

Lofland's earlier work, widely assumed to have been done on the beginnings in this country of the Unification Church of Reverend Moon, resulted in development of the most widely cited conversion model in the literature of sociology. Here he updates and extends this previous work, based on a follow-up study of the same group studied earlier.

## "Becoming a World-Saver" Revisited

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More than a decade ago, Stark and I observed a small number of then obscure millenarians go about what was to them the desperate and enormously difficult task of making converts. We witnessed techniques employed to foster conversion and observed the evolution of several people into converts. We strove to make some summarizing generalizations about those conversions in our report titled "Becoming a World-Saver" (Lofland and Stark, 1965), a report that has received a gratifying amount of attention over the years.

I want here to offer some new data on the conversion efforts of that same millenarian movement as it operates a decade later, to assess the new data's implications for the initial world-saver model, and to share some broader reflections on the model itself.

### "DP" CONVERSION ORGANIZATION REVISITED

The conversion efforts witnessed by Rodney Stark and myself in the early sixties were in many respects weak, hap-

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hazard, and bumbling. The gaining of a convert seemed often even to be an accident, a lucky conjunction of some rather random flailing (Lofland, 1966: Part II). Starting about 1972, however, all that was radically changed and transformed. The "DPs," as I continue to call them,<sup>1</sup> initiated what might eventually prove to be one of the most ingenious, sophisticated, and effective conversion organizations ever devised. I will describe its main phases and elements as it operated at and out of "State U City" and "Bay City," the same two West Coast places where the action centered in *Doomsday Cult* (Lofland, 1966).

DPs of the early sixties and seventies alike believed that their ideology was so "mind blowing" to unprepared citizens that they could not expect simply to announce its principle assertions and make converts at the same time. As documented throughout *Doomsday Cult*, effort was made to "hold back" the "conclusions" and only reveal them in a progressive and logical manner to prospective converts. They were dogged, that is, by a dilemma: they had to tell their beliefs in order to make converts, but the more they told the less likely was conversion.

They dealt with this dilemma by a carefully progressive set of revelations of their beliefs and aims, starting from complete muting or denial of the religious and millenarian aspects and ending with rather more disclosure. This process may be conceived as consisting of five, quasi-temporal phases: picking-up, hooking, encapsulating, loving, and committing.

### PICKING-UP

Reports of people closely involved with the movement suggest that the multimillion dollar media blitzes and evangelical campaigns that made DPs famous and virtual household words in the seventies were not significant ways in which people began DP conversion involvement. Perhaps most commonly, it began with a casual contact in a public place, a "pickup." Indeed, DPs spent time almost daily giving hitchhikers rides and approaching young men and women in public places. Display card tables for front organizations<sup>2</sup> were regularly staffed in the public areas of many campuses as a way to pick up people.

The contact commonly involved an invitation to a dinner, a lecture, or both. Religious aspects would be muted or denied. As described in *Doomsday Cult* (Lofland, 1966: ch. 6), this strategy of covert presentations was employed in the early sixties with but small success. It became enormously more successful in the early seventies due to several larger-scale shifts in American society. First, the residue of the late sixties' rebellion of youth still provided a point of instant solidarity and trust among youth, especially in places like State U City, a major locale of public place pickups. Second, even though the number of drifting and alienated youth was declining from the late sixties, there were still plenty of them. They tended to be drawn to certain West Coast college towns and urban districts. DPs concentrated their pickups in such areas, with success.

While of major importance, pickups were not the sole strategy. Some minor and rudimentary infiltrations of religious gatherings continued (c.f. Lofland, 1966: 90-106), and one center specialized in sending "voluptuous and attractive" women to visit "professors at areas colleges and persuade them to come to meetings under the guise of Unified Science" (Bookin, 1973).

This shift in the strategy of first-contact and shifts in the larger trends of American society (see Lofland, 1977) resulted, further, in a decisive shift in the recruitment pool of the movement. Converts I studied in the early sixties were decidedly marginal and rather "crippled" people, drawn from the less than advantaged and more religiously inclined sectors of the social order. Hence, I quoted the Apostle Paul on the choosing of "mere nothings to overthrow the existing order" (Lofland, 1966: 29). As it became fashionable in the late sixties and early seventies for privileged and secular youth of the higher social classes to be alienated from their society and its political and economic institutions, a portion of such youth encountered the DPs. Some converted. Some of them were offspring, indeed, of the American upper class, a fact that has caused the organization considerable trouble. What is signal here is that the major pattern of prior religious seeking I reported seemed to fade in significance. People with strong prior political perspectives and involvements (e.g.,

Eugene McCarthy workers) started converting. (Such changes must, of course, also be considered in conjunction with a growing political element within the DP itself.)

### HOOKING

By whatever device, a prospect was brought into DP territory. Treatment varied at this point. In mid-1974 Chang himself was still experimenting in the New York City Center with Elmer's ancient notion of playing tape recorded lectures to people (Lofland, 1966: 125-129). Fortunately for recruitment to the movement, other centers went in different directions. The most successful hooked into their dinner and lecture guests with more intensive and elaborate versions of the "promotion tactics" I originally described in *Doomsday Cult* (Lofland, 1966: ch. 9). As practiced at the West Coast State U City Center—the most convert-productive center in the country—these went as follows.

1. The prospect arrived for dinner to find fifty or more smiling, talkative young people going about various chores. The place exuded friendliness and solicitude. He or she was assigned a "buddy" who was always by one's side. During the meal, as phrased in one report,

various people stopped by my table, introduced themselves and chatted. They seemed to be circulating like sorority members during rush.

Members were instructed, indeed, to learn all they could about the prospect's background and opinions and to show personal interest. In one training document, members were told to ask: "What do you feel most excited about. . . ." *Write down* their hooks so that the whole center knows in follow up." The prospect's "buddy" and others continually complimented him: you have a happy or intelligent face; I knew I would meet someone great like you today; your shoes are nice; your sweater is beautiful; and so forth (c.f. Lofland, 1966: 175-177). The feeling, as one ex-member put it, was likely to be: "It certainly felt wonderful to be served, given such attention and made to feel important."

DPs, then, had learned to start conversion at the emotional rather than the cognitive level, an aspect they did not thoroughly appreciate in the early sixties (Lofland, 1966: 189).

2. It is on this foundation of positive affect that they slowly began to lay out their cognitive structure. That same first evening this took the form of a general, uncontroversial, and entertaining lecture on the "principles" that bound their Family group. Key concepts include sharing, loving one another, working for the good of humankind, and community activity (Taylor, 1975). Chang and his movement were never mentioned. At State U City (and several other places with the facilities), prospects were invited to a weekend workshop. This was conducted at The Farm in the State U City case I am following here, a several-hundred-acre country retreat some fifty miles north of Bay City. A slide show presented the attractions of The Farm. During the three years of most aggressive growth (1972-1974), probably several thousand people did a weekend at The Farm. Hundreds of others had kindred experiences elsewhere.

#### ENCAPSULATING

The weekend workshop (and longer subsequent periods) provided a solution to two former and major problems. First, by effectively encapsulating<sup>3</sup> prospects, the ideology could be progressively unfolded in a controlled setting, a setting where doubts and hesitations could be surfaced and rebutted. Second, affective bonds could be elaborated without interference from outsiders.

Focusing specifically on The Farm, the encapsulation of prospects moved along five fundamentally facilitating lines.

1. *Absorption of Attention.* All waking moments were pre-planned to absorb the participant's attention. The schedule was filled from 7:30 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. Even trips to the bathroom were escorted by one's assigned DP "buddy," the shadow who watched over his or her "spiritual child."

2. *Collective Focus.* A maximum of collective activities crowded the waking hours: group eating, exercises, garden work,

lectures, games, chantings, cheers, dancing, prayer, singing, and so forth. In such ways attention was focused outward and toward the group as an entity.

3. *Exclusive Input.* Prospects were not physically restrained, but leaving was strongly discouraged, and there were no newspapers, radios, TVs, or an easily accessible telephone. The Farm itself was miles from any settlement. Half of the fifty or so workshop participants were always DPs, and they dominated selection of topics for talk and what was said about them.

4. *Fatigue.* There were lectures a few hours each day, but the physical and social pace was otherwise quite intense. Gardening might be speeded up by staging contests, and games such as dodgeball were run at a frantic pitch. Saturday evening was likely to end with exhaustion, as in this report of interminable square-dancing.

It went on for a very long time—I remember the beat of the music and the night air and thinking I would collapse and finding out I could go on and on. The feeling of doing that was really good—thinking I'd reached my limit and then pushing past it. [At the end, the leader] sang "Climb Every Mountain" in a beautiful, heartbreaking voice. Then we all had hot chocolate and went to bed.

A mild level of sexual excitement was maintained by frequent patting and hugging across the sexes. Food was spartan and sleep periods were controlled.

5. *Logical, Comprehensive Cognitions.* In this context, the DP ideology was systematically and carefully unfolded, from the basic and relatively bland principles (e.g., "give and take"; Lofland, 1966: 15-16) to the numerologically complex, from the Garden of Eden to the present day, following the pattern I reported in chapter 2 of *Doomsday Cult*. Indeed, if one accepted the premises from which it began, and were not bothered by several ad hoc devices, the system could seem exquisitely logical. The comprehensiveness combined with simplicity were apparently quite impressive to reasonable numbers of people who

viewed it in The Farm context. Indeed, the “inescapable” and “utterly logical” conclusion that the Messiah was at hand could hit hard: “It’s so amazing, its so *scientific* and explains *everything*.”

The encapsulating and engrossing quality of these weekends was summed up well by one almost-convert:

The whole weekend had the quality of a cheer—like one long rousing camp song. What guests were expected (and subtly persuaded) to do was participate . . . completely. That was stressed over and over: “give your whole self and you’ll get a lot back,” “the only way for this to be the most wonderful experience of your life is if you really put everything you have into it,” etc.

#### LOVING

But the core element of this process was deeper and more profound than any of the foregoing. Everything mentioned so far only in part moved a person toward a position in which they were open to what was the crux: the feeling of being loved and the desire to “melt together” (a movement concept) into the loving, enveloping embrace of the collective. (Indeed, we learn again from looking at the DPs that love can be the most coercive and cruel power of all.)

The psychodynamic of it is so familiar as to be hackneyed: “people need to belong, to feel loved,” as it is often put. People who want to “belong” and do not, or who harbor guilt over their reservations about giving themselves over to collectivities, are perhaps the most vulnerable to loving overtures toward belonging. The pattern has been stated with freshness and insight by a young, recently-Christian woman who did a Farm weekend, not then knowing she was involved with the DPs:

When I did hold back in some small way, and received a look of sorrowful, benevolent concern, I felt guilt and the desire to please as though it were God Himself whom I had offended. What may really have been wisdom on my part (trying to preserve my own boundaries in a dangerous and potentially overwhelming situation) was treated as symptomatic of alienation and fear; and a withholding of God’s light. Those things are sometimes true of me, and I am unsure enough of my own openness in groups that

I tended to believe they were right. Once, when [the workshop leader] spoke to us after a lecture, I began to cry. She’d said something about giving, and it had touched on a deep longing in me to do that, and the pain of that wall around my heart when I feel closed off in a group of people. I wanted to break through that badly enough that right then it almost didn’t matter what they believed—if only I could really share myself with them. I think that moment may be exactly the point at which many people decide to join [the DPs].

The conscious strategy of these encapsulating weekend camps was to drench prospects in approval and love—to “love bomb” them, as DPs termed it. The cognitive hesitations and emotional reservations of prospects could then be drowned in calls to loving solidarity:

Whenever I would raise a theological question, the leaders of my group would look very impressed and pleased, seem to agree with me, and then give me a large dose of love—and perhaps say something about unity and God’s love being most important. I would have an odd, disjointed sort of feeling—not knowing if I’d really been heard or not, yet aware of the attentive look and the smiling approval. My intellectual objection had been undercut by means of emotional seduction.

Or sometimes the group would burst into song: “We love you, Julie; oh, yes we do; we don’t love anyone as much as you.” I read it this way: we *could* love you if you weren’t so naughty. And, of course, they *would* love her.

This incredibly intense encapsulating and loving did not simply “happen.” DPs trained specifically for it and held morale and strategy sessions among themselves during the workshops:

On Sunday morning, when I woke really early, I walked by the building where some of the Family members had slept. They were up and apparently having a meeting. I heard a cheer: “Gonna meet all their needs.” And that did seem to be what they tried to do. Whatever I wanted—except privacy or any deviation from the schedule—would be gotten for me immediately and with great concern. I was continually smiled at, hugged, patted. And I was made to feel very special and very much wanted.

As characterized by investigative reporter Ross, people were "picked up from an emotional floor and taken care of." "The appeal is love—blissed out harmony and unity" (Ross, 1975). Indeed, Ross and his coworkers discovered some converts who had been in the movement four to six months who truly seemed to have attended to little or nothing regarding Chang and his larger movement. They were simply part of a loving commune. Some, on being pressed explicitly with Chang's beliefs and aims, declared they did not care: their loyalty was to the family commune. Such, as Stark and I discussed with regard to "affective bonds," is an important meaning of love (Lofland and Stark, 1965: 871-872).

#### COMMITTING

It is one thing to get "blissed out" on a group over a weekend, but is another thing to give one's life over to it. And the DPs did not seem immediately to ask that one give over one's life. Instead, the blissed-out prospect was invited to stay on at The Farm for a week-long workshop. And if that worked out, one stayed for an even longer period. The prospect was drawn gradually—but in an encapsulated setting—into full working, street peddling, and believing participation.

Doubts expressed as time went on were defined as "acts of Satan" (Lofland, 1966: 193-198), and the dire consequence of then leaving the movement would be pointed out (Lofland, 1966: 185-188). A large portion of new converts seemed not to have had extramovement ties to worry about, but those who did—such as having concerned parents—seemed mostly to be encouraged to minimize the import of their DP involvement to such outsiders and thereby to minimize the threat it might pose to them.

A part of the process of commitment seemed to involve a felt cognitive dislocation arising from the intense encapsulating and loving. One prospect, an almost-convert who "broke off" from his "buddy" after a weekend, reported:

"As soon as I left Suzie," he said, "I had a chance to think, to analyze what had happened and how everything was controlled. I felt free and alive again—it was like a spell was broken."

Another, on being sent out to sell flowers after three weeks at The Farm, had this experience:

Being out in the world again was a shock; a cultural shock in which I was unable to deal with reality. My isolation by the Church had been so successful that everyday sights such as hamburger stands and TVs, even the people, looked foreign, of another world. I had been reduced to a dependent being! The Church had seen to it that my three weeks with them made me so vulnerable and so unable to cope with the real world, that I was compelled to stay with them.

This "spell," "trance," or "shock" experience is not as foreign, strange, or unique as it might, at first viewing, appear. People exiting any highly charged involvement—be it a more ordinary love affair, raft trip, two-week military camp, jail term, or whatever—are likely to experience what scientists of these matters have called "the reentry problem" (Irwin, 1970: ch. 5). Reentry to any world after absence is in many circumstances painful, and a desire to escape from that pain increases the attractiveness of returning to the just-prior world. Especially because the DP situation involved a supercharged love and support experience, we ought to expect people to have reentry unreality, to experience enormous discontinuity and a desire to flee back. DPs created their own attractive kind of "high"—of transcending experience—to which people could perhaps be drawn back in much the same way Lindesmith has argued people employ certain drugs to avoid withdrawal (reentry pains?) as well as exploiting them for their own inherently positive effects (Lindesmith, 1968; Lofland with Lofland, 1969: 104-116).

#### THE WORLD-SAVER MODEL REVISITED

A first and prime question is, of course: what are the implications of the above for the world-saver model that Stark and I evolved from an earlier era of DP conversion organization? As summarized in the report's abstract, the model propounds that:

For conversion a person must experience, within a religious problem-solving perspective, enduring, acutely-felt tensions that lead him to define himself as a religious seeker; he must encounter the cult at a turning point in his life; within the cult an affective bond must be formed (or pre-exist) and any extra-cult attachments, neutralized; and there he must be exposed to intensive interaction if he is to become a "deployable agent." [Lofland and Stark, 1965: 862]

My impression is that the situational elements of the model, at least, are so general and abstract that they can, with no difficulty, also accurately (but grossly) characterize the newer DP efforts. Indeed, they are general and abstract to the point of not being especially telling, perhaps reflecting the rather pallid data with which Stark and I had to work. The play of movement and external "affective bonds" and "intensive interaction" continues, certainly, but the new DP efforts now permit much more refined and sophisticated analysis, a level of refinement and sophistication at which I have only been able to hint in my descriptions of "encapsulating" and "loving." I believe, in fact, that close study of the two major DP conversion camps could result in a quantum step in our understanding of conversion, for the DPs have elaborated some incredible nuances.

Relative to the more "background" elements, the concept of the "turning point" is troublesome because everyone can be seen as in one or more important ways at a turning point at every moment of their lives. Like concepts of tension, it is true and interesting but not very cutting. As mentioned, there seems to have been a definite broadening of the range of people who get into the DP. The pattern of prior and universal religious seeking, at least in its narrow form, became far less than universal. People not previously religious at all have joined in noticeable numbers. Only further study can sort out the contexts and meanings underlying the diverse new patterns. Further study ought to address, however, the possibility that an entire generation of youth became, broadly speaking, religious seekers in the early seventies and frenzied themselves, indeed, with a fashion of "seeker chic," a sibling of Wolfe's (Wolfe, 1976) aptly identified "funky chic." Last, there seems no reason to modify our poly-

morphic characterization of "tension," which remains, however, a feature that is virtually universal in the human population.

Be all of that as it may, let me now step back and view the world-saver model as an instance of *qualitative process theorizing*. I have been impressed that, although there have been efforts to give the model a quantitative testing, to employ it in organizing materials on conversion to other groups, and to state the correlates of conversion, almost no one has tried their own hand at qualitative process models of conversion. The world-saver model was intended as much as an analytic description of a sequence of experiences as it was as a "causal theory," and it was very much informed by Turner's (1953: 609-611) too-neglected formulation of the distinction between "closed systems" and "intrusive factors." That kind of logic clearly has not caught on, despite the oddity that much lip-service is given to it, and the world-saver model provides an example of it, as do the very widely known and generically identical models of Becker (1953) on marijuana use, Cressey (1972) on trust violation, and Smelser (1963) on collective behavior. Indeed, and I think now in error, my own effort to generalize the world-saver model to all deviant identities lapsed into the mere causal-factorial approach in providing eleven social organizational variations that affect the likelihood of assuming a deviant identity and reversing it (Lofland with Lofland, 1969: Parts II and III). Such an approach is fine and necessary, but it is a retreat from the study of process, a retreat signaled in my all too abstract, brief, and shakily founded depiction of "escalating interaction" (Lofland with Lofland, 1969: 146-154).

I would have hoped that by now we might have at least half a dozen qualitative process models of conversion, each valid for the range and kind of event it addressed, and each offering insights, even if not the most sophisticated account that might be given. We then could be well on our way to talking about types of conversion and types of qualitative conversion processes. Instead, I fear, some investigators get hung up in trying to determine if the world-saver model is "right" as regards the group they have studied. In my view, such investigators would advance us better by looking at the conversion process directly and reporting what they saw. Stark and I did not feel it necessary

to wear anyone's specific model when we went to look at conversion. I would urge now that people ought not so compulsively wear the tinted spectacles wrought by Lofland and Stark when they go to look at conversion. I would urge, that is, a knowledge of the logic of a qualitative process point of view, but an eschewing of harassing oneself to look at the world through a specific application of that logic (see further, Lofland, 1976: Part 1).

Stepping back yet further, I have since come to appreciate that the world-saver model embodies a thoroughly "passive" actor—a conception of humans as a "neutral medium through which social forces operate," as Blumer (1969) has so often put it. The world-saver model is actually quite antiinteractionist, or at least anti the interactionism frequently identified with people such as Blumer.

It is with such a realization that I have lately encouraged students of conversion to turn the process on its head and to scrutinize how people go about converting themselves. Assume, that is, that the person is active rather than merely passive (Lofland, 1976: ch. 5). Straus' (1976) "Changing Oneself: Seekers and the Creative Transformation of Life Experience" is an important initial effort to lay down new pathways of analysis within such an activist-interactionist perspective. I hope there will soon be many efforts of its kind.

Looking back from the perspective of a decade, however, I think students of conversion have ample reason for celebration and optimism. Stark and I had very few models and theoretical and substantive material to guide us. Limitations aside, there is now a rather solid and rich body of reasonably specific ideas and data-bits that can guide investigators. We do now know more about conversion than we did a decade ago, and I have every confidence that we will know enormously more a decade hence.

## NOTES

1. Because of DP fame, my pseudonyms are now somewhat labored, but I must continue to protect the anonymity of the movement for the reasons indicated in Lofland (1977: note 1).

The main phases of the development of the DP movement from 1959 through 1976 are chronicled in my "Preface" to the Irvington edition of *Doomsday Cult* (Lofland, 1977). Transformations in membership size and composition, modes of operation, funding, and other aspects are equally as startling as the changes in conversion organization I report here.

My account is drawn from the diverse sources described in Lofland (1977: note 2), save here again to acknowledge the indispensable help of Andrew Ross, Michael Greany, David Taylor, and Hedy Bookin.

2. DPs evolved dozens of front organizations from behind which they carried on an amazing variety of movement-promoting activities (see Lofland, 1977: phase two, section IV, "Missionizing").

3. I use the concept of "encapsulation" here in a related but not identical manner to that introduced in analysis of the deviant act (Lofland with Lofland, 1969: 39-60).

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