



College students in crisis may be vulnerable to cults

By Adolfo Mendez
The College Press Service

After 12 years of being in a cult, Lisa Carroll left the group to obtain a master's degree in sociology.

"I wanted to find out why I went in," said Carroll, who now works in public relations for a southern California college.

Carroll joined when she was 18, while she was a freshman in college.

The death of her mother that same year drove her into involvement with the cult. "That's usually when people get involved in cults and mainstream religion. It's the feeling of emptiness," she says.

Concerned for her safety, Carroll prefers not to reveal the cult's identity. "It'd be too dangerous," she said. "You have to understand their mindset."

It's the same mindset that drove the Heaven's Gate cult to commit mass suicide in San Diego. "I would have done anything to protect the leader of the group. I believed that she was God," Carroll said of her group, not tied to Heaven's Gate.

"I had dreams about throwing myself in front of a bullet to protect her. The group that I was with is still active. They will do anything to protect this person," she said.

The initial comfort she felt in the group gave way to feelings of disillusionment when she discovered she was discouraged from asking "too many questions."

"I was excommunicated because I stood up one day and asked some questions," she said.

College students often are drawn into cults because the groups "mix truth with lies. If it was just one big lie, it would be easy," she said.

While it's normal to feel homesick while being away from home, not all students know how to cope with their feelings, Carroll said. Some, as a result, join cults, who fill the need for family, she said.

Estimates on the number of active cults in America range any-

where from 3,000 to 5,000, depending on the source. Numbers for college student involvement are more difficult to come by, given the secrecy of such groups. But author M. Rudin, who wrote *Cults on Campus: Continuing Challenge*, notes that more than half of new cult members are between the ages of 18 and 24.

Cult recruiters find college students attractive targets because often students desire to "better the world, to improve themselves, or to feel closer to God," said D.H. Blunt, author of *Cults on Campus: Awareness is Key*.

Yet while mainstream religious organizations have a mission of enhancing the spiritual development of members, cults, on the other hand, have self-preservation as a main goal and often use deceptive recruitment and conversion techniques, said Rudin.

Cult experts say that research into cults reveals some common themes in such groups:

1. Mind control. Many groups discourage members from reading material other than that produced by the cult. They discourage television and newspaper reading. The reason this works, says Carroll, is because they label such sources as being part of the "dark side."

2. Cutting family ties. "With lots of groups, they'll tell you your family is unenlightened," Carroll said. "Once you're out of your support system, you become more dependent on them."

3. Denial of reality. Sometimes, reality becomes distorted by date-setting, says Larry A. Trachte, a professor at Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa. Trachte, who has taught a course titled "Religious Cults" since 1979, expects a rise in the start of a millennialist fervor as the year 2000 approaches.

The Heaven's Gate cult believed a spaceship was traveling behind the Hale-Bopp comet, a belief with no basis in scientific fact.

For college students, denial can manifest itself in more day-to-day tasks. "They tell you [not to] worry about the stress in school. All the stress you're under doesn't matter, because

school really doesn't matter," Carroll said.

Still, colleges expose students to a world of ideas--ideas which threaten a group's grip on members. Some groups, therefore, try to persuade young followers to drop out, Carroll said.

However, not everyone believes college students are prime targets for cult groups.

Erling Jorstad, professor emeritus at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn., has studied groups like the Unification Church and smaller groups like The Way International and says today's college students aren't in any real danger.

"Today's collegians are not very vulnerable to cult appeal," Jorstad said. "During the 1970s with the counterculture and the anti-Vietnam war sentiment, cults had a strong appeal to the idealistic 'let's make the world a better place' collegians. Or, cults offered a haven; a safe place away from the pressures of social activist involvement."

But in 1997, social activism is dead, he says. "This Generation X with its postmodernist outlook has little or no interest in such change. Their cynicism mirrors that of the older generation, with little interest in organized politics, organized religion, or formal educational pursuits."

While Jorstad acknowledges that there are some exceptions, he says today's collegians are more drawn to self-discovery and individual expression than to social activism. "If this sounds pessimistic, it's because the mood swing for this generation has been that profound since the 1970s," he said.

But experience coupled with research Carroll did for her master's thesis lead her to think otherwise.

"It's just a statement in our society that people are so empty right now. Until that is solved, these groups are only going to proliferate," she said.

"Senioritis" sets in...

The College Press Service

Every day, Christy McBride tosses aside her books and dreams about her summer plans to lie on Aruba's sunwashed beaches.

McBride, a University of Missouri senior, wonders how she'll make it through another month of journalism classes until she dons a cap and gown for graduation. Not to mention, she still needs to polish her resume and line up a job for the fall.

But it seems a certain affliction is making it...well, hard to focus. The affliction is so common among graduating students, it's earned a name--senioritis.

"Senioritis is when the brain is nowhere but on the glorious day outside, the future ahead, not on what needs to be done here and now," she said with a sigh.

With spring break over and the countdown to graduation on, a number of seniors complain that a particular lethargy has taken over their bodies. As the simultaneously anticipate and dread the final curtain on college, they report that senioritis makes it a challenge to keep their minds on anything important.

For Beth Taylor, a Miami University of Ohio senior, it's even tougher to get through classes until graduation because she already has a job lined up at Bank One in Louisville, Ky.

"Now that I have a job, I don't feel like studying," she said. "I just want to go out, to work out, and to sleep."

Kristy Miller, a Stetson University senior, said she heard the call of graduation earlier this year and started going out every night. "You just cease caring about everything--from grades to classes," she said. "You just want to leave school."

Miller forced herself to buckle down when she realized graduation was still several months away. But she's not too concerned about life after graduation, because "there's always grad school," she said.

For many students, "senioritis" is a form of denial that the real world is banging on the door, says Sara Hoover, director of personal counseling at Birmingham Southern College.

"They've had so much structure in their lives--probably since kindergarten--they feel so much pressure to know what they'll be doing in June," she said. "And so many people are asking them what they're going to do."

Instead of finishing resumes or grad school applications, many students decide to blow off classes, frequent bars every night, and even take time away from their job search to play Frisbee in the sun.

"It affects seniors in differ-

ent ways," Hoover said. "I have seen some folks come in stressed to the limit. They're so worried about their GPA, getting the right job, what they're going to do after May 31."

Then there's the students who come in and say, "I just don't care. I'm just going to party this semester," Hoover said. "Their GPA may be great until that last semester."

Jen Nowitzky, a James Madison University senior, admits that she goes out three nights a week and expects that to increase as the weather grows warmer and graduation gets closer.

"You get tired of the busy work and realize this is it, my last chance to chill before stepping into the chaotic real world," she said.

Nowitzky's excited about leaving college, but a little worried because, "I haven't even looked at my resume in three months, much less sent one out," she said.

That's the mistake a lot of seniors make, according to Chuck McConnell, president and CEO of FirstCareer, a job counseling service for college students and recent graduates.

"They really don't have a sense of urgency to go into [their university's] career services," he said. "Most of these universities have great resources that go untapped."

He points to the most recent U.S. Department of Education statistics indicating that one year after

See SENIORITIS, page 2



New organization seeks to improve quality of life for residential students

By Amanda Fellers
Staff Writer

When Rob Foreman returned from a conference for N.C. housing officers in October 1996, he brought with him the idea of starting a Resident Hall Association at Methodist. The RHAs that already exist at several colleges in N.C. are dedicated to bettering the residential living experience. Foreman wanted to bring that same idea to Methodist.

The decrease in the number of resident students at Methodist was a concern to Foreman, residential area coordinator and assistant director of student activities. The decrease has been attributed to complaints from some resident students that they're paying too much to live on campus and not getting enough for their money.

In January, Foreman presented the idea of forming an RHA and explained its benefits:

< It will serve as a student voice in the residence halls.

< It will provide leadership and growth opportunities for student leaders.

< It will provide educational, cultural and social programs that will enhance the college education and experience.

< It will give students the option of purchasing items like carpets, linens, and MicroFridges at a convenient on-campus location with competitive prices.

< Its overall effect will create an environment that will enhance the living and learning experience within the residence halls.

Freshman resident advisor Shawn Hartman thought forming an RHA was an excellent idea.

"I like the fact that it will give resident students a say in dorm life," Hartman said. He described residents as "taxpayers" who currently have little say in dorm issues.

RHA will serve as an open forum for residents to share their concerns and ideas.

"If [residents] want to complain, complain to RHA," Hartman said. "Complain to the right people."

According to Foreman, the RHA will "provide services to make residential living better."

RHA has invested in MicroFridge, a compact unit consisting of a microwave oven placed atop a freezer and a refrigerator. Residents have the option of renting a MicroFridge for the year for \$110 (\$55 each if roommates share). MicroFridge will be available next semester.

Another idea being considered by RHA that would provide a more comfortable living environment is carpet service. Residents would be able to purchase a carpet of their color choice, perfectly cut to fit their rooms. The carpets would be delivered during the summer and ready for residents in the fall.

Other possible services for residents available through RHA include linens, towels, storage trunks and shelving systems.

Hartman wants residents to realize at least one thing about RHA: "This is *their* organization. It is created for them, by them, to enhance their dorm life." He hopes residents will take advantage of the opportunities for them to start making some of the decisions about dorm life.

RHA is open to any resident who wishes to improve the quality of life in his/her dorm or hall. RHA elections will be held April 21 and are open to all residents.

If anyone would like more information on RHA and its services, contact the Resident Life Office at 630-7626.

INSIDE

Students start their own Web design company.....page 2

SGA candidates discuss their platforms.....page 2

Baseball team sets their sights on World Series.....page 3

Softball team aims for conference tournament.....page 3

Cult mentality abounds in our society.....page 4

Truth about Gulf War illness remains a secret.....page 4

Spring Fling '97 offers games, movie, bands

By Dawn Melvin
Staff Writer

Games and various entertainment will be the highlight for students during Spring Fling April 24-26.

A caricature artist will open the festivities Thursday, April 24 in the Berns Center from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. There is no cost for the drawing.

On Friday, April 25, a large inflated obstacle course will be set up in front of the Berns Center. There will also be a volleyball and basket-

ball tournament. On Friday evening, the horror movie *Scream* will be shown on the football field. There will be free popcorn and drinks.

On Saturday, April 26, the

student band Play with the Rattle will open for the band Life in General. Life in General played at Spring Fling '96 and also at a Methodist coffeehouse last fall.

Susan Cherry, a junior and secretary of the student activities committee, said, "There was a lot of good feedback from the students about Life in General, so we thought we would book them again for this year."

The Student Activities Committee plans the Spring Fling and meets every Friday at 11 a.m. in Dining Room 3 for interested students.

