

# Brainwashing and Programming

## *Definitional Perspectives, Levels of Awareness, and Stage*

*I don't know how it happened, but overtime I came to think my Dad was a bad man who was out to hurt us, but that's not who he was and now I know who he is.*

—10-year-old male

*Brain washing has been defined as; intensive propaganda techniques that are applied under conditions of stress and/or coercive persuasion, during which an individual is confronted by conditions deliberately designed to undermine his morale and make him question his accepted attitudes. This paves the way for indoctrination with a "replacement set of beliefs" that will produce a change in behavior.*

—Dr. Haha Lung

Mind Manipulation: Ancient and Modern Ninja Techniques

## Varied Meanings

The terms *programming* and *brainwashing* have been used so frequently that they have developed very broad meanings and are, therefore, not as useful technically or scientifically, or as forensically precise as we would like them to be. There are many related terms, popular and professional, in common use as well: alien thought, alienation, alignment, aping (“monkey see, monkey do”), bombarding, browbeating, briefing (and debriefing), brain dead, character assassination, closed-mindedness, coercive thinking, coercive persuasion, conversion, created memories, delusions, disordered attachments, distortions, dogmatic control, domestic terrorism, drilled-in, echoing, enmeshment, estrangement, fact-finding, fact-giving, false memories, fake convictions, family illusions, false beliefs, foreign thinking, hammering, head/mind games, history creation, holding hostage, implanting memories, imposing thoughts/beliefs, inculcating, indoctrinating, inducing memories, isolationism, keeping the faith, knowing the “truth,” lock-step thinking, maligning, manipulation, mental kidnapping, mimicking, mind control, mind-twisting, mindlessness, mirror image, modeling, oppositional thinking, parental alienation, parentectomy, parental death, parental denigration, parroting, poisoned minds, poison parents, politically correct, pressured, proselytizing, puppeteering, reeducating, remaking, reorienting, retreatism, rewriting history, seeing the light, self-fulfilling prophecy, shutdown, stilted, social death, submissiveness, tainted thinking, thought control, thought induction, thought reform, total conformity, total control, totalitarianism, toxic thoughts, true believer, truth-giving, truth-seeking, turned against, turning away, undue influence, world view, water torture, and many others. Notice that these terms include the process, impact, and results of certain behaviors by one or more parents.

### *Political*

The terms *programming* and *brainwashing* have varied uses and varied meanings in different intellectual and applied disciplines.

In political analyses, the terms often apply to thought control or mind control directed toward political ends. In fact, the term *brainwashing* was probably first used in this context by an American journalist named Ed Hunter. He was referring to a form of mind control that was reportedly being used in mainland China following the Communist takeover. Hunter quoted a Chinese informant who used the term *hsi nao* (literally “to wash the brain”).<sup>1</sup>

Since then, the term in political arenas has often been associated with Asians (more recently with Russians and, now, Muslim fundamentalists) and has connotations of being an intense, rigorous, if not mysterious, process. It is thought of by many as a kind of Pavlovian technique that is all-powerful and irresistible. It conjures up being able to direct people’s thoughts, often against their will. It can start in early childhood and teaches children to sacrifice themselves for the “greater good.”

Lifton notes that, according to Hunter, none of these stereotypes are true because thought reform really has two major components when used toward political ends.<sup>2</sup> The first component is to inculcate confession. This is done by creating exposure to past and present “evils,” followed by induced renunciation of them. For example, exposing a military prisoner to a battle scene and then obtaining from that prisoner a renunciation of his or her past involvement is the first major component of thought reform. Renunciation often gets a prisoner to recant previous goals in order to see the evil nature of his or her own deeds.

The second part of the thought-reform process directed toward political ends is the educational component. This is referred to as the “remaking of the person.” To remake a person, it is often necessary to rewrite history. Reorganization of experiences, involving a modification of sequences, dates, times, and persons, may all be part of the process. A reevaluation of who initiated the conflict and is,

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1. Edward Hunter, *Brainwashing in Red China* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1951).

2. Robert J. Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of “Brainwashing” in China* (New York: W.W. Norton Co., Inc., 1961).

therefore, responsible for “striking the first blow” can also be part of the reeducation process.

These two components may also be employed in nonpolitical aspects of (family) brainwashing. It is not uncommon for a parent to try to obtain a “confession” from a child that the target parent’s involvement in the predivorce family was negative and that all the predivorce experience was evil, especially in regard to the target parent. This process may be called “seeing the light.”

A mother may demand that the child see “who Daddy really is.” A father may demand that a child see the “moral truth” (in negative terms) about the mother’s style of dress or amoral behavior. This exposure process may be quite extreme; parents might bring up materials of which the child has no knowledge and/or actually fabricate historical materials (rewriting history) regarding the other parent.

The reeducation process, or the remaking of the person, may involve a rewriting of marital history in terms of who did what to whom, where, and how. Of course, denial, repetition, exaggeration, confusion, distortion, elaboration, and innuendo as techniques are important in both components of thought reform. These processes are all employed by parents who try to remake the thought process of a child. Ideological (re)alignment is a goal in both the political and parental distortion processes.

### *Computer Technology*

The “program,” as used in computer technology, refers to a set of directions that includes procedures or instructions. These directives are used to structure the arrangement of facts or data. Without the directions or procedures, data would have no way of being coherently organized. This concept has applications to the process of child brainwashing—the parent clearly provides a programme, a set of directions to assist the child in organizing and interpreting the “data” he or she is perceiving. For example, a child observing a parent who is late for pickup may receive a set of directions or instructions such as, “A parent who really cares would certainly be more punctual.” This

is, of course, a code for interpreting the lateness, that, in and of itself, may be perceived as neutral or open to many other interpretations.

In this case, the code suggests that the late parent is to be seen by the child as uncaring. The target parent could have been late due to a traffic accident, personal circumstance, an old habit of tardiness, or some other reason, but the directions for interpreting the act do not include these neutral possibilities. These programmes or directives can lead to an “all or nothing” conclusion. Children are expected to see it this way or they are operating outside of the “code.” Children often seek compliance with parental codes.

### *Social/Psychological and Sociological Usage*

The terms *programming* and *brainwashing* have been used in social/psychological and sociological studies of religious cults<sup>3</sup> to try to gain an understanding of the inculcation process of beliefs. Some studies have also attempted to delineate the conditions surrounding the indoctrination process.

Most of these studies emphasize the necessity of physical and social isolation; the stripping process (modification of hairstyle, speech content, style of clothing, and other features that connected the individual to mainstream society or past social identities); the definition of all outsiders as bad, evil, uninformed, or on the wrong path to truth; the use of repetition; and the reinforcing of inferior status (by having group members perform extremely menial tasks within a house, center, or other group structure).

Certainly, the issue of isolation is relevant to the programming and brainwashing of children, because parents often try to isolate the

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3. An example of this type of study is John Lofland, *Doomsday Cult: A Study of Conversion, Proselytization, and Maintenance of Faith* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966). For additional information on brainwashing and cults, see Edgar Schein et al., *Coercive Persuasion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1961). See also Thomas Robbins, *Cults, Converts, and Charisma: The Sociology of New Religious Movements* (California: Sage Monograph, 1988). See also Thomas Robbins, *Cults, Culture, and the Law* (Scholars Press & the American Academy of Religion, 1985). Richard Ofshe, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, has also written extensively on the topic of brainwashing/indoctrination processes. See also Mark Galanter, *Cults: Faith, Healing, and Coercion* (Oxford University Press, 1989).

child from others, especially the other (target) parent or any other source of contradictory information or beliefs, such as a counselor or other relatives. The stripping process, which can be physical (the taking away of material goods and other types of related restrictions/punishments) as well as social/psychological tools (the removal of love and affection), is often observed in domestic-relations cases and other circumstances in which an adult wishes to control the thoughts/behavior of the child.

The use of repetition is basic to all programming/brainwashing. Repeating the same themes over and over again creates a mind-set conducive to the goals and objectives of the programmer.

The next condition of brainwashing—defining all nongroup members as unacceptable—requires that one must first define the limits of the (in) group. For example, Mom and the kids or Dad and the kids along with a stepmother or stepfather constitute the new family. It involves what sociologists call “we-ness”—a sense of solidarity that creates a social base for programming and brainwashing. Others are not part of “us.” “We” have our views and beliefs. “They” would not understand. This is “our” family.

The use of the inferior status as an inculcation mechanism may be more subtle in domestic-relations situations. Making a child feel like a second-class citizen by giving her less attention than her sister who complies with the programme is one approach. Children are keenly aware of being less favored by a parent. This lowering of status within the family can be done by exclusion, rejection, or denial of affectionate contact; it is extremely painful to a child and, in and of itself, may be powerful enough to bring the child into compliance with the parental programme or belief system.

Inferior status descriptions may also be applied to the target parent, “Your Mom is behaving like a tramp.” “Your Dad is not a college graduate; you should do better in life.” Status manipulation is only one key sociological factor employed in parental segregation activities.

On the sociological side, cultural sets of beliefs, values, rituals, and norms are some of the key elements in redefining a group. Fostering or creating beliefs that a parent is “bad,” “a family wrecker,”

“not really loving the children,” and “being a biological but not social parent” are just a few beliefs that may bond a programming-and-brainwashing parent and a child. As children buy into the repeated beliefs (“We could still be a family if it weren’t for Mom,”) they become emotionally, then socially, then physically disengaged from the target parent. One of the earliest references in the sociological literature is by Farber et al., who notes that brainwashing results in the three D’s (Debility, Dependency, and Dread). Our findings, especially in the frequent and intense cases of brainwashing, are consistent with these early findings. Many of these children end up highly socially-emotionally dependent on the programming/brainwashing parent and can also come to dread contact with the target parent.<sup>4</sup>

Rituals or ceremonies are bestowed special meaning that reinforces target parent exclusion. “We visit GrandMom (like we always did),” and “We go to the beach as a family” are two examples that reinforce the new (limited) membership in “our family.” Any attempt by the target parent to have contact time is defined as a violation of the old or new rituals. “I can’t see you tonight, Dad, we are all going to the movies like we used to do,” said a twelve-year-old girl to her father when he was supposed to pick her up for their weekend visit.

### *Legal/Forensic*

The terms *programming* and *brainwashing* have been used extensively by attorneys and by mental health professionals who work within the legal system.

These terms have been used to mean a number of things, including the manipulation of the actual message content (thoughts and beliefs), negative modeling, coercion of ideas, limiting of choices, and/or the result of a (long) process of programming and brainwashing (alienation).<sup>5</sup> In the latter usage, the themes (programming), process,

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4. I.E. Farber, Harry F. Harlow, and Louis Jolyon West. “Brainwashing, Conditioning, and DDD (Debility, Dependency, and Dread).” *Sociometry* 20, No. 4 (December 1957): 271–285.

5. Richard Gardner, *Family Evaluations in Child Custody Litigation* (New Jersey: Creative Therapeutics, 1982). Gardner indicates that we do not need to attend to less severe cases. We do not agree with this position because our data indicate that all different types and levels

and techniques (brainwashing) are not clearly distinguished from one of the possible results (alienation). We view parental alienation as only one important result of this social, cognitive, and emotional distortion process. Other results can indicate mental/social/psychological danger to children and target parents; danger to grandparent relationships; and distorted views of relationships in general, to name a few.

Most professionals associated with the judicial process agree that virtually all cases that involve children have some elements of programming/brainwashing. Until the original *Children Held Hostage* study (1991), there had been no objective method for delineating the motives, techniques, and effects of programming/brainwashing aside from the emphasis on alienation. Even though many states set prohibitions on character assassination of a parent by another parent, the courts do not have enough detection criteria. They, alas, have been hard pressed to identify exact effects on the children. Some of these problems remain today.

Additionally, the credibility of the child's opinion ("I want to live with Mom [Dad]") has been difficult to gauge in cases of custody, child abuse, wife abuse, husband abuse, incest, and others where the child's opinion is often solicited. Did the child issue that opinion freely? Was he or she confused, coerced, manipulated, bribed, or in other ways influenced? By understanding the components of the programming/brainwashing process, we should be better able to answer these crucial questions. These dilemmas have been helped by the typologies developed in *Children Held Hostage* (1991), as well as other ongoing research.

To say the least, there is still some confusion in the meaning and application of these terms. However, most attorneys, judges, conciliators, parenting coordinators, therapists, and associated professionals remain committed to assist legal professionals in answering

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can have significant effects on children. See also his other work, *Parental Alienation Syndrome* (New Jersey: Creative Therapeutics, 1998). Gardner sees the child as participatory in the process to a greater degree than we do. Also, the use of the term *syndrome* is outdated. Most clinicians and researchers have recognized this term as not central to understanding that some parents seek to damage the relationship between a child and the other parent.



their pressing questions. Forensically, the issue of attitudinal and/or behavioral change or deprogramming remains central. We can most effectively deprogramme once we have a clear understanding of the process, its content, and its effects.

Finally, we can say that programming and brainwashing is a process (intentional and unintentional) whereby a parent or parental surrogate attempts to limit, damage, and interfere with the love, contact, and image of the target parent.

### *Components of the Definitions of Programming and Brainwashing with Examples*

#### **A. Programming (The Idea Component)**

(1) Ideology (General to specific. Serves as basis for development of programmes.)

- Religion
  - The body is a holy temple. Anyone who defiles it is bad or evil (general).
  - Drinking alcohol is showing disrespect to God's temple (specific).
  - Anyone who drinks, like your mother, is sinful (relevance of the general and specific ideologies to target parent).
- Personal Philosophy
  - A parent should be with the child whenever the child needs him or her (general caretaking philosophy).
  - A parent who works cannot provide adequate care (specific).
  - You should be with your mother because Dad works too much (relevance of specific ideology to target parent).
  - Your mother works a lot and therefore is not a good caregiver (relevance of the specific to the general philosophy).

- Communal Standards
  - Children have a greater need for their mothers (general).
  - Your father is not a mother (specific).
  - The time with your father does not need to be increased (conclusion and relevance of the specific to the target parent).
- (2) Socio-Psychological Dimensions as Bases for Programme Selection, Intensity, and Modification
  - *Revenge/retaliation* — “He’ll pay for the hurt he caused.”
  - *Rejection* — “She just threw me away like a used newspaper.”
  - *Feelings of Injustice* — “After the kind of wife, mother, and friend I’ve been, I don’t deserve this.”
  - *Hostility* — “I hate everything she stands for.”
  - *Fear* — “If the kids go with her, I’ll never see them again.”
  - *Loneliness/abandonment* — “If the kids are with him, I’m really alone. My family is in California, and I have no single friends.”
  - *Survival* — “My Daddy said that if I tell the judge that I want to be with Mom more, he could die in jail. Then I wouldn’t have a Daddy, any food, or a place to live.”
- (3) Desires, Intentions, Goals, Objectives
  - Desired ends/results:
    - *Attitudes* — “Your stepparent was the cause of our divorce” (direction for child to see him/her as contaminated).
    - *Behavior* — Child should not want to visit when stepparent is present.
    - *Intent* — To sever target parent contact (or to identify with one religion over another).
    - *Goals/objectives* — Create a singular relationship between child and programmer.
- (4) Specific Themes/Content
  - *Theme* — Noncooperation at target parent’s home.

- Content — “It’s not necessary to clean up at Mom’s all the time” (said by father).

## B. Brainwashing (The Action Component)

(1) Techniques (of inculcation, attitudinal/belief restructuring, behavioral change):

- Denial of existence technique — Child is not allowed to possess photos of the other parent.

(2) Process (dynamics of procedures/operations):

- *Destruction* — Destroying photos each time they are discovered in the child’s possession.

(3) Methodology/Applications (general/specific):

- *General* — Negative comments about the physical image of the target parent.
- *Specific* — Going into the child’s room when he or she is at school, locating and destroying photos of target parent.

## C. Levels of Awareness of the Themes and Processes

(by programmer /brainwasher and child and target parent)

(1) Conscious/Intentional versus Unconscious/Unintentional

- *Conscious/Intentional* — “I hate her [referring to the mother], and she deserves to never see the children.”
- *Unconscious/Unintentional* — Parent fails to ask about good times that a child has experienced with the other parent.

(2) Language Usage and Participants

- *Language Usage* — “John [the father] is on the phone, dear.” Mother deletes the use of the father title, thereby changing his status and importance.
- *Participants* — May include parents, siblings, grandparents, neighbors, attorneys, other professionals, stepparents, and others (surrogate programmer/brainwasher).

## Operational Definition: Clarifying the Terms and Distinguishing between Programming and Brainwashing

The utility of distinguishing between these two terms, which to our knowledge has not been done previously, will provide ten major positive functions. By distinguishing between programming and brainwashing we will experience: (1) better clarity; (2) improved specificity; (3) enhancement of the general application potential of the terms; (4) improved diagnostic utility, especially in reference to motivation and detection; (5) enhancement of treatment/deprogramming dimensions (especially because there are stages within the two terms and diverse types of interventions that will be applicable, depending on the different components and stages of programming and/or brainwashing); (6) improved expert forensic witness applications; (7) benefits to lawyer-client consultations; (8) more appropriate judicial understanding and response; (9) improved research applications; and, finally, (10) enhanced predictive capacities in various cases.

### *Definitions Employed in This Study*

#### **PROGRAMMING**

Programming is the formulation of a set or sets of *directions* based on a specific or general belief system directed toward another (child victim or target parent) in order to obtain some desired end/goal. The programming may be willful (conscious) or unintentional (unconscious). The set of directions, messages, and/or other themes contained within the programme may be used to influence the thoughts, perceptions, opinions, ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and/or behaviors of the victims.

Effective programming often causes the child (victim) to operate against the other, or target, parent. The intent of the programmer is to control the child's thoughts and/or behavior. The programme often contains themes designed to damage the child's image of the target parent in terms of the target parent's moral, physical, intellectual,

social, vocational, emotional, and educational qualities (as well as his or her parenting abilities).

If the intent of the programmer is to control the flow of information (as to a judge in child abuse or sexual assault cases), then the child may feel compelled to lie or distort his or her (real) perceptions/beliefs. Confusion in the child may result from internalizing the programme. The programmer may issue a message such as, “You never really saw me hit Mommy. I was holding her so she would stop hitting me.” This child reported to a judge, “I don’t know what I saw.”

The programme directed the child to reinterpret reality and/or to develop anxiety about the original understanding. It was successful in controlling the flow of (damaging) information about the programmer. (The father did, in this case, strike the wife/mother and the child saw it as an act initiated by the father.)

So the programme is the ideological basis of a two-part process. First, you must have a belief system in place; this serves as a basis for action by the perpetrating parent. Ultimately these beliefs are instilled into the child to further the goal of disengaging from the target parent.

### **BRAINWASHING**

Brainwashing is the selection and application of particular techniques, procedures, and methods employed as a basis for inculcating the programme. The brainwashing is the applied dimension.

It is a process that occurs over a period of time and usually involves the repetition of the programme (content, themes, values, beliefs) until the subject responds with (emotional, attitudinal, behavioral) compliance. Brainwashing techniques may be employed singularly or in combination. There may be one or more people involved in the process. Techniques may vary over time. Rewards for compliance also may vary from material to social/psychological.

The person designing the programme or performing the brainwashing goes by different names. He or she has been called an alienator, perpetrator, brainwasher, manipulator, assaulter, programmer, activator, performer, message creator, instigator, dictator, or

some other term that implies someone in a position of setting up the programme and/or possibly carrying out its actions through the process of brainwashing.

The receiver of the programme or its content is referred to as the victim, the programmed, the manipulated, the alienated, the brain-washee, the recipient, the fall guy, or the respondent.

The programmer (a parent who creates the ideas/goals) may be different than the brainwasher (perpetrator of the actions). The person receiving the message or content contained in the programme and carried out through the process of brainwashing may be either an active or passive participant in the process. In other words, some children are fully aware of the intent of the programming/brainwashing parent and actively participate. Others may not be aware of the desired ends of the programming and brainwashing parent and are unknowing agents and victims themselves in the process. This is why Gardner's argument of penalizing some children for their participation is, we believe, blaming the victim. (*See* Richard Gardner's therapeutic interventions for children with parental alienation, Chapter 2: Separating the Child from the Programmer.) The third person in the programming/brainwashing triad is the individual whom the child is brainwashed against. This is often the non-brainwashing parent, although stepparents, therapists, judges, mediators, and others can also become foci. They are called the "targets" of the programming/brainwashing.

#### **LEVELS OF AWARENESS:**

##### **The Brainwasher versus the Recipient**

The person creating the programme and/or performing the brainwashing process may be operating in a conscious, overt, manifest, obvious, intentional fashion, or may be operating in an unconscious, covert, latent, hidden, or unintentional fashion. Some aspects of the programme may be developed and implemented through a conscious and intentional process, and other features may be unconscious and unintentional.

For example, a parent may consciously send the message that the child should spend less time with the other parent. However, the parent may be unaware of the imitative behavior of the child observing when he or she talks on the telephone to the target parent; when the programming-and-brainwashing parent interacts with the target parent, he or she may make faces. These could be modeled by the child. This may (or may not) be an unintentional process.

We have seen cases where children will exactly imitate the gesticulation patterns of a programming/brainwashing parent. If the programming-and-brainwashing parent is asked where the child obtained these behaviors, he or she may, in good faith, have no idea. However, forensic evaluators and mental health professionals may be able to observe the same tainted behaviors in one of the parents.

### **Can You Have One Without the Other?**

There are a number of logical possibilities resulting from the two-part breakdown of programming and brainwashing. The first possibility is that both programming and brainwashing are present, which is the most common combination.

In this case, a parent would formulate a theme, message, or belief such as, “Our new family is superior” and, therefore, “it is appropriate to dislike your maternal grandparents.” The brainwashing technique could be to make negative comments about the grandparents when looking through family photograph albums.

The second possibility is that there is neither programming nor brainwashing. This is unusual. In most separation/divorce cases where there is animosity and conflict between the parents, there is some degree of programming and brainwashing, though it is not always long-term, intense, and devastating.<sup>6</sup> (See Table 17, Percentage of Parents Who Programme/Brainwash by Intensity Level.)

Parents who have neither programmed nor brainwashed are likely to be parents who wish to have joint, or cooperative, parenting. They

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6. Richard Gardner, *The Alienation Syndrome and the Differentiation Between Fabricated and Genuine Child Sex Abuse* (New Jersey: Creative Therapeutics, 1987).

may also have insight into the damaging effects of this conflicted process for their children. These types of parents make statements such as: “Our problems should not be the children’s”; “Just because we are divorcing doesn’t mean the children have to divorce either of us”; and “Saying bad things about each other will only hurt the kids in the long run.” These parents can separate their social-emotional issues from the needs of the children. They provide the healthier environment for postdivorce children.

The third possible programming/brainwashing scenario is that programming is present, but brainwashing is not. In this case, a parent chooses a theme, such as the child was “abused” by the target parent. However, the parent decides not to follow out the programme or message content with an actual process or technique. The thoughts and desires remain internal and are never carried to the level of action. In an evaluation, a parent may admit to thoughts of turning a child against the other parent or of influencing the child regarding possible court testimony. However, the parent has never carried through. Parents in this category check their thoughts and desires for the good of the child (assuming the child was not abused) or for legal self-protection. In any event, they do not turn their impulses into damaging realities.

In the fourth scenario, programming is absent, and brainwashing is present. This is not possible in the context of our definition because the brainwasher must have some message/theme/ directive or desired end (programme). In other words, though this is a logical possibility, it is not an empirical reality. Still, a parent may not be aware of the exact nature of programming he or she is implementing through a particular brainwashing technique. But through careful study, a mental health professional, evaluator, conciliator, attorney, judge, or other trained person may discern an underlying idea pattern that might be thematic in nature.



*Degrees of Programming and Brainwashing and Impact Measures*

Component	Frequency of Execution				
	Highest Multiple Times/Day	Moderate Weekly or Monthly	Low On Occasion	Never	Positive
Message Context	Seriously assaultive language	Mix of some serious and some incidental	Incidental or accidental	None	Supportive of other parent and parent-child relationship
Areas Assaulted	All – Social, psychological, economic, spiritual, family, parenting, etc.	Different areas at all times or focus on a few areas	Few areas or on occasion	None	None. Looks for good qualities in the other parent
Number of Programmers/Brainwashers	Many – Parents, neighbors, teachers, religious leaders, etc.	Parent and possibly some other agents	Usually just the parent	None	None, and the parent stops it if he or she sees another person doing it
Break in the Pattern	None – Continuous	Breaks when sees target parent losing	Frequent breaks	None to start with	None to break
Perception of Damage to Children by Programming/Brainwashing Parent	None or “other blamer” behaviors	Usually little to none	Some insight	Usually highly sensitive to damage to children	Extremely high sensitivity
Respect for Child’s Needs and Insight	Very low to none	Some insight, but with limited protection	Generally high	Very high	Extremely high

Component	Frequency of Execution				
	Highest Multiple Times/ Day	Moderate Weekly or Monthly	Low On Occasion	Never	Positive
Child's Language	Negative to target, hostile; mirrors programming/ brainwashing parent	Some negative language; frequently mirrors programming/ brainwashing parent	Occasional negative language; some independent language	No negative language (fully independent)	Positive language is the norm; mirrors positive views of parent(s)
Potential for "Backlash Effect"	High	High to moderate	Low	None	None
Damaged Trust in Relationships for the Children	Severe	Moderate	Some	None	None
Child's Inner Conflicts over Target Parent	Severe	Significant	Present, but manageable	None	None
Comfort in Being with Target Parent	Severe tension	Significant	Present, but manageable	None, seeks contact freely	Seeks contact freely
Tells Programming/ Brainwashing Parent Positives About Target	Virtually never	On occasion	Will share, but cautious	Openly gives information and feelings	Very positive incorporation of both parents
Feels Integrated with Both Birth Parents' Lives	No, and is often not integrated with assaultive parent either, although it may look that way	No, limitations exist	Pretty well integrated	Well integrated contact and caring exist	Fully integrated

Component	Frequency of Execution				
	Highest Multiple Times/ Day	Moderate Weekly or Monthly	Low On Occasion	Never	Positive
Potential for Unpredictable Anger by the Child	High	Moderate	Varied, but manageable	None related to parental circumstances other than usual	None
Child Wishes Conflict Would Stop	Strong desire	Strong desire	Some desire and concern	Not relevant, doesn't exist	None

### Stages of Programming/Brainwashing

We have been able to uncover eight stages in most cases of programming and brainwashing. The eight stages are listed here and more fully explained below.

1. Ideational or ideological components (choosing a thematic focus).
2. Rationalizing the ideas and/or techniques.
3. Using mood-induction techniques and facilitate distorted views of target parent.
4. Using sympathy-creating techniques (brainwashing).
5. Gaining compliance with parent's own belief system and desires.
6. Testing effectiveness (feedback assessment by programmer/ brainwasher).
7. Measuring loyalty.
8. Escalating/intensifying/broadening/generalizing
9. Maintenance (including continuation and/or modification of particular themes/brainwashing techniques).

*Ideational and Emotional Components/Thematic Focus*

In the first stage, an individual sets up a particular thematic focus or foci. These thematic foci are often based on ideological dimensions of one's (family) experiences, cultural heritage, and thought processes. The themes may be derived from religion, educational orientation, personal philosophies (such as philosophies of parenting), or other institutional and social bases.

For example, many parents select an attack on the lifestyle of the other parent as their thematic focus. Some common characteristics of lifestyle that the programmer may attack include the use of alcohol and "extreme" drinking behavior, the decision to live with a person out of wedlock, the viewing of certain kinds of movies, the consumption of certain foods, or the preference for certain types of sporting events, travel, music, dress, mannerisms, friendship patterns, and educational/cultural interests (or lack thereof).

Many themes may be derived from a religious orientation (or be rationalized on the basis of a religious orientation). Often, parents with a fundamentalist religious perspective make severe judgments against a parent with (any) components of a liberal lifestyle. Parents with a liberal lifestyle can, in turn, be equally critical of a religiously observant parent.

For example, the thematic focus of alcohol consumption could result in a programme containing the message, "Any use of alcohol makes a person immoral." An ideational component may also derive from a personal philosophy of parenting.

Some parents believe that the use of any babysitter or surrogate is synonymous with abandonment of parental responsibilities. A parent who believes this may use it as a basis (rationale) for a programme. The programme content could become, "Your mother is not doing what a parent should do, leaving you after school with a babysitter." Kidnappings to foreign countries are often related to parental beliefs that the host country is sympathetic and that it will support that parent keeping the child. In some countries fathers are seen as owners of the children. The likelihood of return is low should the father abscond to one of these countries.

It is very important to realize that programmes are generally based on ideological components. Ideology, by definition, is not usually developed through a rational, logical process. Therefore, it is not necessarily amenable to logical discourse or modification based on reason alone. An attempt on the part of an evaluator, a therapist, an attorney, or a judge to convince a father that the mother is really a good parent in many other ways, even though she leaves the children with a surrogate after school, may prove futile.

Again, the simple social-psychological explanation for this is that ideology is the type of thought process least amenable to change. It is also based on long socio-historical processes and may be tied to ethnic, religious, familial, communal, national, or other normative underpinnings. Parents who programme and brainwash are virtually always seeking ideological alignment with their children; they want the children to believe in, as well as execute, behaviors that will result in damage to the relationship with the target parent.

#### **EMOTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

A programme may be fueled by emotional factors even though these resulted from social factors. Being left for another person (leading to feelings of hostility, anger, revenge, rejection), being left economically impoverished (leading to feelings of fear, survival, revenge, injustice), being left for no apparent reason (leading to confusion, anxiety, the need for control of one's destiny), having been abused (leading to retaliation, control, revenge, hostility), being told you've been "out-grown" (leading to revenge, the need for autonomy, the need to show who's grown-up), being told you're stupid and insignificant (leading to desires for accomplishment, leading to power needs), being left alone (leading to fear of loneliness), being disgraced in the community (leading to the need for equilibration, saving face, revenge), being told others are more exciting and interesting (leading to revenge, rejection, guilt, desire to punish, desire to show-off a new relationship), and dozens of other scenarios related to separation and divorce leave individuals with emotional needs (if not scars) that are sometimes dealt with by programming and brainwashing a child.

Also, and unfortunately, the child may be seen as the only vehicle left for emotional equilibration. Determining these social-emotional factors provides a fuller understanding of the energies behind the programming and brainwashing processes. These emotional factors may be operating at various levels of self-awareness. It is helpful to interview a parent first about his or her emotional-social issues and needs before turning to a direct assessment of the programming and brainwashing. (See Chapter 4 for more insight into this aspect.)

### *Rationalizing the Ideas and/or Techniques*

#### **MOOD-INDUCTION AND SYMPATHY-CREATING TECHNIQUES**

Once a programme is developed with particular or general foci that are based on ideological or social-emotional factors, we have the underpinnings for stages two and three, which are the beginnings of the actual brainwashing stages.

Mood induction and sympathy creation are necessary stages in the programming-and-brainwashing process. During these two stages, the programmer/brainwasher induces feelings of support, sadness, understanding, anger, or any other social-emotional reactions that facilitate a linkage between the programmer/brainwasher and the child. Mood induction and sympathy creation can be done in myriad ways. The most common include repetition of a theme.

Some other common methods parents use to induce mood and create sympathy are:

1. Intimidation and threat;
2. Guilt induction;
3. The buy-off;
4. Playing the victim role (needing a caretaker);
5. Suggesting that the child or perpetrating parent will experience loneliness and fear;
6. Parental promises to change themselves and/or conditions;
7. Parental overindulgence and permissiveness;
8. Telling “the truth” to the child about past events and;

## 9. Becoming the child's confidante.

### *Compliance and Testing of Effectiveness Stages*

After successful mood induction and sympathy creation, the child begins to demonstrate that he or she shares the attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and, ultimately, the behavior that the programmer/ brainwasher desires.

For example, the child “desires” to see the target parent less. The child ends conversations with the target parent on the telephone after only a brief period. The child uses some of the same gesticulation patterns as the programmer/brainwasher in regard to the “bad” parent. The child begins to speak to the target parent in the same tone and with the same content as the programming parent. An evaluator can determine whether a child has reached the compliance stage by asking the target parent what behaviors he or she observed in the child, then comparing these observations to the programmer's own attitudes toward the target parent. (This is only one procedure for determining the presence of the compliance stage.)

The sixth stage of programming and brainwashing involves testing the effectiveness of the programme. The programmer/ brainwasher develops “feedback assessment.” The brainwashing parent says to the child, after he/she returns from the target parent's house, “Well, how did things go at Dad's?”

This could be simply an inquiry of interest and concern. On the other hand, it could be a question intended to uncover any dilemmas, conflicts, bias, impasses, distortions, misunderstandings, and estrangement that may be developing within the other parent's home. Questions like, “Are you feeling like you would like to spend less time at your Dad's?” “Do you feel that your mother's friends are good for you?” “Given the fact that we could go to Disneyland for another week this summer, what would you like to do about the shared summer we have set up?” These questions not only test the effectiveness of the brainwashing but they also help to further implement the programme. Material and affectional rewards are often administered when the child issues the “proper” feedback or answer.

*Loyalty Measures*

The seventh stage is a component of the feedback assessment. The programmer and brainwasher often seek to determine how loyal the child is to their views, opinions, and attitudes.

Tests of loyalty include specifically determining how much time the child wants to spend at the other parent's home; what type and frequency of dialogue they have; how much and in what ways the child perceives the programmer as a victim; where the child would really like to live; who the child thinks is the better parent; who got the worst deal as the result of the divorce; whose lawyer is better, kinder, or more understanding; who has been there during more crises; and a whole host of other measures.

The use of language like *we*, *us*, *them*, and *ours* is an indicator of divided loyalty themes and desires. The father who said, "We (referring to himself, the stepmother, and the two children) have our new family. Why doesn't she just leave us alone?" reflects this exclusionary position. This perspective will often be translated into programme themes so that the child begins to speak in exclusionary terms also—"Mom bothers *us* too much."

*Escalation/Intensification/Generalization*

If the previous seven stages have been implemented, tested, and defined as successful by the programming/brainwashing parent, he or she may move to stage number eight.

This stage of broadening the programme to include additional areas of assault is quite common. If a parent's lifestyle is attacked successfully, then the attack may be broadened to include observations about the target parent's love and devotion to the child. It may also be broadened to include observations about a lack of commitment to education or to any other issue or domain related to parenting. The ultimate goal of the generalizing may be to assault all dimensions of the target parent's life.

If this is the case, one may need to work backward in the steps in order to determine what has transpired previously. It is unusual



for a child to have a globally negative assessment of a birth parent without significant input from a brainwashing parent.

Statements children will make when they have reached this stage include “I don’t like anything about going to my Dad’s”; “My mother is just a person I don’t want to be around at all”; “I don’t know exactly what I don’t like, I just don’t like being there”; “My Mom’s a loser, and that’s all there is to it”; “My Dad’s just got nothing to offer me, so why should I be made to go there?” “I don’t know why I don’t want to see my Mom, I just have a bad feeling about her, that’s all”; “The whole weekend stinks”; and “My father does not understand the needs of children.” Pursuing these global statements virtually always brings up contradictory information and feelings from the child.

#### *Maintenance of the Programme*

Once the previous eight features have been set in place to various degrees, it is important for the programmer/brainwasher to develop procedures that maintain the programme. If the programme and subsequent attitudes and behavior are (strongly) inculcated, it may only be necessary to brainwash with minor reminders and suggestions.

However, if a child, mental health professional, courts, and target parent attempt to react against a programming-and-brainwashing process, the maintenance aspect may have to take on a stronger and more articulated form.

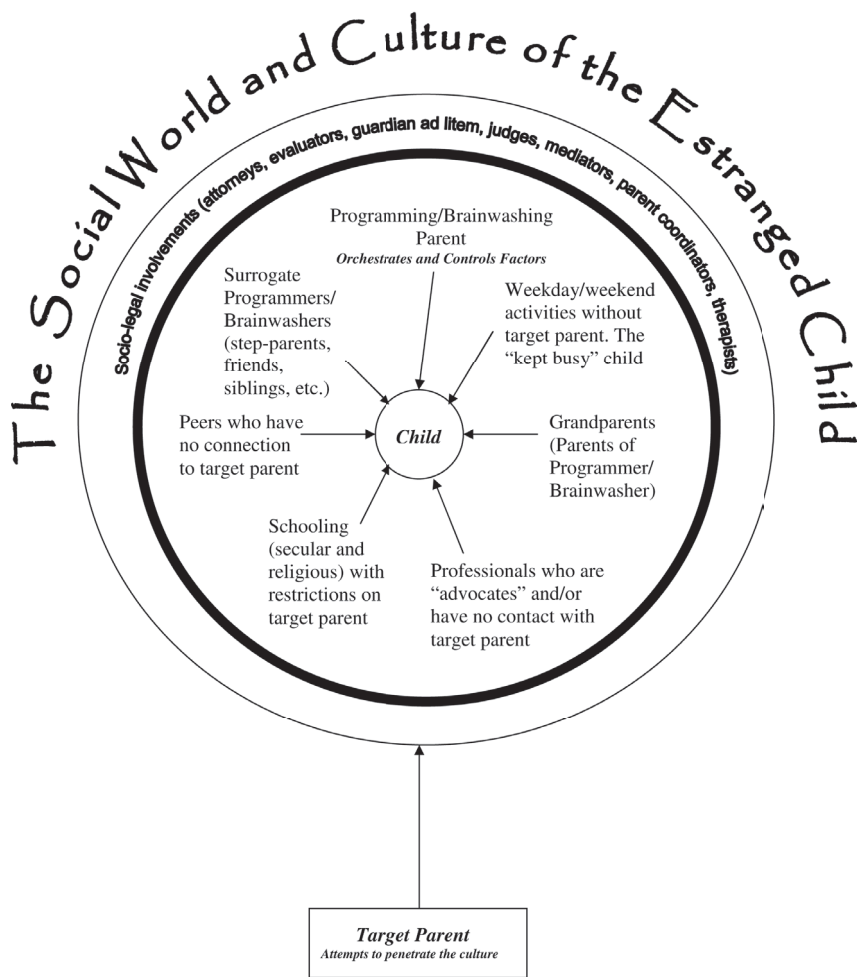
A mother said to her child (in response to a comment from the target father), “Yes, Dad was there when you were born; it’s true, but ask him how long he stayed in the hospital.” This not only uses the child as the middle ground or as the battleground, but it is also an example of an attempt to maintain the programme in the face of a counter-reaction from the target parent.

Maintenance may include simply reinforcing messages; developing new and associated themes; or creating additional reasons and techniques for limiting appreciation, affection, or contact in regard to the target parent.

If it has gone on long enough, the programming/brainwashing parent may have to issue few, if any further messages. To the untrained eye “it’s the child’s own views.” Judges and professionals often see children at the maintenance stage and incorrectly conclude that the children have formulated their own views. They can find no present external inputs from an adult figure; the damage has been done. Only careful social-historical research can uncover the process, the participants, and the results.

*Penetrating the World of the Estranged Child*

The child who experiences programming/brainwashing can become enmeshed in a culture. This ideological matrix has the power to become larger as the boundaries become increasingly difficult for the target parent to penetrate. The programming/brainwashing parent builds a strategic plan to incorporate more and more “players” who buy into the belief systems of the “good vs. bad parent.” Of course, the more social and professional associations a child has with people “who believe” the negative messages, the more they take on a life of their own. “Players” in the culture form a coherent system of beliefs, behaviors, and protection.



Penetrating the World of the Estranged Child