem more desirable.

These types of persuasive tricks, on their own, are not terribly effective at producing long-term loyalty. Laws are designed to prevent outright lies, so many companies are more or less honest. It’s pretty easy to check claims against product reviews. And the mistake of buying an ineffective brand of laundry detergent costs only a few dollars.

In contrast, a high-demand group will pull all the stops to recruit and retain lifelong members. These groups use a legion of persuasive techniques in unison, techniques that strip away the personality to build up a group pseudopersonality. New members know very little about the group’s purpose, and most expectations remain unrevealed. People become deeply involved, sacrificing vast amounts of time and money, and investing emotionally, spiritually, psychologically, and socially. Escape proves to be very difficult, and former members face a struggle to regain a sense of sanity.

In one sense, then, the line can be drawn at how totalistic the system is. Does it

1. Madeleine Landau Tobias, and Janja Lalich. *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds: Freedom and Recovery from Cults and Abusive Relationships*. Alameda, CA: Hunter House, 1994. 88.

2. “Hindu Guru Found Guilty on 20 Counts of Molesting Young Girls.” *Austin-American Statesman*, March 4, 2011. <http://www.statesman.com/news/news/local/hindu-guru-found-guilty-on-20-counts-of-molesting-1/nRX5s/>

3. Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, 1995. 61-62.

4. Geri-Ann Galanti, Ph.D. “Reflections on ‘Brainwashing.’” *Recovery from Cults*, ed. Michael D. Langone, 1995. 101-102.

permeate every aspect of life and self? Hassan says, "...as employed by the most destructive cults, mind control seeks nothing less than to disrupt an individual's authentic identity—behavior, thoughts, emotions—and reconstruct it in the image of the cult leader [or group]... Cult mind control is a social process that encourages obedience, dependence, and conformity. It discourages autonomy and individuality by immersing recruits in an environment that represses free choice. The group's dogma becomes the person's only concern. Anything or anyone that does not fit into his reshaped reality is irrelevant."¹

By contrast, "In a benevolent group, influence processes are positive and ethical and the locus of control remains within the individual. Influence is used only to promote independent thinking and decision-making, self-awareness, and self-control. Individuality, creativity, and free will are respected and promoted. People recognize and understand the influences around them. Access to diverse information sources is encouraged."²

Another author, therapist, and former cult member, John D. Goldhammer says, "Certainly many groups are helpful and constructive forces in society...*provided they maintain a balance of power between individual autonomy and the group.*"³ Is the individual on equal footing with the group itself? Or is the ideology more important than the member?

As Galanti explains, "All forms of influence are not the same. Langone, for example, discusses a continuum of influence, ranging from choice-respecting influence (educative, advisory, and certain types of persuasion) to compliance-gaining influence... Although definitions of what is therapeutic vs. what is destructive will vary according to personal biases—for example, cult members would surely argue that what they do is for the benefit of the members—a strong case can be made that cults largely utilize indirect and deceptive techniques of persuasion and control to serve the interests of the leaders rather than those of the members."⁴

Informed consent is key here and separates unethical types of persuasion from the ethical. Persuasion comes from friends, family, corporations, politicians, religions, scientists, authors, and activists. The real question is: Are we being persuaded by facts, reason, research, and open access to information, or by manipulation and deception?

Consent through fraud is not consent at all. Hassan said, "Many cult leaders believe that it is necessary for them to practice deceptive recruitment and mind control techniques for ideological reasons. But if the effect of their actions is to make the person dependent and subservient, then I believe it is hurtful and people's rights are being violated."⁵

Mind control is as much about teaching members to control themselves as it is about exertion of external controls. I call this the "inner thought police."

Apostle Erastus Snow told this story about Joseph Smith: "...a certain lawyer...who came to see him...expressed astonishment and surprise at the ease with which he controlled the people, and said it was something that was not to be found among the learned men of the world. Said he: 'We cannot do it. What is the secret of your success?' 'Why,' said the Prophet, 'I do not govern the people. I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves.'"⁶

External constraints translate into self-suppression which leads to a totalist system blocking all avenues of escape. One member of a New Age spiritual cult described his internal struggle: "These images haunted my mind because I was starting to have thoughts of leaving. It was strange how charged these thoughts to leave were... The avalanche of consequences in my mind were unthinkable. My will to move on them was easily and quickly drowned in a sea of guilt, self-condemnation, and fear of hell. To leave was like walking off a cliff into a hellish abyss. I had to hide these thoughts not only from the other

1. Hassan, *Releasing the Bonds*, 2000. 38.

2. Hassan, *Releasing the Bonds*, 2000. 55.

3. John D. Goldhammer. *Under the Influence*. First Edition. Prometheus Books, 1996. 18.

4. Galanti, "Reflections on 'Brainwashing,'" *Recovery from Cults*, ed. Langone, 1995. 86.

5. Hassan, *Releasing the Bonds*, 2000. xx.

6. *Journal of Discourses*. Vol. 24. Privately Printed, n.d. <http://jod.mrm.org/1> 159 .

members, but from myself and God.”¹

Hassan observes, “What makes this all so insidious is that members often speak and act with the greatest sincerity because they have been subjected to the same mind control techniques that they use to recruit others.”²

What is a Cult?

Michael Langone, Ph.D., is a psychologist specializing in cult research. He is the director of the International Cultic Studies Association, and editor of *Cultic Studies Review*, a scientific journal. In the introduction to *Recovery from Cults*, he writes:

A cult is a group or movement that, to a significant degree, (a) exhibits great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea, or thing, (b) uses a thought-reform program to persuade, control, and socialize members (i.e., to integrate them into the group’s unique pattern of relationships, beliefs, values, and practices), (c) systematically induces states of psychological dependency in members, (d) exploits members to advance the leadership’s goals, and (e) causes psychological harm to members, their families, and the community.³

That may be hard to swallow all at once, but all these points will be addressed throughout these pages.

The defining characteristics can also be thought of in terms of isolation. To one extent or another, high demand groups isolate members, either physically or mentally, from the rest of society. “In order to manage [the conflicts between the group and society], cultic groups tend to become isolated, psychologically if not physically, governed by hidden agendas, and totalistic, that is, they will dictate, sometimes with excruciating specificity, how members should think, feel, and act.”⁴

This brings to mind cult compounds, like the Branch Davidians in Waco, TX. Yet modern cults often try to fit into the mainstream as best they can. Most cults like to attract new members, and it helps to put on a good front.

“...the majority of cults today are not as isolated from the outside world as were cults in the 1970s... Typically believers continue working at their pre-cult jobs and more often tend to remain in contact with family and friends, even though this contact becomes more strained as the cult member’s behavior, attitudes, and language begin to change.”⁵

Many dysfunctional families display the same dynamics we see in larger groups, and often, thought-control methods are used in abusive homes. “Since the upsurge of both public and professional interest in the issue of domestic violence, there has been some recognition of the link between mind control and battering. Men or women who batter their partners sometimes use manipulative techniques similar to those found in cults. The most common include ‘isolation and the provocation of fear; alternating kindness and threat to produce disequilibrium; the induction of guilt, self-blame, dependency, and learned helplessness.’... The similarities between cultic devotion and the traumatic bonding that occurs between battered individuals and their abusers are striking.”⁶

Those more interested in how one-on-one relationships can employ mind control techniques can read *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds* by Madeleine Tobias and Janja Lalich, as it covers this issue more in depth. This may be of particular interest to Mormons who have also been in abusive relationships and were controlled not only by the Church, but also

1. Steve Sanchez. *Spiritual Perversion*. Austin, TX: Turn Key Press, 2005. 211.

2. Hassan, *Releasing the Bonds*, 2000. 4.

3. Michael D. Langone, Ph.D., ed. “Introduction.” In *Recovery from Cults: Help for Victims of Psychological and Spiritual Abuse*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1995. 5.

4. Langone, “Introduction,” *Recovery from Cults*, 1995. 5.

5. Lorna Goldberg, M.S.W., A.C.S.W. “Guidelines for Therapists.” *Recovery from Cults*, ed. Langone, 1995. 236.

6. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994. 17-18.

by their spouse, who may have used LDS doctrine to enforce control. This will cause multiple layers of issues that will require special care to unravel.

Myths of Cults & Mind Control

Unfortunately, our stereotypical misconceptions about the nature of brainwashing prevent us from recognizing it.

—Geri-Ann Calanti, Ph.D.,
*Recovery from Cults*¹

When discussing cults, it is important to dispel the biggest myths perpetuated by society. By looking at what a cult is *not*, we learn what a cult is.

Steven Hassan reveals, “When I was in the Moon cult [aka The Moonies], my friends and family told me time and time again that I had been ‘brainwashed,’ or that I was under ‘mind control.’ At the time, I thought ‘mind control’ meant being handcuffed, tortured, and interrogated under bright lights, and I knew that hadn’t happened to me. So, when people called me a ‘brainwashed robot,’ I thought they were just persecuting me for my beliefs, and their negative comments wound up reinforcing my commitment to the group. Like any member of a destructive cult, I needed to learn what mind control really is, and how it is used, before I could understand that I had been subjected to it.”²

Myth: Cults are weird or obvious. Cultists dress funny, talk funny, and have blissed-out, glassy stares.

Media coverage exposes the most extreme cases and TV-ready images, so we tend to think all such groups are strange and easy to identify.

The most obvious example is Jonestown, where 912 men, women, and children were convinced to drink cyanide-laced Flavor-Aid. Another example is Heaven’s Gate, where 39 members committed suicide, believing they were catching a passing space ship. The Branch Davidians were killed in a standoff with FBI agents in Waco, TX, while defending their beliefs and their prophet, David Koresh. Members of Aum Shinrikyo (now Aleph) in Japan are known for setting off a sarin gas bomb in a busy subway, killing 13 people and injuring 5,000.

The Unification Church, aka The Moonies, became known in the 1980s for its mass weddings. Eastern meditation groups, like Transcendental Meditation, often practice long hours of meditation, causing their members to appear “tranced-out.” New Age and UFO cults often have unusual beliefs, which makes it easy to single them out for public scrutiny. A group based on Hindu beliefs, Hare Krishna (ISKCON), made the news in 1983 when the parents of a follower were awarded damages for falsely imprisoning and brainwashing their minor daughter.

To believe that all cultic groups fall into these sensational extremes is a dangerous fallacy. More often, successful groups blend into society by appearing mainstream, friendly, and normal. They project a positive image of strong moral values.

The most successful cults are the most subtle.

Myth: Brainwashing involves physical restraint, hypnotic wheels, flashing images, and a swinging lamp.

1. Galanti, “Reflections on ‘Brainwashing,’” *Recovery from Cults*, ed. Langone, 1995. 87.

2. Hassan, *Releasing the Bonds*, 2000. 33.

These images come from movie and TV writers who need dramatic imagery to keep us entertained. All those special effects would likely be counterproductive. Real-life mind control is not that exciting.

The term “brainwashing” comes from a Chinese word that literally translates to “cleanse brain.” After the Korean War, some POWs returned sympathetic to the views of their captors and some did not. Those held by the Koreans had been tortured and starved, but did not show signs of sympathy for their captors. In contrast, those held by the Chinese allies had been treated much better, and this proved to be a far more effective indoctrination and interrogation tool.

The science shows we are much more likely to change our minds for those we like. Restraint devices are likely to scare people off. Those who wish to control must first earn trust.

Manipulators start by creating good feelings and positive opinions about the group. Potential recruits already agree with at least a few of the beliefs, so they slowly change some behaviors under slight social pressure. Over time, the will to use critical reasoning on doctrinal and group matters is stripped away. Misdeeds lead to shame, which is offset at other times by praise and elitism. Public commitments create deepening belief and dependence.

By this time, cult members have come to believe that their lives, identities, moral principles, and possibly their very souls are in danger if they do not obey and believe. This is enough to trap a person. No interrogation rooms or torture chambers are necessary.

Myth: Brainwashing requires hypnosis.

Brainwashing does not require hypnosis. People are ready and willing to believe a good sales pitch without going into a trance.

And trances aren’t all that mystical. It is very natural for the human brain to change states of consciousness. It does not require drugs, meditation, chanting, or swinging pocket watches.

Our mind is capable of tuning out unimportant or repetitive information so we can focus on more relevant cognitive tasks. We are in an altered state when we fall asleep and when we dream. We are prone to changing states when we read, learn, concentrate, watch TV, listen to music, drive, and create. Sometimes the conscious side of the brain wants to shut down for a little while and we “space out.” We can become so involved in a story or focused on learning that we lose all awareness of the outside world. Music and creative activities can shift us into the right brain, which controls emotional, visual, and sensing functions, and makes us less critical.

Human beings are quite comfortable with most altered states because we experience them every day. It doesn’t take much for a manipulator to subtly switch a person to a more emotional state, or cause someone to become absorbed in a story. While in these states, we’re not at the total mercy of a would-be brainwasher, but we are more easily influenced, especially if the manipulator is someone we trust.

Myth: Only stupid, needy, mentally ill, uneducated, or spiritually weak people join cults.

Anyone is susceptible to coercive persuasion. Not every group may be able to lure you in, nor are you always susceptible. But there are cultic groups that would appeal to you at the right time in your life.

Many cults target people who are in an unstable period. When someone is going through difficult times, normal defenses are down, and people are more open to deception and persuasive techniques. If someone offers hope, friendship, comfort, or answers to burning questions, people are more accepting of inspirational messages.

Teenagers and college-age adults are at the highest risk, because they are in transition and are seeking belonging and identity.

Cult followers are typically of above-average intelligence. Complex belief systems attract brilliant people, especially those who are driven to find meaning.

Hassan observes, “Most of the former cult members I have met are exceptionally bright and educated. They have an active imagination and a creative mind. They have a capacity to focus their attention and enter deep states of concentration. Most are idealistic and socially conscious. They want to make the most of themselves—and to make a positive contribution to the world...”

“The more creative a mind a person has, the more his imagination can be used to control him. Indeed, bright people sometimes have even more sophisticated fantasies about the group and its doctrine than does the cult leader.”¹

Myth: All cults are religious in nature.

A totalistic system can be built around any subject.

Researchers generally recognize four main categories of cults: Religious, political, self-improvement and large group awareness training (LGATs), and commercial cults.² The specific beliefs or dogmas of the group don’t matter, because thought-reform methods can be built up around any subject. Generally cults appeal to the values of society, like peace and love, equality, God, money, personal growth, and political change.

Some political parties and activist groups are manipulative and deceptive. Some legitimate businesses are controlling of employees, as are many multi-level marketing groups. Any topic for which people are willing to organize is fair game.

Myth: A cult is any pseudo-Christian or non-Christian faith.

Many people define cults as religious groups that are not Christian or include doctrines that are not in line with their interpretation of the Bible. Some believe any non-Christian religion is a cult.

This definition is not used by secular researchers who have studied cults with a scientific eye. It is doctrine-based and does not explain anything about the mechanisms of mind control or how it is psychologically and materially harmful to people. It assumes that one brand of biblical interpretation is more valid than another. It assumes all Protestant sects are completely free of manipulation and exploitation. These are inaccurate assumptions.

Mind control is not about the untruthfulness or strangeness of doctrines.

“From our perspective, a group or relationship earns the label ‘cult’ or ‘cultic’ on the basis of its methods and behaviors, *not* on the basis of its beliefs... *It is not the beliefs that we oppose, but the exploitative manipulation of a person’s faith and trust in other human beings.*”³

Myth: “Cult” means the same thing as “occult.”

These words sound the same, but they do not mean the same thing, nor do they even have the same origin.

“Cult” can sometimes refer to any religion or set of beliefs. It comes from the Latin word for “worship”, and we also find it in the words “culture” and “cultivate.”

1. Hassan, *Releasing the Bonds*, 2000. 120.

2. Hassan, *Releasing the Bonds*, 2000. 5.

3. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994. 5.

Occult also comes from Latin, “occultus”, meaning “hidden, concealed, secret.” It refers to pagan forms of worship, magic, and divination. For many years, these activities were kept hidden from controlling religious bodies, and hence, the association to “that which is concealed.”

Some Christians and those who believe these activities to be inherently evil will tend to associate the occult *and* cults with Satanism.

A study of the psychological effects of group manipulation has nothing to do with whether or not the group is Christian or related to the occult.

Myth: People can easily leave a cult whenever they want. No one is forcing them to be there.

You wouldn’t light yourself on fire, would you? Or drive your car into a wall, or cut off your arm, right? You are free to do these things, but probably don’t out of fear.

Likewise, cult members believe they face real dangers if they leave, and this fear keeps them bound. Cultists may fear spiritual punishment, assault by spiritual forces (demons, evil spirits, God), financial failure, loss of friends and family, loss of support, loss of salvation, and loss of purpose. Sometimes cult members may even fear physical violence from fellow members.

Members may also be emotionally, financially, or psychologically dependent upon the group or leader. Some groups work to break down individuality and self-reliance, sometimes even regressing them to a childlike state.

Those who think about leaving face very real problems.

Myth: People who have left cults should just get over it.

Unfortunately, it is not so simple. Former cultists had their entire lives, minds, and personalities deeply invested in a deceptive organization. Many former members suffer from psychological and even situational difficulties that will take time and effort to overcome. Some of these problems can include anxiety, depression, guilt, anger, eating disorders, panic attacks, indecisiveness, difficulty integrating into society, post-traumatic stress, recovery from physical and sexual abuse, inability to trust, sexual problems, confusion and disorientation, “floating” and dissociation, and lingering phobias.

Some former members suffer material loss for leaving, and may have left behind family and friends, which prevents closure.

Myth: Brainwashing is total. If some members are able to disagree, or if someone has left the group, that’s proof they were never really brainwashed.

No brainwashing method has ever been found to be total and complete. Abraham Lincoln said, “You can fool some of the people all the time, or all the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.”

No matter how strong the methods, some members will eventually see through to the deceptions or become too miserable to stay.

I was a wreck of stress. I kept going through the motions of my life, going to work, going home, going to the [SLF] school, going to work again. I tried to be positive, like I was okay, like I wasn't distressed by it all, like I knew what I was doing.

—Steve Sanchez, *Spiritual Perversion*¹

Partly because it was so much easier than feeling anything, and partly because I wanted desperately to please my father, I spent my early years almost completely oblivious to my own psychological state.

—Martha Beck, *Leaving the Saints*²

Your worst enemy...was your own nervous system. At any moment the tension inside you was liable to translate itself into some visible symptom.

—George Orwell, 1984

All Is Not Well in Zion

Another ancient dystopian story is Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*. Like the Garden story, it depicts captivity, though in not such pleasant terms.

A group of prisoners are locked deep in a cave, chained to kneel before a wall lit by an unseen fire behind them. They can only see the shadows of figures moving in front of the fire. They have known no other life nor seen sights other than the shadow play before them.

One man is released. Now he can see the fires and the people with the shadow puppets, but the fire pains his eyes. The shadows seem more real and comforting to him than reality.

When he is shown the world outside, the sun blinds him and burns his skin. After awhile, he acclimates to the truth. Knowing freedom, he yearns to go back and explain it all to his friends. In this, he knows he is helpless to free his fellows. He lacks the language or context to explain this new world and how it is better than the cave.

So what's the big deal? Mormons are happy, clean, fun, moral, upright, gentle people. Why rock the boat? If mind control can improve lives, who is it hurting?

But too often the happiness, like choice, is an illusion made of pressed suits and modest dresses on cheerful families all striving blissfully for a life full of blessings. For too many Mormons, those outward smiles are mere shadow puppets on the cave wall.

In the ward, everyone thinks everyone else's family is happy and perfect. If you have any issue, it's temporary, or there's some sin that needs resolving. If you're miserable, there's something wrong with *you* and not anyone else. So you hide it. But maybe everyone else is hiding it, too.

1. Sanchez, *Spiritual Perversion*, 2005. 156.

2. Beck, *Leaving the Saints*, 2005. 61.

Many individuals and families in the Church who seem happy, who seem perfect, are *not*. Outside the cave, it is easy to find accounts from current and former members who have been putting on a show.

Recall the Hans Christian Andersen story, *The Emperor's New Clothes*. The crafty con artist tailor sells the king a new magic outfit. Wise people will see the finest suit ever sewn; fools will see nothing. Word quickly spreads throughout the land and the people come to see the king, parade through the streets, absolutely naked in his new “clothes.” In unison, everyone cheers for his beautiful outfit, afraid of being mocked for fools.

This story is real and everyone is naked. No amount of pretending will change that. Who is willing to admit that all is not well in Zion? Those who are brave enough to point out the issues and put on some real clothes are shunned by the many naked others. They are ousted from the group.

This chapter may seem overly negative to some readers. It lays out the case of why this book is needed and why the Church is not perfect like it is. Many believing Mormons may consider this chapter unfair, but to those who struggle, this chapter should validate and explain some of the things they may be feeling; it is a comfort to show they are not alone. For each statistic and example herein, there is a real person, a flesh and blood human being with legitimate suffering, in need of love and support.

This chapter also lays out the extremes on the fringes of the present Church (and her related splinter groups), and examines the potential dangers of a future that is as severe as the Mormon past.

The LDS church does come through on many of its promises and it is beneficial to members in many ways. Yet in spite of positive outward appearances, belonging to a high-demand group can cause a number of serious problems. John Goldhammer states, “Logically, people who are under mind control do not consciously realize [it]. But they can and do suffer from a myriad of physical, emotional, and psychological consequences that may be rationalized away as some personal fault or weakness, or a test of their faith, loyalty, dedication, and endurance.”¹

For many Saints², the costs of membership far outweigh the benefits.

Is Mormonism A Danger To Society?

One would think that the world had seen more than enough of what a well-disciplined mob can do in the hands of a single madman.

—**Carl Jung, *The Undiscovered Self***

The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity. Surely some revelation is at hand; surely the second coming is at hand.

—**William Butler Yeats, *The Second Coming***

The word “cult” conjures the worst in our imaginations.

Are Mormons poised to do something extreme, like the high-profile cult cases in the news? Will they pull a Jonestown mass suicide or an Aum Shinrikyo act of terrorism? Where are the group marriages, life on compounds, or the selloffs of property in preparation for the end times? And since they haven’t done anything like that, doesn’t it prove they’re not a cult?

The answer to this, like the other topics in this book, is complex. Let’s explore some of the ways in which Mormonism and its spinoff groups are presently and potentially dangerous.

In the Church’s early history, Mormons were participants, both in perpetrating and

1. Goldhammer, *Under the Influence*, 1996. 175.

2. All members of the LDS Church are considered Saints, based on biblical usage of the term to refer to all Christ’s followers.

being victimized by, extreme acts, including unconventional sexual practices, confidence games, communal living, mass migration, establishment of a theocracy, destruction of a printing press, massacres, and religious assassinations. Today, Mormons are taught that the early Saints were merely being persecuted for standing up for their righteous beliefs. Yet there is much, much more to that story.

Indeed, if actions of the early Saints were news headlines today, Mormons would be unequivocally labeled a cult by just about everyone. American society at the time treated the Mormons with the same courtesy we treated the Branch Davidians in Waco, TX, for many of the same reasons: Joseph Smith and his followers broke written laws and social contracts.

These are not empty accusations. Many well-researched, evidence-based books and websites have been written to reveal the true events of LDS history. This book will generally avoid discussion of manipulation in Church history. Those early Saints are dead, and this book is to help the living. Anything else is an academic question, albeit an interesting one, perhaps worthy of its own book.

What about now? On the surface, there seems little chance Mormonism will fall back to the fringes of yesteryear. The mainstreaming approach garners respect and brings in new members. Nevertheless, the level of control exerted by the modern Church could, in theory, lead once again to extremes.

Captive Hearts tells us, “At any given time, a number [of cults] may be relatively harmless. But most—if not all—have the potentiality of becoming deadly...”¹

I was ready to sell all I had to move to Missouri² the instant the prophet gave word. I had mentally prepared myself to live “the Principle”, polygamy, had the prophet reinstated it. Would I have done anything more excessive based on direct or implied commandment?

Probably.

“I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.” 1 Nephi 3:7

This is what Nephi tells his father, right before he kills a drunk man to get a book so that “an entire nation” would not “dwindle in unbelief.” This story was taught to me from age three, in songs, storybooks, Primary³ lessons, and later Seminary and firesides⁴. With examples like this, I grew up wondering if I could kill on God’s command. I had certainly been prepared to die for the Church, like Joseph Smith, like the Mormon pioneers, like the Old Testament prophets.

So while the modern Church hasn’t done anything too weird *lately*, leadership has the power to command large numbers of faithful members to do things which, to the outside world, would seem quite destructive.

And then there are the little programs that most members don’t know about, like the West Ridge Academy and other reform schools that have direct ties to the Mormon Church, including a presiding Branch President⁵, a Seminary teacher, missionaries, and funding. Upon the recommendation of the ward bishop⁶, parents pay tens of thousands of dollars to send their rebellious teen, and are warned not to listen to “lies” about their treatment. Cases

1. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994. 180.

2. Joseph Smith prophesied that in the Last Days, New Jerusalem would be built in Missouri. D&C Section 103, Graham W. Doxey. “Missouri Myths.” *Ensign*, April 1979. <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1979/04/missouri-myths>

3. Primary is the auxiliary for children aged 4-11.

4. Additional meetings are sometimes held, especially for teenagers and college-aged members, called “Firesides.” These are often held Sunday evenings, and attendance is considered optional (but strongly encouraged). They are generally directed at a specific topic (like chastity), and often guest speakers come in from out of town.

5. A branch president is like a bishop, only over a smaller congregation.

6. The leader of a “ward,” which is a congregation-sized group of Mormons. Bishops are laymen with no training, called of God, and do not receive a salary. Like most clergy, bishops take confessions, run meetings, and care for members. They are required to support themselves in addition to their leadership role. The bishop is assisted by two counselors, and this group is called “bishopric.” He is also responsible for delegating work to other members who are also “called” to other positions, such as teachers and leaders of auxiliaries.

of severe physical, psychological, and sexual abuse have been collected by former attendees.^{1,2}

Other tangential programs have existed and continue to exist, such as Evergreen International (a conversion treatment center aimed at turning homosexual members straight)³ and Youth Developmental Enterprises (work camps for LDS youth against which many allegations of abuse have been leveled).⁴ Reports of abuse are often suppressed, inhumane practices excused, and ties disavowed.

Mormonism has inspired more than a hundred currently-operating spinoff religions⁵, which consider the Book of Mormon to be scripture and which hold Joseph Smith as their founding prophet. Most are more high-demand than the mainstream Church. While the Church tries to distance itself from fundamentalists (FLDS), the fact remains that these offshoots are inspired by Smith's original teachings and rely on LDS doctrines. Those attempting to recover from FLDS groups will find much of value in these pages.

It is fertile ground for manipulative individuals. Many FLDS groups reference a Joseph Smith prophecy that the Church house will be set in order by a "mighty and strong" future prophet, which plays well into their narrative. Dr. Michael Welner, an associate professor of psychiatry at NYU School of Medicine, studied more than 60 leaders of fundamentalist Mormon sects. "In the course of my research, I interviewed a man who has taught in [LDS] fundamentalist circles [who] has met over a hundred people...who believed themselves, quite earnestly, to be the 'one mighty and strong.'... He himself believed for a time that he was the 'one mighty and strong,' then backed away from what he believed to be too much a calling for him."

He added, "It is in a culture where there is a prophet in the present day, and in which man and God communicate on a deeply personal level, that these experiences take place."⁶

Dr. Welner insists that such beliefs and behavior are not always psychotic, that traits similar to psychopathy can be a product of strong beliefs and cultural context. Moreover, "The power of religious ordination enables someone who is psychopathic to exploit the devout around them. How expedient a position to be a prophet, with unquestionable superiority and providence. For the wrong person, it is absolute power that corrupts absolutely."

Individuals within the mainstream LDS Church can also take the doctrine to extremes. One example is Glenn Taylor Helzer, who, in 2000, "twisted scripture to convince his brother Justin Helzer and friend Dawn Godman that bloodshed was necessary if he was to reach the highest echelons of the Mormon Church" and to usher in the Second Coming.⁷ He then proceeded to murder five people.

Other notorious latter-day prophets responsible for religious killings include Bruce Longo, Jeffrey Lundgren, the Lafferty brothers, and Ervil LeBaron. Christine Jonson was not a self-appointed prophet, but thought God told her to drown her two children. All of these events have occurred within my lifetime.

While anyone can go off the deep end, instances when insanity is inspired by LDS teachings cannot be easily dismissed. The scriptures contain too many stories about

1. Chino Blanco. "Trapped in a Mormon Gulag." *Daily Kos*, Jan 5, 2009.

<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2009/01/05/680293/-Trapped-in-a-Mormon-Gulag>

2. Eric Northwood. *Clearing Time: Fighting a Mormon Gulag*, 2011. <http://vimeo.com/32268408>

3. *Former LDS "Ex-Gay" Claims Evergreen Is a Suicide Mill*, 2010. <https://www.truthwinsout.org/blog/2011/07/17561/>

4. "Utah Boys Allegedly Victimized at Maui Land and Pineapple Camp in the 1980s." *Urban Honolulu News*, Jan 24, 2014. <http://urbanhonolulu.hawaiinewsnow.com/news/business/295433-utah-boys-allegedly-victimized-maui-land-and-pineapple-camp-1980s>

5. "Latter Day Saint Movement / Groups and Denominations - Active." Accessed Nov 8, 2013.

<http://ldsmovement.pbworks.com/w/browse/#view=ViewFolder¶m=Groups%20and%20Denominations%20-%20Active>

6. Michael Welner, M.D. "New Research Reveals Secrets About Psychology of Polygamous Sects and Their Leaders." *ABC News*, March 1, 2010. <http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/TheLaw/research-reveals-secrets-psychology-polygamous-sects-leaders/story?id=9955379>

7. Malaika Fraley. "Grim Crime Scene Re-explored in Depth in 'False Prophet.'" *San Jose Mercury News*, March 16, 2008. http://www.culteducation.com/reference/childrenof_thunder/childrenof_thunder20.html

underdog prophets who triumph in the end. Leaders of spinoff groups can be very convinced and convincing in the context of prophets like Noah, Paul, Lehi, Jonah, Abinadi, or Joseph Smith himself.

On June 2, 2002, fourteen-year-old Elizabeth Smart was abducted from her home by Brian David “Emmanuel” Mitchell. She was held captive and repeatedly raped for nine months. The Elizabeth Smart case is particularly interesting for two reasons.

One, Mitchell (and his wife, Wanda Barzee) sincerely believed they followed the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. In the LDS context of personal revelation and spiritual gifts, Mitchell thought he was a prophet. Following the examples set by the former prophets, he obeyed God’s revelation, went against society’s laws, and took an especially young second wife.

BYU professor Daniel Peterson studied Mitchell’s writings and “called Mitchell’s book ‘an impressive production in many senses,’ [and] said Mitchell uses scriptural language well and makes many references to both fundamentalist and mainstream beliefs of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

“I don’t share his belief, but there’s a logic to them,” said Peterson... ‘The logic makes sense when you buy into the presuppositions.’”¹

Arguably, Mitchell would have abused people regardless of his beliefs. But the context of Mormon culture gave him spiritual justification.

Secondly, Elizabeth Smart’s conditioning likely made her submissive and easily controlled by Mitchell. Mormonism puts people into a submissive and gullible state where they may be vulnerable to more extreme manipulators.

When the story first broke, reporters openly suspected Smart’s family, questioning whether a 14-year-old girl would willingly go with a strange man without putting up a fight or trying to run away. When I heard this, I became livid. Of course she would willingly go with a strange man. I was also once a 14-year-old Mormon girl. I had been sheltered. I was naive. I had been taught to trust unquestioningly. I was particularly vulnerable to fear and had no defenses against those who might wish to abuse me, nor the understanding of what such abuse might entail. I had been taught that God works in mysterious ways and might have easily bought a well-crafted story by an assailant well-versed in scripture.

Worst of all, I was never taught I had the right to fight back.

With myself in her shoes, I could imagine a number of scenarios through which Elizabeth Smart would have gone quietly. It turned out I was at least partly right. She originally went with Mitchell because he threatened her sister. She stayed all those months in part because of the prior conditioning intended to keep her subservient.

In her own words: “I remember in school one time, I had a teacher who was talking about abstinence. And she said, ‘Imagine you’re a stick of gum. When you engage in sex, that’s like getting chewed. And if you do that lots of times, you’re going to become an old piece of gum, and who is going to want you after that?’ ...for me, I thought, ‘I’m that chewed-up piece of gum.’ Nobody re-chews a piece of gum. You throw it away. And that’s how easy it is to feel you no longer have worth. Your life no longer has value... Why would it even be worth screaming out? Why would it even make a difference if you are rescued? Your life still has no value.”² This type of shaming object lesson is often taught in LDS Sunday School.

Smart now hopes to teach kids to fight back against assailants, something she said she was never taught to do: “...if you’re given choices, if you’re given skills, if you’re given permission to fight back, to know that you are of value and to know that you don’t *have* to live your life that way, you don’t *have* to do what other people tell you, that you have value and you always will have value, nothing can change that, then that’s what we should be

1. Pamela Manson. “BYU Prof Says ‘There’s a Logic’ to Mitchell’s Writings.” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Nov 30, 2009. http://www.sltrib.com/news/ci_13893835

2. *Child Trafficking Symposium: Elizabeth Smart*. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2013. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ot3SdCip7Xl&feature=youtube_gdata_player

doing.”

Why Should We Mourn Or Think Our Lot Is Hard?

No one can ignore the truth, diminish their awareness by avoiding or trivializing the facts, betray their rational mind in the process, and not pay the price psychologically.

—Blair Watson,
*The Psychological Effects of Mormonism*¹

I think I could—uh—be happier if I didn’t—uh—did not believe the Church was—is true. I think if I didn’t believe the gospel I could be—uh—would be off of this treadmill that is making me feel almost crazy...

—Anonymous LDS woman,
quoted in *Mormon Women, Prozac and Therapy*²

There are many anecdotal stories, online and in books, about the negative effects of Mormonism in individual lives. I will not recount them here in detail. Instead I will give a high-level view of problems generated by high-demand group participation, and specifically in mainline Mormonism.

Most of these problems are hidden. To admit that more than a few stray sheep have significant issues would be to admit failure of the gospel. Nevertheless, “Cults attack and destroy a person’s independence, critical thinking abilities, personal relationships, and general physical, spiritual, and psychological state of being.”³ Mormonism is no different.

Janja Lalich, Professor of Sociology and associate editor of the *Cultic Studies Journal*, writes of a political cult to which she belonged. “A well-respected doctor and party theoretician in his 50s said he was so tired he prayed daily for a heart attack to give him some release. A number of others said they secretly wished they would get killed in a car accident because they couldn’t think of any other way of getting out.”⁴ Too many Latter-day Saints can relate.

Members oppress their inner selves. Major life decisions, like education, marriage, family planning, career, use of spare time, and development of talents are heavily influenced by generalized one-size-fits-all advice that doesn’t account for individual preferences and situational details. In fact, the will of the group may be in direct conflict with individual interest. Minor personal decisions including diet, fashion, use of money, entertainment, and intellectual pursuits, are given disproportional weight and scrutiny.

Members can become overly dependent on the group and engage in approval-seeking behaviors. Members are encouraged to place their locus of control outside themselves, either in God, the doctrine, the leadership, or other members, thus allowing others to define their context and frame of happiness, accomplishment, validation, and worth.

Members become isolated through an over-focus on the Church. Conversations outside the meeting house are monopolized by Church topics. Nonmember friends and family feel alienated by overuse of Church terminology and a lack of topic diversity. Church members are kept childlike, blocked from exposure to a variety of ideas and people.

Moreover, members can be plagued with unexpressed feelings of depression, guilt, shame, exhaustion, phobias, magical-thinking, passive-aggressive behavior, and hidden

1. Blair Watson. “The Psychological Effects of Mormonism: How Mormonism Affects People’s Self-Esteem.” 2008. http://members.shaw.ca/blair_watson/

2. Kent Ponder, Ph.D. “Mormon Women, Prozac and Therapy.” 2003. <http://packham.n4m.org/prozac.htm>

3. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994. 6.

4. Janja Lalich. “A Little Carrot and a Lot of Stick: A Case Example.” In *Recovery from Cults: Help for Victims of Psychological and Spiritual Abuse*, ed. Michael D. Langone. New York: W.W. Norton, 1995. 84.

familial abuse. They may suffer self-esteem issues or feel like they can never fit in. Others battle eating disorders, toxic perfectionism, and suicidal ideation.

Self-esteem

Self-Esteem reflects our deepest vision of our competence and worth.

—Nathaniel Brandon,
*The Art of Living Consciously*¹

The degree to which Mormonism affects people's self-esteem is a function of the age when they began to be indoctrinated in it and the duration of that indoctrination process, the sensitivity of their psyche...and emotions, the degree of psychological and emotional health and interdependence,...enmeshment...with their family-of-origin, and other factors.

—Blair Watson,
*The Psychological Effects of Mormonism*²

The Church regularly tears down individual identity and replaces it with the clone of a perfect Church member. This is a fundamental aspect of mind control, and it is not without cost. Self-esteem is a casualty, because you can only esteem your authentic self, not a pseudo-self created by an outside ideology.

For example, the word “worthy” is a loaded term used frequently in LDS culture. On the surface, it seems to mean one thing, but psychologically, it comes to mean another. Your worth, or value as an individual, is based on performance. The bishop regularly checks your purity in worthiness interviews. Other members judge your outward behaviors: Are you wearing the right clothes? Wearing garments? Following the Word of Wisdom³? Attending Church? Using clean language?

Because Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit cannot stand to be in the presence of sin, your very acceptance by God is based entirely on performance-based purity. The psychological effect for many is that the locus of control, i.e. the source of your self-worth, moves out of your hands and into the hands of others, on whether or not they judge you worthwhile... or worthy.

Self-esteem also requires self-awareness. Continual repression of doubts and feelings that are not in line with Church teachings suppresses awareness. A personal blind spot develops to block more than just the proscribed topics.

Former member Blair Watson has written and presented extensively on the effects of Mormonism on self-esteem:

When confronted by faith-disrupting facts, Mormons have a choice: Either they acknowledge the facts and question and doubt what they've been taught, or they ignore or trivialize the facts that conflict with their religious faith.

The psychological result of doing the latter is developing a reputation with [your] mind that [you] cannot fully trust it. If a person won't allow their mind to acknowledge and accept facts/realities that conflict with church teachings and widely-held Mormon beliefs, the individual ends up experiencing...a lack of confidence in their mind, its cognitive processes (e.g., their critical and rational

1. Nathaniel Branden. *The Art of Living Consciously*. New York: Fireside/Simon & Schuster, 1999. 175.

2. Watson, “Psychological Effects of Mormonism,” 2008. http://members.shaw.ca/blair_watson/

3. The Word of Wisdom is a set of dietary recommendations (now considered commandments) given by Joseph Smith in 1833. (D&C 89). Modern interpretation means that Mormons refrain from alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, and nonprescription drugs. Chocolate is the main exception to the caffeine rule, and some Mormons allow for caffeine as long as it's in soft drinks (the original scripture does not list caffeine, only “hot drinks”). Since breaking the Word of Wisdom is an outwardly visible sin, it is often judged more harshly than less-visible commandments, such as caring for the needy.

thinking), and the judgments and conclusions that their mind produces. Religious people who do not fully trust their mind typically become psychologically dependent on authority figures (parents, church leaders, etc.) to tell them what is true, right, the will of God, how they should behave, etc.¹

Self-esteem depends upon autonomy and flexibility to make personal decisions. When an outside organization carries undue influence, your sense of confidence suffers. Watson continues: “Being ‘on purpose’ has nothing to do with living the type of life that other people believe is right for you, or doing what a religious organization, family members, or other individuals say is the will of God for you. It’s about being psychologically free enough from others’ beliefs and in-tune with yourself to know what your destiny is and to live it.”²

These factors have a powerful effect even on those who fit easily into the Church’s mold. Others, who don’t fit so well, are impacted even further...

Square Peg, Round Hole Syndrome

Sadly, members are taught to believe that Mormonism is right for every single human on the planet—that the Church is perfectly compatible with every person who has all the good traits of human nature. If a person has trouble fitting in, therefore, there is something seriously wrong with that person.

—Jack B. Worthy, *The Mormon Cult*³

Some of the same beliefs and practices that are more good than bad for some LDS individuals are more bad than good for others.”

—Kent Ponder, Ph.D.,
*Mormon Women, Prozac and Therapy*⁴

Particularly vulnerable to self-esteem issues are those who struggle to fit in.

Many in the exmormon forums have said they felt like a square peg trying to fit into a round hole. I had used this analogy myself for many years before I finally left. The Church is a better fit for some than others, but it claims to be the straight and narrow gate to happiness and salvation for every human being.

Ken Ponder, in his essay on the high rates of Prozac usage among LDS women, uses a shoe analogy:

If a church’s ‘belief shoes’...are all narrow, even though they vary in length, which women will think this *works*? Those with narrow feet, of course; they will benefit. Those with wide feet will be in pain and wondering why. When bishoprics and therapists have strong religious conviction that narrow shoes are God’s only true shoes, they offer corn and bunion pads to pained women with wide feet.⁵

Ponder admits that many members gain a sense of security by strict adherence to rules and pre-made decisions. Indeed, the strong, loyal community resulting from such a totalistic environment has its advantages, especially to those who can walk the walk in those one-size-fits-all shoes.

Yet, according to a former member writing as Jack B. Worthy, “The Mormon community can be a source of serious misery for those with traits or personalities that clash with its clearly defined norms of acceptable behavior and its endless list of expectations.”⁶

1. Watson, “Psychological Effects of Mormonism,” 2008. http://members.shaw.ca/blair_watson/

2. Watson, “Psychological Effects of Mormonism,” 2008. http://members.shaw.ca/blair_watson/

3. Jack B. Worthy. *The Mormon Cult: A Former Missionary Reveals the Secrets of Mormon Mind Control*. Tucson, Ariz.: See Sharp Press, 2008. 50.

4. Ponder, “Mormon Women, Prozac and Therapy,” 2003. <http://packham.n4m.org/prozac.htm>

5. Ponder, “Mormon Women, Prozac and Therapy,” 2003. <http://packham.n4m.org/prozac.htm>

6. Worthy, *The Mormon Cult*, 2008. 50.

Particularly vulnerable are the socially-awkward; gay or transgendered; exceedingly curious or scientifically-minded; neurodiverse individuals with bipolar disorder, autism and Asperger's syndrome, and anxiety disorders; eccentrics; certain types of artists and creative people; free-thinkers and intellectuals; non-conformists and free-spirits; single parents; divorced people; feminists; liberals; those who are uncomfortable with restrictive gender roles; converts; people from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds; and unorthodox thinkers. This list is not exhaustive. Many people in these categories find ways to be happy in the Church, but for some, their struggles outweigh the benefits of membership, and they become inactive or leave.

The Church tells us it is a "choice" to be straight, obedient, submissive, faithful, conservative, healthy, and good mothers or fathers. The sad part is the extent to which square pegs tend to blame themselves, and can never be happy just being who they are, because the round hole is established as the ideal.

"Gay people are also misfits in Mormon culture. If a person is gay, this fact absolutely must be kept secret. Gay Mormons learn to hate themselves. Few are accepted by their families for who they are."¹

The Church seems to be slowly changing its stance on homosexuality, but it is not changing quickly enough or in the right ways. In some cases, members still participate in institutionally-approved bullying, as gay members are shunned and mistreated by wards and families. Evergreen International is a Church-supported organization which still attempts to "cure" people of same sex attraction.² North Star is another organization for homosexual Mormons.³ They advocate that homosexuals should enter a straight marriage with someone they do not love and are not attracted to.

This is self-denial in its most painful form. The message is, "If you can't become who the Church wants you to be, then at least pretend." The Church promises happiness and salvation through marriage and family, and to deny it to those born with same sex attraction, or to work around it by making people marry someone they cannot feel close to, is highly problematic.

In contrast to these organizations, Affirmation seeks to reconcile LDS faith with being true to your gender identity and sexual orientation.⁴ This is the kind of open conversation the Church needs to have around these issues.

Creative souls may also be square pegs, like he who has "...a strong need to express himself or herself in unique and artistic ways. The repetitive lifestyle of Mormonism that demands conformity of dress and behavior, and major time commitments to Church activities, feels boring and bland to artists and non-conformists."⁵

While Mormonism encourages creative outlets, talents must be developed within a certain rigid structure. Music and other performance arts are highly encouraged, but usually channeled towards "uplifting" styles like hymns and classical music. Rock music, for example, is discouraged.

According to John D. Goldhammer, "Groups encourage what I call 'creativity in a box,' which means we can be creative as long as it furthers the group's agenda and purpose."⁶

Edgy expressions of art are highly frowned upon. Everything is expected to be "G" rated, faith-promoting, and all sweetness and light. It is difficult to say anything artistically new when confined by both spoken and unspoken expectations.

If you feel like a round peg in the Church's round hole, then more power to you. But don't take away power from others.

"Virtually every individual knows that it is irrelevant to wonder whether his or her native language is 'true.' Neither do they look for the true car or think they have found it;

1. Worthy, *The Mormon Cult*, 2008. 50.

2. "TheSSAVoice.com - Evergreen International." Accessed Nov 8, 2013. <http://www.thesavoice.com/>

3. "North Star International." *North Star International*. Accessed Nov 8, 2013. <http://northstarlds.org/>

4. "Affirmation: Gay & Lesbian Mormons." Accessed Nov 8, 2013. <http://www.affirmation.org/>

5. Worthy, *The Mormon Cult*, 2008. 50.

6. Goldhammer, *Under the Influence*, 1996. 42.

they look for a brand and model that suits their needs.”¹ The Church is in a position to be the brand that meets everyone’s needs. In order to do so, they would have to become less focused on a narrow ideal of perfection.

Guilt & Shame

Totalistic systems establish a demand for purity, making it impossible to feel completely adequate. The result is a deep sense of guilt and shame which can have lasting effects. Members blame themselves for bad things that happen, fall into depression and self-loathing, and churn with anxiety for not measuring up.

Avoidance of shame can lead to denial of authenticity. The true inner personality, when it conflicts with doctrine, is tied up and stuffed into a well where its screams can’t be heard.

Sexual shame and ignorance can prevent a healthy, responsible sex life. And ironically, shame can lead to addiction, often to the very thing you’re most ashamed of. You then seek absolution. The imposed cycle of sin and repentance gives control to the Church, because you believe your behavior is shameful and the Church to be the sole mediator of God’s compassion.

This dynamic will be discussed in greater detail throughout the book.

Depression, Eating Disorders, & Suicide

...I did not pick up on Jane’s mood of ‘feeling down’, as she described in the letter. To me, she appeared happy—just as everyone there seemed happy. ...what we see on the surface does not always reflect what is underneath. This is highly significant and part of how [the Moonies] ‘hook’ people.

—Geri-Ann Galanti, Ph.D., *Recovery from Cults*²

I managed to act as happy as I should have been. I was pretty successful at hiding from everyone...the fact that beneath the surface, I was a slow-motion train wreck.

—Martha Beck, *Leaving the Saints*³

It is no secret that many Mormon women are depressed.

—Blair Watson,
*The Psychological Effects of Mormonism*⁴

I can still tell if someone is LDS. Something about their eyes, their carriage, and the famous Mormon accent. Sometimes they have a false smile that doesn’t quite reach those world-weary eyes. I’ve smiled that smile before under the constant pressure to project happiness, regardless of how it feels inside.

Dr. Curtis Canning, President of the Utah Psychiatric Association, said, “In Mormonism, there is a social expectation—particularly among the females—to put on a mask, say ‘Yes’ to everything that comes at her and hide the misery and pain. I call it the ‘Mother of Zion’ syndrome. You are supposed to be perfect because Mrs. Smith across the street can do it and she has three more kids than you and her hair is always in place. I think the cultural issue is very real. There is the expectation that you should be happy, and if

1. Ponder, “Mormon Women, Prozac and Therapy,” 2003. <http://packham.n4m.org/prozac.htm>

2. Galanti, “Reflections on ‘Brainwashing,’” *Recovery from Cults*, ed. Langone, 1995. 95.

3. Beck, *Leaving the Saints*, 2005. 91.

4. Watson, “Psychological Effects of Mormonism,” 2008. http://members.shaw.ca/blair_watson/

you're not happy, you're failing."¹

This section will cite many statistics, but remember that behind each of these numbers are people: individuals with hard lives and demons to face. I care very deeply about their suffering, and I am motivated to help ease it in any way I can. The mind control techniques described in this book contribute to their pain. The facts are here to back up my claims and to offer validation to those who endure, to say, "You are not alone."

Any high-demand group will compound chronic negative emotions like depression, shame, and anxiety. Fundamentalists of any stripe face these issues and there are plenty to be found in every state. But Utah beats all.

An oft-cited pharmaceutical study claims, "Antidepressant drugs are prescribed in Utah more often than in any other state, at a rate nearly twice the national average."² 15% of randomly sampled Utahans used antidepressants in 2000. This rose to 18.36% in 2006. In both years, Utah was the top state in antidepressant use, though in 2006, use of antidepressants rose in most states, and the gap between Utah and other states decreased significantly.³

Mental Health America published a study in 2007 revealing the rate of depression by state. Utah ranked the highest. 10.14% of adolescent respondents had at least one "major depressive episode" in the previous 12 months, compared with the national average of 8.95%. Another 10.14% of adults answered the same, with the national average of 8.05%. 14.58% of Utah adults responded that they'd had "serious psychological distress" during the previous year, compared to 11.63% overall.⁴

Psychologist Matthew Draper argued in a presentation at the Utah Valley University Mental Health Symposium that these studies don't imply much, since they don't break state demographics down into active LDS vs. inactive LDS vs. non-LDS. He argues that if you look only at faithful attending members, and control for a number of factors, the gap disappears. This narrow category of Mormons are actually less likely to use antidepressants.⁵

To this I argue that with 62.2% of Utah's population being LDS,⁶ the number of LDS antidepressant users cannot be so easily ruled out. Moreover, inactive Mormons are still affected by LDS doctrines and failures to meet social and religious expectations. His argument is a bit tautological: The most well-adjusted members are happy, and he conveniently ignores all who are not well-adjusted, and therefore, not happy.

Draper further breaks out active members into smaller groups, including, for instance, those who struggle with pornography, and finds higher antidepressant use among those who can't measure up. Draper's analysis seems to indicate that those who find the gospel easy, who have fewer "sinful" tendencies to repress, are happier.

So should we dismiss the larger number of Mormons who, for whatever reason, don't find it so easy? Should we ignore the source of their conflict and simply expect them to try harder?

Draper's slides reveal interesting data and case studies about the pressures of perfectionism, repression of sexuality and anger, and the belief that suffering is good for the soul. Draper credits these to false beliefs and misunderstandings of doctrine, which lead to unnecessary dissatisfaction and clinical depression.

1. Julie Cart. "Study Finds Utah Leads Nation in Antidepressant Use." *Los Angeles Times*, Feb 20, 2002. <http://articles.latimes.com/2002/feb/20/news/mn-28924>

2. Cart, "Utah Leads Nation in Antidepressant Use," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb 20, 2002.

3. Emily Cox, Ph.D., Doug Mager, MA, and Ed Weisbart, MD. "Geographic Variation Trends in Prescription Use: 2000 to 2006." *Express Scripts*. (Jan 2008).

4. Tami L. Mark, Ph.D., MBA, David L. Shern, Ph.D., Jill Erin Bagalman, MSW, and Zhun Cao, Ph.D. "Ranking America's Mental Health: An Analysis of Depression Across the States: Mental Health America." *Mental Health America* (Dec 11, 2007). <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/state-ranking>

5. Matthew R. Draper, Ph.D., Brett Breton, Ph.D., Julie Ogilvie, Natalie Haight, and Kiley King. "Helping Depressed Mormon Clients: Looking for Aid in Mormon Doctrine and Theology." Utah Valley University, 2013.

6. Matt Canham. "Census: Share of Utah's Mormon Residents Holds Steady." *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 17, 2012. <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/jazz/53909710-200/population-lds-county-utah.html.csp>

I contend that most unhappy Mormons understand the doctrine just fine. (And if it's so hard to understand, and so detrimental when it is misunderstood, how can it be called "plain and precious truth"?)

Kent Ponder states, "The same LDS Church that works so well for many works very badly for many others, who become chronically depressed, *especially women*."¹ It is not necessary to prove that the LDS Church makes everyone unhappy, only that it makes some people unhappy. For those unhappy people, this is a very important issue indeed.

An unpublished Utah Valley University (UVU) study sampled 1,000 students at the school attended predominantly by Latter-day Saints. "The results...suggest that there is a culture of perfectionism...related to depression found at UVU... Aspects of perfectionism found included internally imposed standards, externally imposed standards and a high need for organization and competency. In addition, a person's perception of their spirituality or religious beliefs and experiences also played a role."²

They did find that, contrary to popular assumptions, men and women suffer depression at the same rate, though women are more likely to be diagnosed. Because of this perception, more is written about depressed LDS women. Eventually, more may be known about Mormon men with depression.

Kristine Doty, Director of Field Education at UVU, studies what she calls "toxic perfectionism." "Doty...said LDS women are frequently confronted by the perfect storm of unrealistic expectations, personal guilt and suppressed feelings."³

It is not a *lack* of faith or dedication that leads to this sort of perfectionist-fueled depression. As Ponder points out, "...very often the brightest women who most strongly believe the Church is true are the ones made most depressed by it."⁴ If you don't believe in the need to be perfect, how could it depress you?

Perfectionist attitudes are planted from the pulpit and fertilized by LDS culture. Demand for perfection is directed at all members, but women are singled out for additional responsibilities with fewer rewards. For instance, Prophet Ezra Taft Benson (when he was still an apostle) defined women's roles in his conference talk, "The Honored Place of Women":

Since the beginning, a woman's first and most important role has been ushering into mortality spirit sons and daughters of our Father in Heaven...

Provide your daughters with opportunities to develop their own skills, by allowing them to bake, cook, sew, and arrange their own rooms.⁵

Speaking about his wife, Flora, Benson said, "Gladly losing herself in service to her husband and children, she has shown a courageous determination to magnify what she knows is the divine and glorious calling of being a worthy wife and mother."

Flora was good because she "lost herself" in service. To whom much is given, much is required, and members who believe this are likely to place unreasonable expectations on themselves. We can't accuse them of twisting or misunderstanding the gospel.

Since the Church promises happiness for righteous living, depression can be a cycle that endlessly feeds on itself. Unhappiness is a sign that you must be doing something wrong, which leads to more shame, which leads to more internalized anger, which leads to deeper depression. For many, surfacing without medication is impossible.

In this case, medication is only masking the true problem.

Repression of anger and other unwanted feelings is also known to cause depression. This is sometimes known as "anger turned inward", and getting to the root of this anger is a

1. Ponder, "Mormon Women, Prozac and Therapy," 2003. <http://packham.n4m.org/prozac.htm>

2. "Depression Study by UVU Professors Yields Insights on Cultural Impacts." *UVU Press Releases*. Accessed Nov 8, 2013. <http://blogs.uvu.edu/newsroom/2010/10/14/depression-study-by-uvu-professors-yields-insights-on-cultural-impacts/>

3. Ben Lockhart. "UVU Professor's Study Puts Focus on LDS Women and Depression." *DeseretNews.com*, January 31, 2013. <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865571984/UVU-professors-study-puts-focus-on-LDS-women-and-depression.html>

4. Ponder, "Mormon Women, Prozac and Therapy," 2003. <http://packham.n4m.org/prozac.htm>

5. Ezra Taft Benson. "The Honored Place of Woman." In LDS General Conference, Oct 1981. <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1981/10/the-honored-place-of-woman>

common therapy technique.¹ Mormon doctrine actively encourages the repression of anger, doubts, and desires, which I will show throughout this book.

Contained pressure has to go somewhere, and like an overheated boiler, repression may explode at “safe” targets, like spouses and children, nonmembers, or members who do not seem to measure up. This can result in passive-aggression and abuse.

Inwardly-directed rage may result in self-harm, eating disorders, chronic illness, and even suicide, all noted as being problematic among Utah Mormons.

Suicide rates in Utah, and indeed, the rest of “Mormon corridor” (Idaho, Wyoming, Arizona) are much higher than the rest of the nation. According to the Utah Department of Health, 402 Utahans end their own lives every year, and another 4,152 attempt it.² Utah came in at the 45th worst in completed suicides, at 15.57 per capita compared to the national average of 11.05.³ And the Center for Disease Control found Utah ranks the highest for adults having suicidal thoughts, 6.8% of the population compared to the national average of 3.7%.^{4,5}

Certainly the Church cannot be blamed for all suicides in Utah; other factors should be considered. Yet LDS pressures are too large a factor to ignore. Why need the Church orchestrate a Jonestown-style mass-suicide to be considered dangerous, when every day, individual members are killing themselves due to shame and depression? What is the difference between 912 deaths in one day and thousands of deaths over decades?

Codependency & Passive-Aggressive Culture

Mormon psychological conditioning interferes with self-assertion in a variety of ways. Many Latter-day Saints dilute their personality because it doesn't fit the LDS concept of being nice, meek, long-suffering, and placating to Mormon authority figures (including God, as defined by Mormonism). Many members hide their assertiveness because they fear confrontation and conflict and the disapproval and possible rejection by LDS family members, leaders, and friends if they assert themselves and speak their truth...

—Blair Watson,
*The Psychological Effects of Mormonism*⁶

Many Mormons lack an understanding about setting healthy boundaries. It is difficult for most Saints to say “No” to new callings⁷, charitable requests, and demands for more time. Mormons are often meddling in each other's business, judging one another and, for the sake of someone else's spiritual welfare, offer unsolicited advice, drop in unannounced for visits, or simply don't take no for an answer.

Often members are pecked to death with good intentions.

Codependence and enmeshment can be a big issue in many LDS families, which is especially encouraged by the Church doctrine of the Forever Family. If we cannot be saved without our children, then we'll have to drag them kicking and screaming to the Celestial

1. Fredric N. Busch. “Anger and Depression.” *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* 15 (2009): 271-278.

2. “Utah Department of Health: Violence & Injury Prevention Program.” Accessed Nov 9, 2013. <http://www.health.utah.gov/vipp/suicide/>

3. Mark, et al., “Ranking America's Mental Health,” *Mental Health America* (Dec 11, 2007).

4. Alex E. Crosby, MD, Beth Han, MD, Ph.D., LaVonne A. G. Ortega, MD, Sharyn E. Parks, Ph.D., and Joseph Gfroerer, BA. “Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors Among Adults Aged ≥18 Years – United States, 2008-2009.” *CDC Surveillance Summaries* 60 (Oct 21, 2011): 1-22

5. Candice Madsen. “Utah at Center of ‘Suicide Belt’; Youth Suicide Rate Troubling.” *KSL.com*, April 25, 2013. <http://www.ksl.com/?nid=148&sid=24937434>

6. Watson, “Psychological Effects of Mormonism,” 2008. http://members.shaw.ca/blair_watson/

7. Nearly every function at the ward-level of the Church is filled by members who are “called” of God to serve, without financial compensation. Callings include leadership roles at every level, teachers, organists and pianists, Boy Scout leaders, choir directors, and so on.

Kingdom¹.

This is not what a healthy family looks like, but without any counterexamples, most Church members don't realize this.

Michael J. Stevens, Professor at Weber State University in Utah, conducted research and wrote extensively on the topic of passive-aggressive conflict resolution among Mormons:

I often observe that mainstream LDS Church members along the Wasatch Front have a difficult time confronting any form of disagreement, even when they are clearly uncomfortable or unhappy with what's being discussed or decided. It's as if they were conflating all forms of disagreement or conflict with contention...

If all conflict is viewed as the functional equivalent of having the 'spirit of contention,' what options are left to a person who disagrees, or sees things differently, or who has goals and interests different from the rest of the community? How can one raise objections or question and challenge others, or raise unpleasant topics, if doing so is tantamount to being in league with Beelzebub? If one's view of all conflict is that it must be avoided so as to avoid contention, then there is no direct, healthy, constructive strategy available for resolving conflicts and disagreements.²

He analyzed LDS writings to find the frequency of how often passivity is encouraged.

...queries at www.lds.org for variations of 'obey/obedience,' and 'submit/submission' returned over 500 hits in general conference talks since 2002, and Mosiah 3:19 (which encourages the reader to be 'submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things') was quoted at least once in 17 of the preceding 20 general conferences...

The influences of this aspect of LDS culture works on us like the tide—repeatedly and unremittingly, year after year after year, in subtle and subconscious ways, making it difficult to ever spontaneously develop healthy coping skills for managing conflict and disagreements. It also undermines our capacity to use power ethically when we have it at our disposal, or to respond effectively to abuses of power when we are in a subordinate position. I would argue that few people who are raised Mormon are provided with good examples of what healthy disagreement and conflict management looks like or with methods of how to foster constructive, collaborative problem-solving and negotiation.

He found the highest passive-aggression scores among Mormons and people raised in Utah.

Along this same vein, abuse, especially of children, is often ignored and covered up by LDS families and by Church leadership. Victims of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse are often revictimized while perpetrators are let off with barely a slap on the hand. Church authorities are not given sufficient education to counsel abuse victims, and LDS Family Services therapists may ignore secular understandings of family dynamics when it conflicts with doctrine.

1. Mormons believe the afterlife is divided into three "degrees of glory," plus outer darkness. The kingdoms are: Celestial, Terrestrial, and Telestial. All three are said to be heavenly, but only admittance to the Celestial Kingdom allows you to be with God and your family forever. Your position in the afterlife is based on your repentance, growth, and works in this life. The criteria for the Celestial Kingdom is quite high. Outer darkness is reserved for the worst people, perhaps only for Sons of Perdition (those who deny the Holy Ghost). The exact criteria for each kingdom and outer darkness are unclear, i.e. What does it take to "deny the Holy Ghost"? Members are not supposed to speculate too much, because only God can judge.

2. Michael J. Stevens. "Passive-aggression Among the Latter-day Saints." *Sunstone Magazine* no. 170 (April 2013). <https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/passive-aggression-among-the-latter-day-saints/>

In most cases, bishops and stake presidents are in violation of the law when they fail to report abuse to authorities. This is a serious problem which could fill its own book, and indeed, The Mormon Alliance and others have written a great deal on this topic.

Material Loss

As Church members, we were taught to not value “things of the world.” Nevertheless, material goods are valuable, and the Church is happy to take these goods off the Saints’ hands.

Tithing and other donations make sense from the LDS perspective, but once outside, it is easy to see it as a form of extortion under the threat of invisible consequences, namely saving your eternal soul, and buying insurance against burning at the last day.¹

Life is short, and as far as I know, it is the only one I have. Church members are busy “storing up treasures in heaven”, and often have little time to enjoy this life that we most definitely, provably, possess.

While many intangible goals are for good, such as spending time with family and doing charity work, most endeavors of the Church are make-work projects that have no lasting impact. Such demands on resources can be exhausting, and Church members are never allowed to relax or just “be.”

Over-reliance on faith can lead to magical thinking and gullibility. Members tend to lean on God to solve their problems. While the Church does attempt to teach self-reliance, members may have their minds so crippled by the many mind control techniques that it makes them less capable.

The suppression of critical thinking can leave members susceptible to scams which do not directly conflict with the gospel. Members are often naive and overly trusting, taken in by manipulative individuals and multi-level marketing, pyramid schemes, and expensive self-improvement seminars.

The Economist ran an article on affinity fraud, a type of scam involving close friends and trusting communities. Utah received special mention:

The state thought to have the most affinity fraud per head is Utah, where 60% of the population are Mormons. In 2010, regulators and the FBI were investigating cases there with 4,400 victims and perhaps \$1.4 billion (or \$500 for every Utahn) in losses. The numbers have surely climbed since, with the three largest cases alone involving combined losses of up to \$700m, says one investigator.

Mormons tend to be both trusting and welcoming of newcomers, says Keith Woodwell, head of Utah’s Division of Securities. As soon as you pull up to your new house, neighbours appear to help you unpack. A scammer who gets his foot in the door can exploit this closeness.²

1. President Marion G. Romney Second Counselor in the First Presidency. “The Blessings of an Honest Tithe.” *New Era*, Feb 1982. <http://www.lds.org/new-era/1982/01/the-blessings-of-an-honest-tithe>

2. “Fleeing the Flock.” *The Economist*, Jan 28, 2012. <http://www.economist.com/node/21543526>

Until a person leaves Mormonism, they have no idea how painful it can be.

—Anonymous Online Exmormon,
quoted in *The Pattern of the Double-Bind in Mormonism*¹

One of the nifty paradoxes of dysfunction is that the crazier the system in which you grow up, the more afraid and less equipped you are to leave it and stand on your own.

—Martha Beck,
***Leaving the Saints*²**

Is it any wonder that many former cultists describe their post-cult experience as an emotional roller coaster? ...whether they ‘pocket’ the cult experience or confront it, it inexorably permeates their lives... Consequently, if it is not properly understood, it cannot be effectively managed.

—Michael Langone,
***Recovery from Cults*³**

Don't Just Get Over It—Recover!

Church members are “leaving the Church in droves”, according to General Authority Marlin K. Jensen speaking to Utah State University students and faculty.⁴

A 2011 survey⁵ conducted by John Dehlin questioned 3,000 Mormons who had lost their testimonies and found the leading causes of disillusionment included doctrinal and theological issues, historical issues, losing faith in Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, and problems with the Church’s stance on social issues, like homosexuality and the role of women.

Additional reasons included disliking the feeling of being judged, the emphasis on the “one true church” and perfectionism, and the organization’s use of funds.

The results of this survey contradict the prevailing myths, that members leave or become inactive because they are offended or want to sin. These two reasons tied for *last* on the survey.

Easy exposure to disconfirming information on the internet is facilitating these increased losses in membership⁶. On the survey, leading historical and doctrinal problems

1. Stricker, *The Double-Bind in Mormonism*, 2000. 96.

2. Beck, *Leaving the Saints*, 2005. 262.

3. Langone, “Introduction,” *Recovery from Cults*, 1995. 12.

4. Peter Henderson, and Kristina Cooke. “Special Report - Mormonism Besieged by the Modern Age.” *Reuters*, Jan 30, 2012. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/01/30/uk-mormonchurch-idUKTRE80T1CP20120130>

5. “Understanding Mormon Disbelief: Why Do Some Mormons Lose Their Testimony, and What Happens to Them When They Do?” March 2012. http://www.whymormonsquestion.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Survey-Results_Understanding-Mormon-Disbelief-Mar20121.pdf

6. A complete list or detailed description of all controversial issues is outside the scope of this book.

include: Polygamy/polyandry¹, origins of The Book of Abraham², racism³, Book of Mormon issues (DNA⁴, anachronisms⁵), Masonic influences on the temple ceremony⁶, conflicting versions of the First Vision⁷, women and the priesthood⁸, etc. A single one of these issues might be easy to think around, but for many people, the sheer volume of problems cannot be easily dismissed.

Some think that leaving the Church is the “easy way out.” Believe me, it’s not. The easiest way would have been for it to be true, for all promises of happiness in this life, and eternal happiness in the next to be real. To have retained the respect and love of my family. To have held on to the identity and values I was given from birth. To have all my answers given to me by a true Prophet of God, by inspired scripture, and by bishops and priesthood leaders guided by gifts of the Holy Ghost. To receive my own guidance from the Holy Ghost. To feel like a round peg in a round hole because the Church truly is the Plan of Happiness⁹ for everyone.

It was a nice dream. Though I experienced a strong sense of freedom when I left, I also had a thousand new problems, with no guidebook, no leaders, and no one to help me figure it out except myself.

General Authority Glenn L. Pace said, “You can leave the Church, but you can’t leave it alone. The basic reason for this is simple. Once someone has received a witness of the Spirit and accepted it, he leaves neutral ground. One loses his testimony only by listening to the promptings of the evil one, and Satan’s goal is not complete when a person leaves the Church, but when he comes out in open rebellion against it.”¹⁰

This simple dismissal distracts from our legitimate concerns. For all the negative effects of being Mormon, leaving brings its own consequences. For many, leaving can be harder than staying, especially at first.

1. Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and other LDS leaders practiced polygamy up until 1890. Many controversies surround this topic, which exceed the scope of this book.

2. The Book of Abraham was purportedly translated by Joseph Smith based on a set of papyri he bought from a traveling mummy exhibit. Most Mormons accept that this document was written by the prophet Abraham, and it is now considered scripture. However, modern Egyptologists who have analyzed remaining fragments of the papyri have identified it as a common Egyptian funerary text.

3. Multiple racism controversies surround the past and present LDS Church, including the fact that men of African descent were not allowed to hold the priesthood until 1978. And the fact that black skin was considered a curse for Cain’s sins. And the fact that Native Americans were also said to be cursed with dark skin. While the Church now disavows many of these doctrines, they still flourish in LDS folklore. The Book of Mormon still describes righteous people as being “white and delightsome” and still includes God cursing a whole race of people with “a skin of blackness” for their sins. (2 Nephi 5:21, 2 Nephi 30:6, 4 Nephi 1:10)

4. Members are lead to believe the Lamanites, a race of people in the Book of Mormon who originally came from Jerusalem, are modern-day Native Americans (including South American peoples). DNA evidence does not support this claim.

5. Various items mentioned in the Book of Mormon were not available to the people of the Americas during that time period. Examples include horses, steel, wheels, and silk.

6. The temple ceremony is in many ways identical to Masonic rituals. Joseph Smith joined the Freemasons and founded a Masonic lodge in Nauvoo, IL, shortly before introducing the temple ceremonies to Latter-day Saints.

7. The First Vision is the account of how Joseph Smith went to the woods to pray and was visited by God the Father and Jesus. This story is central to the founding of the LDS Church and to Joseph Smith’s legitimacy as a prophet. Yet there are four different accounts written by Smith himself, all of which contain troubling contradictions.

8. Some LDS women argue that there is a power imbalance between men and women, since women cannot “hold the priesthood.” Priesthood is the power and authority to act on behalf of God. It comes along with spiritual powers (like discernment and inspiration, the ability to give healing blessings, etc.) It also comes along with a great deal of leadership and organizational power. Women have little say in Church decisions, except for when it comes to leading children and other women. And even then, male priesthood-holders can overrule. There are also historical issues which most members are unaware of, that women once had more power within the Church and were also ordained with the priesthood.

9. The Plan of Happiness, or the Plan of Salvation, is the core doctrine of the Church. In a nutshell: We existed as the spirit children of God before we were born. We needed bodies and we needed to learn and be tested. In order to do so, we needed free agency. Yet freedom to act required sin, and justice demands that sin must be paid for. Our brother Jesus offered to take on the price of our sins. Our other brother Lucifer wanted to force everyone to obey. God cast out Lucifer and those who sided with him. The rest of us came to earth. We are tempted and tested, but those who keep the commandments and repent are cleansed through Christ’s atonement and can return to the Father. Following this plan is supposed to bring at least some measure of happiness and comfort in this life, as well as unimaginable joy in the next.

10. Glenn L. Pace. “Follow the Prophet.” In LDS General Conference, April 1989.

There's a good reason we can't leave it alone. The Church was my entire life for twenty-six years. I lived in fear and respect and love of God, the Church, the Prophet, the Book of Mormon, and had professed *knowledge* of their truth in public. I was raised to believe its tenants were as real as the mountains. The Celestial Kingdom existed just like Earth. I learned the names of latter-day prophets alongside US Presidents.

The history of the Church and the scripture stories are instilled as deep in my memory as the history of the world. Mormon culture is as familiar as American culture. The principles of the gospel are as much a foundation to my views of morality as any ethics or philosophy book I've read since.

Mormonism is an integral part of my identity and always will be. Even after writing this book, I still won't have spent as much time thinking about the Church since I've left as I did while in.

All but one other member of my family are still members. I have a very uncomfortable relationship with most of them as a result. It is difficult for them to understand me. They've been trained to think I am weak at best, evil at worst. I was told that if I ever left, I'd suffer in many ways, up to and including spiritual death.

How could I just "leave it alone"? How could anyone?

Captive Hearts says, "Reentering the noncult world can be painful and confusing. To some extent, time will help. But the passage of time and merely being physically out of the group are not enough. You must actively and of your own initiative face the issues of your cult involvement... We both know ex-cult members who have been out of their groups for 7, 10, 15 years, who have never had any counseling or education about cults or mind control. These individuals live in considerable emotional pain and have significant difficulties in their lives due to unresolved conflicts about their group, their leader, or their cult experience. Often they are still under the subtle effects of the group's thought-reform program."¹

Exit counselor Carol Giambalvo agrees with many cult researchers about the best way to recover from a high-demand group: "In my experience the most helpful tool for recovering ex-cultists is learning what mind control is and how it was used in their specific cult."²

According to another helping professional, Paul R. Martin, "If former cultists do not understand the thought-reform program, they will not be able to resolve their tangle of emotions—guilt, fear, shame, sadness, and anxiety. They will not appreciate the extent to which these emotions result from a constricting of their relationship with self, world, and cult."³

In *Reflections on "Brainwashing"*, researcher Geri-Ann Galanti describes her experience attending a Moonie recruitment camp to observe their techniques. She went into the situation knowing they would try to manipulate her and the methods they would use. This only added a little to her resistance:

The day after the camp experience I was interviewing a former deprogrammer who had spent several years in the Moonies. About halfway through the interview I asked her to describe exactly what she did during a deprogramming. She looked me straight in the eye and said, 'Exactly what I've been doing with you.'

I was shocked; I didn't need deprogramming; I didn't buy their doctrine; they didn't brainwash me. Despite my protestations, I came to realize that they *had* influenced me: 'Remind me again what's so bad about the Moonies.' I knew very well the reported abuses of members by the Unification Church—the long hours of fund-raising, late at night, often in dangerous areas; the lack of proper nutrition; the suicide training; the fear and guilt; the relative poverty in which the members live,

1. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994. 2.

2. Carol Giambalvo. "Post-Cult Problems: An Exit Counselor's Perspective." *Recovery from Cults*, ed. Langone, 1995. 148.

3. Paul R. Martin, Ph.D. "Post-Cult Recovery: Assessment and Rehabilitation." *Recovery from Cults*, ed. Langone, 1995. 211.

while the leaders dwell in splendor; the munitions factory owned by a church that is supposedly striving for world peace; the divisions created between family members; the deceptions—all of the horrors. But that knowledge no longer seemed important. I had a great time, the people seemed good, so by association, the group did as well. While I was with them I was unable to reconcile the emotional truth with the intellectual one, and the more immediate emotional reality won out. It was only later, when I was outside the environmental influence of the group, that what I knew began to sink in.¹

Most ex-members retain elusive remnants of this programming. “Many former cult members selectively deny aspects of their cult experience. Some become angry and resistant at the mention of mind control, thought reform, or brainwashing, thinking that these things could not possibly have been done to them. It is very threatening to a person’s sense of self to contemplate having been controlled or taken over... Yet only by confronting the reality of psychological manipulation can ex-cult members overcome its effects.”²

Steve Sanchez recounts talking to a fellow former member of his New Age Christian cult, SLF: “I realized she was still under the spell of [Rev.] Will to some degree, even though she had left more than two years earlier. When I talked to her I could see she was hesitant to be too critical of SLF.”³

Often when members leave, “they will tend, as do victims of other forms of abuse, to believe that they left because something was wrong with them. They do not usually view the group as a cult—at least not initially. Holding the layperson’s view of cults, they think that cults are weird groups for crazy people, and since they are not crazy and their group isn’t weird, it isn’t a cult.”⁴

This is the sort of residual programming that leads to such hardships long after being under the group’s influence. The remedy is simple: “Knowledge of cults gives you the language to explain to yourself what happened.”⁵ *Captive Hearts* speaks of “demystifying the guru’s power.”⁶

Michael Langone says, “Although not necessarily caused only by the cult experience, their pain is inextricably linked to that experience. And because deception lies at the heart of the cult experience, former cult members...must be educated about cults before they can see through the deception and adequately deal with the problems.”⁷

Exit counselors are expensive and hard to find. With the right tools, it is possible to help yourself.

That’s why I don’t “leave it alone.” By reading dozens of books and papers on cults and mind control, and by reading LDS exit stories and unfiltered sources about problematic doctrines and history, I experienced the healing I needed to overcome my programming. Most of the triggers I once experienced are now gone.

Many former Mormons go through a phase where they devour anti-Mormon material. They flood internet forums designed for them, sharing with one another so they can understand their experiences and work through their anger, pain, betrayal, and ongoing hurt caused by leadership, family and friends.

As former Mormon Chris L. Morin describes, “I spent every spare moment studying Church matters. This investigation exposed subconscious biases and validated doubts that had plagued me for years.”⁸

Compare to Steve Sanchez’s account: “For me it was strengthening and therapeutic to

1. Galanti, “Reflections on ‘Brainwashing,’” *Recovery from Cults*, ed. Langone, 1995. 100-101.

2. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994. 35.

3. Sanchez, *Spiritual Perversion*, 2005. 377.

4. Langone, “Introduction,” *Recovery from Cults*, 1995. 11.

5. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994. 92.

6. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994. 64.

7. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994. xi. (From Foreword by Michael Langone)

8. Morin and Morin, *Suddenly Strangers*, 2004. 158.

be doing all this exposing and fighting.”¹

This process is a vital part of healing and finding a new place in the world. Answers about church history and doctrine have been explored at length by many other authors. Follow your interests and trust your instincts. If you feel like reading twenty books about Joseph Smith, do it. Those who tell you it is an unhealthy obsession, or it is somehow proof that the Church is true, do not fully understand the psychological pressures involved or are making further attempts to control.

And then I did leave it alone for a few years. But I keep coming back. Why? Again, it is a part of me. Every time Mormonism comes up in the news and each time I meet a Mormon or exmormon, it all floods back. Sometimes I’m still a teenager trying to be perfect.

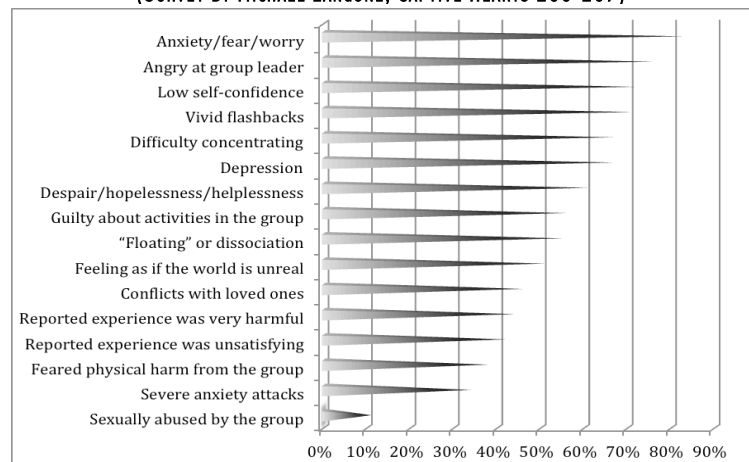
Today, I can’t leave it alone because I know there are thousands of others like I was ten years ago, struggling to find the answers I have. I cannot hide my candle under a bushel. I wrote this book to help them move more quickly through the phases of recovery.

Though hard to you this journey may appear...

The fact that most people who leave cults will have a high number of negative mental, emotional, and situational difficulties is noncontroversial among cult researchers. I’ve compiled a comprehensive list taken from multiple books:

Depression; low self-worth; anxiety; panic attacks; phobias; paranoia; flashbacks; nightmares; insomnia; eating disorders; restlessness; lack of direction; memory loss; self-blame; guilt; shame; anger & rage; confusion; sense of betrayal; loss of concentration & blurring of mental acuity; the feeling of being in a fog; feeling lost; loneliness, isolation, & alienation; indecisiveness; “floating” or slipping into dissociative or altered states; uncritical passivity; the “fishbowl effect” (feeling scrutinized or watched); no longer feeling “chosen” or special; confusion about morality; confusion about personal goodness; financial problems; excessive doubt; fear of joining new groups & distrust of professional services; distrust of personal decision-making ability; relationship issues; culture shock; identity issues; employment issues.^{2,3,4,5}

EMOTIONAL ISSUES SUFFERED BY THOSE WHO LEAVE CULTS:
(SURVEY BY MICHAEL LANGONE, CAPTIVE HEARTS 266-267)



Research by Margaret Thaler Singer and Richard

Ofshe found signs of temporary psychosis in otherwise healthy individuals, as well as post-traumatic stress, dissociative disorders, psychosomatic illnesses, cognitive inefficiencies, phobias, and self-harm.⁶

Effects on family relationships are particularly difficult for Mormons. Families are forever, except when family members stray.

1. Sanchez, *Spiritual Perversion*, 2005. 380.

2. Langone, *Recovery from Cults*, 1995.

3. Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, 1995.

4. Hassan, *Releasing the Bonds*, 2000.

5. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994.

6. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994. 267-268.

Severing very often occurs, either because the apostate is shunned, or because the LDS family focuses so heavily on the gospel as to be alienating. As Jack B. Worthy said, “Leaving the Mormon reality dome usually damages family relationships in painful ways, so people with traits and personalities that clash with the culture suffer whether they stay or go.”¹

Self-blame can exacerbate all the negative effects. As *Captive Hearts* describes, “Already prone to much self-doubt, former cult members easily fall prey to obsessional thoughts about the nature of reality, the truth about the leader or group, and especially about whether or not they did the right thing by leaving.”² And, “...ex-members may further berate themselves by analyzing their unhappiness according to the cult’s doctrines, which always places the cult on top and the member on the bottom. All these people unknowingly participate in victim blaming because they don’t understand cults.”³

As you can see, leaving a high-demand group is not easy.

Other factors can complicate recovery. “Individuals with a prior history of emotional problems are also more likely to experience emotional problems while *in* the group. Therefore, they more commonly require psychotherapeutic interventions following their cult departure.”⁴

This is compounded by the fact that members with emotional or family problems are referred to LDS Family Services, which can keep that person within the closed logic of the Church. While many find relief and modern therapeutic practices through LDS therapists, strict adherence to some doctrines might reinforce problems.

For instance, unlike mainstream psychologists, most LDS therapists still counsel that masturbation is a sin. Since this one point can be the source of severe shame and self-loathing, a client will find no relief where she ordinarily would. Likewise, a woman who is stressed from trying to follow the Church’s high standards of motherhood might not receive permission to slow down and take care of herself. Victims of sexual abuse might be further victim-blamed to mirror what they’ve heard from their abuser, culture, family, and bishop. And addictions may continue to be moralized as sins rather than psychological disorders which respond best to treatment.

Those who suffer from extreme difficulties like self-harm, eating or sleeping disorders, panic attacks, anxiety or depression, or severe dissociative episodes, should seek help from secular mental health professionals. You don’t necessarily need to find a cult exit counselor. Any good mental health professional can assist with these problems, but be sure to inform them of your background. Since experience in a high-demand group can simulate other mental disorders, treatment may not be the same. Refer professionals to books like *Recovery from Cults* as a starting resource.

Born Under the Covenant⁵

When a seal is put upon the father and mother, it secures their posterity, so that they cannot be lost, but will be saved by virtue of the covenant of their father and mother.

—Prophet Joseph Smith⁶

Most cult recovery books assume members were converted rather than born into their high-demand group. For Mormons, this is usually reversed. Recovery books help readers

1. Worthy, *The Mormon Cult*, 2008. 50.

2. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994. 99.

3. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994. xi.

4. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994. 51.

5. When Mormons get married, they are sealed together in the temple for eternity. Their children will be automatically sealed to them when they are born. Such children are considered born “under the covenant,” since their parents made covenants with God. Most LDS children are born to temple married parents, thus “born under the covenant” means “raised LDS.”

6. Joseph Smith. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1978. 5:530.

remember their pre-cult identity. For most of us, the road is more difficult. We don't *have* a pre-Mormon identity.

Children born or raised within a cult grow up in a closed, controlled environment where bizarre, unorthodox, and harmful beliefs, values, and mores are accepted. When someone raised in a cult leaves it, that person may truly feel like a stranger in a strange land, and may have difficulty adapting to the dominant, noncult society. Cult life may have delayed emotional and educational development; it may have hampered medical needs. In addition, the child may have suffered physical, emotional, and sexual abuse—a common and serious problem for children in cults.¹

Thankfully, the LDS church allowed us some exposure to mainstream culture. Most of us were given access to medical treatment, and though familial abuse is prevalent in LDS families^{2,3}, it is not officially encouraged.

Though R-rated movies were verboten, we were allowed to watch other movies. While rock-and-roll might have been banned in some of our more zealous families, we could overhear enough. Most of us were educated in public schools (although I wasn't). We could participate in sports; read books and magazines (within limits); eat most normal foods; wear relatively normal clothes; and generally had enough exposure to the mainstream to make the transition.

However, the limits that *were* placed on us can make our upbringing a little odd, especially for those who did not sow wild oats, or were raised in more sheltered or abusive households, or who lived in the Mormon corridor⁴ where outside culture is Mormonized.

The lack of exposure to "the world" during high school and college has effects. From *Captive Hearts*, "There are developmental tasks to be completed, such as individuation and separation from the family. There are educational and career choices to be made. And there are issues about dating, sex, and marriage to explore. Cult members do not get the opportunity to pass through these normal developmental stages and experiences, and sometimes complain of being 30- and 40-year-old teenagers when they get out of the cult."⁵

This is why many exmormons describe going through an "adolescent phase", where, no matter their age, they spend a year or two acting like teenagers, experimenting with music, movies, fashions, pastimes, sex, alcohol, and drugs. We faced moral and philosophical questions we had never before confronted.

It's a whirlwind of fresh experiences, and suddenly life is brand new again. Decisions are not always made with the wisdom of an experienced adult, because this adult has been sheltered and now must make them without the parental safety net.

Some exmormons, suddenly free from isolation and depression, may be in danger of going too far in experimenting with substances and lifestyles, and may fall to the very perils the Church warned of: Alcoholism, drug addiction, broken relationships, sexually transmitted diseases, and unwanted pregnancy.

The Church labeled many things sinful. But just because the Church exaggerated the consequences of "sin" does not mean you should do the exact opposite of everything they said once you get out... caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, revealing clothing, sex, pornography, and even drugs and new religions may be safe to explore, but only in moderation, with full awareness of the risks, and with assurance you can fulfill your responsibilities towards self, children, spouse, career, education, and safety.

This is the time for you to learn to make your own decisions, and it can be both scary

1. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994. 50.

2. Emily Belanger. "Domestic Violence and Mormonism." *Peculiar People*, April 26, 2012. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/peculiarpeople/2012/04/domestic-violence-and-mormonism/>

3. Lavina Fielding Anderson, and Janice Merrill Allred. *Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance (Volumes 1, 2, & 3)*. The Mormon Alliance, 97 1996. <http://mormon-alliance.org/casereports/casereports.htm>

4. The Mormon Corridor is the area of the Western US settled in the 1800's by Mormons, and it retains a high percentage of Saints to this day. The areas include Utah, Idaho, Nevada, Arizona, along with parts of Wyoming, California, Colorado, Oregon, and Washington.

5. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994. 50.

and rewarding. Consequences both positive and negative are now yours to reap. It is best to take this phase with caution. Fortunately, the internet is a great resource. I highly recommend researching any topic about which you have doubts. Awareness and education can lead to a safe, sane, and consensual life full of moderated choices.

Identity issues were perhaps the most difficult for me during this phase. I was a person held together by the glue of LDS ideology. As I proudly told the world, “I am a Mormon.” I *am*. To no longer *be* that meant I didn’t know who I was. The impact of disillusionment cannot be overstated, especially for those of us who knew no other identity from birth.

We Then Are Free From Toil and Sorrow, Too...

Know this, that ev’ry soul is free, to choose his life and what he’ll be.

—**Know This, That Every Soul Is Free,**
LDS Hymn #240¹

Freedom is born in the moment I decide I am free to move away from what has previously imprisoned me.

—**Sam Keen,**
Hymns to an Unknown God²

The apostle John said, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:32. Lots of people like to co-opt this phrase, especially those who are selling truth.

I assert *you* are the arbiter of truth. You get to decide what is meaningful. Maybe this book is full of crap. You can judge it on its merits, along with every other thing.

Martha Beck said, “I am free, and always have been; free to accept my own reality, free to trust my perceptions, free to believe what makes me feel sane even if others call me crazy, free to disagree even if it means great loss, free to seek the way home until I find it.”³

I resist anyone who claims exclusive coverage of truth. I retain my freedom to move away from that which imprisons me, be it religions, commercial enterprises, relationships, or fitness programs. I value my hard-won liberty way too much. I am now in charge and get to decide what works best for me and what doesn’t. As they say in twelve-step groups, “Take what you like and leave the rest.” By “like”, I don’t mean meaningless temporary pleasures. I mean I get to judge what is important to me and what offers the lasting happiness I seek.

There is life after Mormonism. I and thousands of other exmormons are living joyfully, free from guilt, shame, closed-logic structures, blinders, and monopolized time. Rather than follow rote rules, I make my own choices based on wise consideration of proven risks. I’ve learned what I really want from life. I am free to pursue dreams which were impossible before. I have many friends with similar interests who accept me for who I am, not who I’m pretending to be. I’ve got confidence, the career I want, and the family I want. I am a square peg who made my own square hole.

Joe Kelly, a former member of Transcendental Meditation and the International Society of Divine Love, recounts, “...back in the world now, I found it to be so very different from what they taught... cults had taught me that all worldly relationships were mundane and ultimately meaningless, self-centered, and based on what others could take from you... I learned how caring and helpful my true friends and family could be. They accepted me as I was. They didn’t require absolute belief or use pressure.”⁴

1. Anon. “Know This, That Every Soul Is Free.” In *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1985.

2. Keen, *Hymns to an Unknown God*, 1995. 66.

3. Beck, *Leaving the Saints*, 2005. 297.

4. Tobias and Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds*, 1994. 90.

Adam had to break one commandment to thrive, to fulfill the purpose of all existence. He had to learn that which God had forbidden. Just as eating the fruit set Adam and Eve free from their beautiful and confining garden, so shall the truth set you free. Perhaps God's real test is this: Can you sacrifice ignorant bliss on the altar of knowledge? Will you trade milk for meat? Will you put away childish things and finally grow into adulthood?