

4-11-1997

Controlling Control in the Cult: Big Brother, Little Brothers, and "Turning In"

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp>



Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), [New Religious Movements Commons](#), [Other Religion Commons](#), and the [Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Editor, IBPP (1997) "Controlling Control in the Cult: Big Brother, Little Brothers, and "Turning In"," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 2 : Iss. 2 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol2/iss2/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu.

Title: Controlling Control in the Cult: Big Brother, Little Brothers, and "Turning In"

Author: Editor

Volume: 2

Issue: 2

Date: 1997-04-11

Keywords: Control, Cult

Abstract. A previous article (IBPP, Vol. 1, No. 9, "The Psychology of Controlling Control") described the psychological challenges that must be surmounted by political leaders desiring to control others. The present article describes psychological phenomena which may present an "additional advantage" to cult and other political leaders in the quest for control.

Researchers and commentators on political control often perseverate about the Orwellian Big Brother keeping hordes of unfortunates in physical, psychological, or spiritual chains. Big Brother and his control apparatus increase, decrease, or maintain pressure--modulating moment by moment as necessary in the attempt to oppress, to prevent, suppress, or repress thoughts, feelings, motives, and behavior contrary to what is allowed.

This control task is difficult to be sure, one that has never been completely accomplished by the alleged exemplars of Big Brother's Kingdom--Stalin's Soviet Union, Hitler's Germany, Kim Il Sung's North Korea, Khomeini's Iran, Hoxha's Albania, Ceaucescu's Romania, to some 1960's New Left leaders Johnson's and Nixon's United States, and, of course, David Koresh, Jim Jones, and Do Applewhite. Yet some of the very targets and objects of Big Brother and his apparatus often facilitate their own control and that of others. They provide an "additional advantage" to Big Brother through "turning in" others. Although there is usually a standing directive to do so even for those suspected of the slightest deviancy, only some act on the directive even in cases in which no one else knows what they know. What are the psychological phenomena responsible?

Compliance. One turns in another only because one believes that Big Brother does know of the deviancy, even when he doesn't. If it were not for the noxious consequences promised one who does not turn in others, one would not. Identification. One turns in another only because one respects someone else who does turn in deviants. The attempt to emulate the respected other leads to turning in the deviant other. (Some might term this identification with the aggressor.) Internalization. One turns in another because one actually has internalized the directives of Big Brother as one's own directives. Whether Big Brother then knows of a specific deviancy or whether a respected other turns in deviants is moot. (Although in the latter case, a respected other who doesn't turn in a deviant may at that point still be respected by the internalizer but will also be turned in consonant with Big Brother's--and now the internalizer's--directives.) Defense Mechanisms. One turns in another in an unconscious attempt to manage intrapsychic conflict, often through expressing desires in some distorted fashion. Here one who turns in another consciously believes the deviant deserves it, when unconsciously one is trying to strengthen oneself in the battle to--in some way--master unacceptable internal impulses that are perilously close to being expressed. Some variants of defense mechanisms include unconsciously denying these impulses even occur (denial), investing more energy in keeping them out of awareness (repression), contributing to social objectives (sublimation), consciously believing that characteristics which one unconsciously believes are unacceptable in oneself are not even of oneself but are of some deviant others (projection), and so on. Of course, if the concept of the unconscious is specious, so is the explanatory worth of defense mechanisms which are unconscious by definition. Acting Out. This term has different meanings, but here it denotes behaving in a manner not to manage psychological conflict

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

but to express that conflict. Turning in others might have more to do with Issues of trust, loyalty, and the acceptability of assertiveness and aggression than the moral and ethical Issues of other people's behavior.

Thus, a cult member becoming ambivalent about goals, practices, and values might well have much to fear while living in the kingdom of Big Brother--not only from Big Brother and the control apparatus but from the many Little Brothers of whom even Big Brother may be unaware. (See Galanti, G.A. (1993.) Cult conversion, deprogramming, and the triune brain. *Cultic Studies Journal*, 10, 45-52; Kliger, R. (1994.) Somatization: Social control and illness production in a religious cult. *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, 18, 215-245.) (Keywords: Control, Cult..)