

Trauma Bonding: The Pull to the Perpetrator

Author: Svali

Published on: Oct. 12, 2000

I will be writing on an extremely difficult subject, that of trauma bonding, also known as bonding to the perpetrator. This is difficult to do for several reasons. As a child, I was in a state of captivity to my abuser; as delineated in trauma journals. I was raised in an isolative cult, and bonded heavily to my primary programmers, both my parents, and the trainers that worked with me. Then, as an adult, I continued the vicious cycle when I became a trainer, then a head trainer, and bonded others to me.

Trauma bonding is the issue that is left out of the equation when people ask Why do cult members recontact their perps? Why do they keep going back for more abuse? Without understanding chronic trauma, and the effects of trauma bonding, it is impossible to understand the dynamic involved. I will be sharing in this article both from personal memory of methods used, as well as sourcing to the literature on the subject. My greatest hope is that by understanding this often misunderstood subject, that others may be helped to pull out of its insidious pull.

If a person is unable to escape chronic, traumatic abuse, they will eventually begin to bond with their perpetrator(s). This has been well documented in the literature. It will occur because of the dehumanization of the victim, who may reach a state of feeling that they are robotized; or non-feeling, combined with a disruption in the capacity for intimacy caused by the trauma.

Trauma impels people both to withdraw from close relationships and to seek them desperately. The profound disruption in basic trust, the common feelings of shame, guilt, and inferiority, and the need to avoid reminders of the trauma that might be found in social life, all foster withdrawal from close relationships. But the terror of the traumatic event intensifies the need for protective attachments. The traumatized person therefore frequently alternates between isolation and anxious clinging to others.

Many victims of severe and unrelenting trauma, whether domestic violence, incest, or ritual abuse, will find that they feel anxious when alone, and fear abandonment and isolation. The over-dependent

characteristics are NOT a personality fault, but a result of the chronic abuse. This is often rooted in the fact that as a child, the trauma survivor was not only a CAPTIVE to their abuse, but they depended upon their perpetrator for food, shelter, or other necessities. In addition, with ritual abuse, a small child will often be abandoned for periods of time, to increase their dependency upon the very people who are abusing them.

Any two or three year old will be almost insanely grateful to be rescued from a small box that they have been confined within for hours, or from the dark confines of a musty basement where they have been left for a day or two. Even the most abusive perpetrator will then become the child's rescuer, which is the foundation of trauma bonding. In trauma bonding, the person's abuser will be perceived as the one who delivers and rescues from the abuse, as well as the tormentor. This creates a psychological ambivalence that creates dissociation in a young child. The very helplessness and terror that are instilled by the abuse, cause the child (or later, the adult) to reach out to the only available hand for relief: the perpetrator. And the perpetrator WILL rescue and stop the abuse, or take the child out of the confines of their pain, but for a price: their unrelenting loyalty and obedience. This is the traumatic underpinning of all cult programming that I have seen: a combination of abuse and kindness; terror and rescue; degradation and praise.

This will be reinforced by the perceived power of the perpetrator in the cult situation: In situations of captivity, the perpetrator becomes the most powerful person in the life of the victim, and the psychology of the victim is shaped by the actions and beliefs of the perpetrator. (1) This is survival at its most basic for the child raised in a cult setting, since failure to do this will cause further punishment and pain. The child will have seen people tortured or killed for disobedience, and so, literally, the perpetrator WILL have the perceived power of life and death over the child. If the child complies, and is obedient to the demands of their perpetrator and the group, they will be rewarded with freedom from punishment and continued life.

The intense coercion to not only comply with, but to identify idealistically, with the group in this context is overwhelming. Almost all very young children in an abusive cult setting will begin to internalize their perpetrators in some form in order to cope with this reality. And this reaction will be rewarded heavily, if not done intentionally. Many cult handlers or trainers will pretend to pass on their spirit; into the child, and will tell the child that they now live within them; and are

always watching them. Frequently, the young child will then create an internal alter with the same name as the outside abuser or trainer.

I remember my second trainer, Dr. Brogan, saying that he was giving himself immortality by going to live inside of me when I created (with his help) an internal Dr. Brogan. This alternate personality became a head internal trainer inside, the same role that Dr. Brogan had on the outside, and part of healing has meant learning that this internal Brogan is actually part of ME and learning that he no longer had to do his old job of reprogramming me internally. It has also meant breaking free of the hold that the GOOD memories of him, the kindnesses, the expressions of love and caring, held over me as well, since they bonded me to him, and to the group that he belonged to.

In the cult, it is not uncommon to have a death ritual where the child is brought to a near death experience. Afterwards, the rescuers are the trainers who talk soothingly to the child, massage him or her with oils, and tell the child that they owe their life to them. Not only that, but the warning is given: if the child ever tries to break free, they will return to the state of dying. Other set ups will include burying a child alive in a box or coffin; again, the perpetrators will rescue the horrified child who is almost out of their mind with terror (after several long hours) under one condition: undying loyalty to the group and the rescuers. Traumatized beyond belief, the child readily complies. This time of avowal and loyalty will be buried in a deep, subconscious layer of the mind, and the older adult or survivor may not be aware that part of the draw to the group is the belief that they owe their life to them. The subconscious fear needs to be dealt with: that leaving the group does NOT have to mean death, as they were taught in early childhood traumatizations.

After any training session, all Illuminati trainers know that the most important time is the kindness bonding; after the trauma is over. The best trainers will have kind personas that will come out, talk lovingly to the subject and tell them how well they did, how needed the subject is to the group, how special and unique they are. Rewards such as a special food, drugs, or a sexual partner will be given as well. This kindness after the trauma is the hook that will often draw programmed personalities back to the cult, since some personalities may know only of the rewards and kindness, and will block the abuse. Heavily abused alters have less of an investment in returning to the cult; but heavily rewarded and praised alters will, and must be helped in therapy to see the whole picture.

Siblings and other children will often form a trauma bond with each other, much as soldiers in a war setting, or prisoners, will do. Twinning with a non-biological twin will carry this to an extreme. In different situations, the children are allowed to rescue each other, increasing their loyalty and bond to each other. They will go through the same programming and torture together, and will feel the bond of surviving it together. A battlefield mentality may literally develop, as friendships deepen in youth and vows to be willing to die for one another are given and taken. But all too often, these friends and twins and siblings are also forced to traumatize and wound each other, reinforcing another basic cult message: the one who loves you will hurt you.

The survivor who escapes the cult will feel a powerful pull back because of a lifetime of these types of distorted messages. The safe therapist, or non-DID friend, is not hurting them, and this may create a huge dissonance in a person who up until this point had always been taught that love meant pain. They may doubt the reality of the caring messages of those around them, or need to test their support system over and over. And highly wounded alters, who were bonded to believe that they owe their very life to the ones who have abused them most, may still try to recontact former perpetrators, not believing that life can be different yet.

Undoing a lifetime of this type of teaching and training takes time, patience, perseverance, and prayer. It will stretch the most caring support person as they wonder why the survivor recontacts their abuser. The survivor will feel that they have betrayed themselves, if they find they have recontacted perpetrators, unaware of the powerful pull that trauma bonding may still have on certain alters inside. But with caring support and continued therapy, the survivor will begin to test old beliefs. Personalities formerly loyal to the father, mother, or other trainers may decide to cut off contact, and will go increasingly long periods without being reaccessed. They may come out in therapy, angry and disgruntled, or asking when the therapist is going to put down their façade and begin hurting them (this is another form of testing). The person's whole world view may go through a 180 degree inside as they realize that love does NOT have to mean abuse, and the message reaches the deepest layers inside. Deep grieving over the abuse of trust, over the betrayals, over the intentionality of the trauma bonding and the set-ups will occur, as the person moves towards healing and away from the pull of their former abusers. The process takes time, often years, to occur, but the result, which is a life free from cult abuse, is well worth it.

Copyright 2000 svali

References: 1. Trauma : site at <http://tor-pw1.attcanada.ca/~lrs/info/trauma.htm> excerpt from excellent book Trauma and Recovery (1997) by Judith Lewis Herman, MD

2. Attachment and Bonding Center of Oklahoma: site at http://www.abcok.org/attachment_disorder/ Good discussion of attachment disorder and causes in infants

3. The Meadows press release: The Case for Traumatic Bonding: The Betrayal Bond Patrick J. Carnes, Ph.D., C.A.S. Review of book that has an excellent discussion of trauma bonding and emotional betrayal; article has checklist of symptoms of trauma bonding.