Child Abuse in the Hare Krishna Movement: 1971-1986

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E. Burke Rochford, Jr. with Jennifer Heinlein

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All these boys must be taken care of very nicely. They are the future hope. (Prabhupada letter, July, 1974, in Prabhupada 1992:795).

These kids were growing up and seriously leaving [ISKCON]. Not a little bit leaving. Not leaving and being favourable, still chanting and living outside. Nothing like that. They were leaving. And suddenly it was like 'What happened?' *And then it started to be revealed that the kids were molested.* (Long-time ISKCON teacher, interview 1990)1

Religion and child abuse, ' "perfect together" . . .and mutually attractive.' So concludes Donald Capps in his 1992 presidential address to members of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Mutually attractive in spite of the fact that religion has often vigorously defended the rights of children, including condemning child abuse and neglect (Capps 1992; Costin et al. 1996:47). Yet research on child abuse suggests that religious beliefs can foster, encourage, and justify the abuse of children (Capps 1992; Ellison and Sherkat 1993; Greven 1990; Jenkins 1996). Moreover, church structures may provide opportunities for abusive clergy (Krebs 1998; Shupe 1995).

This paper deals with how children in a religious organisation were abused physically, psychologically and sexually by people responsible for their care and well being. My purpose is to describe the problem as it existed within the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), more popularly known as the Hare Krishna movement. This discussion of child abuse within ISKCON is a historical one.2 I consider child abuse and neglect within the context of ISKCON's boarding schools-or *ashram*-based gurukulas- as they existed from 1972 until the mid-1980s. I develop a sociologically informed framework to understand how and why child abuse and neglect took place. Thus my attempt is not concerned with identifying or explaining the 'causes' of child abuse by focusing on the abuser per se. Rather attention is given to a variety of organisational factors that fostered, and indeed created opportunities for child abuse to occur within ISKCON's schools.

I argue that child abuse must be understood within the broader context of ISKCON's development as a religious organisation. The expansion of marriage and family life has defined ISKCON's transition from a communally-organised sectarian movement, to one characterised by a loosely organised congregation of financially independent householders and their children (Rochford 1995a, 1995b, 1997). As the number of marriages and children began to grow in the mid-1970s, householder life was redefined by ISKCON's renunciate elite as a symbol of spiritual weakness. As a stigmatised and politically marginal group, householders were left powerless to assert their parental authority over the lives of their children. Children were abused in part because they were not valued by leaders, and even, very often, by their own parents who accepted theological and other justifications offered by the leadership for remaining uninvolved in the lives of their children.

In recent years, child abuse has played an influential role in the ongoing politic surrounding the authority and legitimacy of ISKCON's leadership. For many ISKCON members, and devotees marginal to or outside of the organisation, child abuse stands as a powerful symbol of the failure of ISKCON's traditionalist, communal, hierarchical (that is, sectarian) form of social organisation. Child abuse has come to represent a fundamental betrayal of trust, not only for abused children and their parents but also for the membership more generally. (Also, see Rochford 1998a on leader misconduct and changing sources of religious authority within ISKCON.)

It is important to make clear from the start that no one knows how many of ISKCON's children were abused in the *gurukula.* It is also the case that ISKCON's *gurukulas* did not uniformly experience problems of child abuse. Finally, the virtual collapse of these institutions in North America and world-wide in favour of community day-schools, has all but eliminated the context of abuse considered here.3

Before turning to the substantive issues raised above, I first want to build a broader context for my discussion. One only has to pick up the local newspaper to realise that child abuse occurs all too frequently in the communities in which we live. Moreover, while we might assume that religious life would remain immune to the tragedy of child abuse, the facts suggest otherwise. Various religious groups-conventional and unconventional alike-have been shaken by allegations of child abuse, especially sexual misconduct on the part of church authorities (Jenkins 1996:50-52; Palmer 1997; Shupe 1995, 1998).

Defining the problem of child abuse

Reported cases of child abuse and neglect have been on the rise in the USA in recent years (Costin et al., 1996:136-7; Daro 1988).4 More than a million young people suffer abuse and mistreatment annually (Daro 1988:13; US Bureau of the Census 1997:218). The American Association for Protecting Children found that 1.7 million children suffered neglect or abuse in 1984, an increase of 156% since 1976, the first year this agency began collecting data on child abuse (Daro 1988:13). 5 In 1995, there were just under two million reported cases of child abuse involving 2.95 million children in the United States. After investigation by State child protective services, evidence suggests that 1 million children were abused or neglected (US Bureau of the Census 1997:219). Because many cases of child abuse go unreported, the actual number of abused children may well be substantially higher (Daro 1988:14-15).

Although overall rates remain high, the prevalence of various types of child abuse and neglect appear to be changing. Physical abuse has decreased while sexual abuse has expanded as a proportion of the total percentage of reported cases of child abuse (Costin et al. 1996:138). The latter trend may be changing however as the percentage of *substantiated* cases of child sexual abuse actually declined between 1990 and 1995 (US Bureau of the Census 1997:218). A majority of parents in the USA continue to use physical punishment, however, and the percentage of parents favouring corporal punishment declined only slightly during the 1970s and 1980s (Straus and Gelles 1986; Straus 1994:23-24).6

While child abuse is no doubt present within any community in the USA, it can also be found within a variety of religious groups and denominations-perhaps especially among those adhering to a Judaic-Christian tradition. Both the Old and the New Testaments recommend the use of physical punishment on the part of parents to help tame the will of a child (Ellison and Sherkat 1993; Greven 1991). Such intervention is mandated because all persons are believed to be born sinful (that is, displaying ego-centrism and selfishness). Parents thus face the responsibility of 'shaping the will' of their children to ensure they become right with God. Biblical passages giving legitimisation to physical punishment of

children are many. Among the most commonly cited are: 'He that spareth the rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chaseneth him betimes.' 'Withhold no correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shall beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell' (Proverbs 13:24 and 23:13-14, respectively, quoted in Bottoms et al. 1995:87). Accordingly, parents who subscribe to a doctrine of biblical literalism-such as conservative Protestants- are especially prone to using physical punishment as a form of discipline (Ellison and Sherkat 1993). Corporal punishment is viewed both as a necessary and legitimate means to combat the sinfulness of a child, while simultaneously re-enforcing parental (that is, patriarchal) authority.

Apart from encouraging and justifying corporal punishment, religious ideas have also been used by parents and religious institutions alike to 'cause emotional pain' by tormenting children through the excessive use of shame and fear (Capps 1992:7-9). The latter researcher concludes that 'religious ideas might be as abusive as physical punishment for children' (1992:8).[7]

When the average person reflects on child abuse and religion today he or she is likely to identify sexual misconduct by religious officials, particularly on the part of Catholic priests (Berry 1992; Jenkins 1996, 1998). This is largely because sexual misconduct by Catholic priests has received widespread media coverage in the USA and world-wide (for a review, see Jenkins 1996:53-76, 1998). Yet, child sexual abuse by clergy is hardly limited to Catholicism (Isely and Isely 1990). The most often quoted survey dealing with sexual problems among Protestant clergy found that 10 percent were involved in sexual misconduct of one sort or another, and that 'about two to three percent' were paedophiles (Rediger 1990:55, quoted in Jenkins 1996). This rate is equal to or perhaps even slightly higher than for Catholic priests (Jenkins 1996:50).[8]

While the sexual abuse of children is troubling, it becomes doubly so when religious figures are involved. After all, clergy are viewed in most religious traditions as God's ordained representatives, this comprising the very basis of their religious authority. In cases of clergy sexual abuse, religious authority is directly or indirectly used to exploit children, and to cover it up. Clergy who sexually abuse children are often able to escape disclosure, because their status as religious figures shields them from accusations of abuse (Barry 1992; Bottoms et al. 1995). Allegations made by a child concerning clergy sexual misconduct are likely to be ignored, or dismissed as fabrication by parents and other adults (see for example, Barry 1992). Clergy sexual abuse of children, in significant respects, parallels familial incest because it is 'often characterised by the same guilt, betrayal of trust, and shame . . .' (Bottoms et al. 1995:90; also see Blanchard 1991:239-240). It is thus hardly surprising to find allegations of clergy sexual misconduct being made by adults victimised as children.

As one might expect, sexual abuse by religious authorities is especially damaging to victims. One study concluded that abuse by religious authorities 'is as psychologically damaging, and perhaps *more* damaging, than even the violently physical abuses of parents whose religious beliefs led them to view their children as evil incarnate' (Bottoms et al. 1995:100). Children molested by religious authorities often suffer from depression, suicidal ideation and affective disorders (Bottoms et al. 1995:99). Moreover, it is not uncommon for those sexually abused by clergy to change religions, or more likely still, to repudiate religion altogether (Bottoms et al. 1995:99). Such an outcome appears even more likely when clergy sexual misconduct is hidden or otherwise covered-up by the church hierarchy. [9]

Child abuse within ISKCON schools

Unlike most instances of child abuse that occur in the home, ISKCON's children were abused and neglected within the confines of the movement's schools, by unrelated adults and older children acting on a teacher's behalf. During these formative years of ISKCON's development, the movement's children were educated in boarding schools, living more or less separate lives from their parents. It was here that some of ISKCON's children were physically, psychologically, and sexually abused.10

As Prabhupada saw the public school system in America as indoctrinating 'children in sense gratification and mental speculation, he referred to the schools as "slaughterhouses"'(J. Goswami 1984:1). By contrast, the *gurukula,* as he envisioned it, was specifically meant to train students in spiritual life, so that they could return back to Godhead. Given that the fundamental goal of the *gurukula* was to train students in sense control, children were removed from their family as early as age four or five years. Prabhupada believed little hope existed for a child to learn self-control within the nuclear family because of the 'ropes of affection' between parent and child. Children thus attended the *gurukula* on a year-round basis, with occasional vacations to visit with parents. They resided in *ashrams* with children of similar age and sex. *Ashrams* varied in size and the number of children they took in. In 1979 there were 6-8 students living in each of the boys *ashrams* in Los Angeles. Reports indicate that in other *gurukulas* the number of students residing in an *ashram* ranged as high as 20 or more. An adult teacher lived in the *ashram* and took responsibility for supervising the children, and tending to their day-to-day needs (Rochford 1997).

ISKCON's first formal *gurukula* was established in Dallas, Texas, in 1971. The Dallas *gurukula* remained the only school of its type within the movement, until 1976, when it was forced to close by state authorities. At the time of its closing the school had approximately 100 students, the majority of whom were between the ages of four and eight. With the impending demise of the Dallas school, *gurukulas* were established in Los Angeles and at New Vrindaban in 1975. In 1976, the Bhaktivedanta Swami International Gurukula began accepting adolescent boys as students in Vrindavan, India.11 Between 1975 and 1978 a total of 11 ISKCON schools opened in the North America. *Gurukulas* also started in France, Australia, South Africa, England and Sweden, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Regional schools appeared in Lake Huntington, New York, and central California (Bhaktivedanta Village), in 1980 and 1981 respectively (Das, M. 1998).

As the last two regionally based *ashram-gurukulas* closed in North America by 1986, ISKCON schools became almost exclusively day-schools. The only exception in North America today is the Vaisnava Academy for Girls located in Alachua, Florida, for high school aged women. The school has both day-students and students living full-time in the *ashram*.12 World-wide only the Vrindavan and Mayapur, India, schools remain *ashram*-only *gurukulas.* A sizeable majority of ISKCON's children in North America presently attend state-supported schools (Rochford 1997, forthcoming), a trend found in a number of other countries as well.

Reports by second generation youth, parents and educators alike suggest that a proportion of the children who attended the *gurukula* suffered psychological, physical and sexual abuse. Yet it remains unclear just how many children were abused directly, or otherwise witnessed their friends and classmates being abused. The latter represents a form of psychological abuse in its own right.

Lacking reliable quantitative findings, it becomes extremely difficult to determine with any degree of precision what the actual incidence of child abuse was within ISKCON's *gurukulas.* Unfortunately, we are

left to estimates of uncertain quality. Over the years any number of estimates have been offered ranging from 20% of all students who attended an *ashram-gurukula* suffering some form of abuse, to as many as 75% of the boys enrolled at the Vrindavan, India, *gurukula* having been sexually molested during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Whatever the actual incidence of child abuse, it remains clear that abuse directly and indirectly influenced the lives of a sizeable number of children. Yet, child abuse did not occur uniformly, either across *gurukulas,* or, very often, even within the same school. As one long-time teacher concluded,

child abuse . . . wasn't all-pervasive. It wasn't in all *gurukulas.* It didn't affect all children. But it was in enough schools and affected enough children and it went on for enough time . . . (Interview 1990)13

Abuse and neglect within the *gurukula* took a variety of forms. The following statements from young adults and former *gurukula* students indicate the kinds of abuse that occurred.

. . . I remember dark closets filled with flying dates (large three inch, flying cockroaches) and such, while beatings and 'no *prasadam*' for dinner became everyday affairs. (Devi Dasi, K. 1990:1)

Seattle was hell because I was only six years old, my mom lived in Hawaii and I had always been a very shy mommy's girl. The movement was in its earlier stages and the devotees were fanatical-beyond fanatical. I mean, they would give us a bowl of hot milk at night, so I would, of course, pee in my bed. Then as punishment they would spank me very hard and make me wear the contaminated panties on my head. In general, at that time, because I was so young, I was so spaced out and confused. I would cry. . .for my mom, but that wasn't allowed, so I would say I was crying in devotional ecstasy. I really regret Seattle because I had a dire need for my mother's warmth and reassurance at that time in my life. (Second Generation Survey 1992)

The teacher use to say, 'Oh, you don't know when you are going to die. You could die in your sleep.' And one day I was really bad and one of my teachers said, 'Who knows you might die tonight. Krishna might be punishing you. He might be taking away your life . . .' And from that night on I use to pray every night, 'Krishna please don't kill me. I promise I will be a good girl tomorrow. Please let me get fixed up enough so I can go back to Godhead. Don't take me in my sleep.' And for years I had insomnia. I was too afraid to go back to sleep. (Interview 1991)14

Two young men recount their days as students in the Vrindavan, India, *gurukula* during the early 1980s.

X: I wasn't afraid of being sexually molested. I don't think I was afraid of being mentally abused either. I was definitely afraid of being physically abused . . . Sexual molestation, all of us, man, we'd just take it, you know. . . That's what we all felt. We didn't even consider it abuse back then.
XX: Yeah, that was just normal. . .The ironic thing about that, though, is probably the mental thing [abuse] was probably the longest lasting.
X: There was no way to escape that. (Group Interview 1993)

As word of child abuse within the *gurukula* came to the attention of ISKCON authorities, some efforts were made to intervene. Yet this very intervention sometimes resulted in new strategies of coercive abuse. Most significant was enlisting older boys in the Vrindavan *gurukula* to physically abuse younger students who were deemed troublesome and unruly by teachers.

X: The other thing was that older boys acting in the capacity of monitors were used to abuse the younger students. Some started to realise that 'Hey, teachers can't be beating kids.' They did it in a new way.
EBR: With the monitors.
X: Yeah. Which was the older boys beating the younger boys, and I was one of the older ones . . .and they [teachers] would call me in on occasion and I would just have to knock the living s--- [out of a younger student] . . . I'd be sitting there going 'Man, I love you. I don't want to be doing this. . .' [I]t's like,' what are you gonna do? If I don't do it to you, they're gonna do it to me.'
XX: That's another kind of mental abuse. (Group Interview, 1993)

While a porportion of ISKCON's children were themselves abused, others experienced the abuse as they watched their friends and classmates being mistreated by teachers and others responsible for their care.

If the teachers treated one of our friends bad then we all felt bad. I remember there was one teacher that use to grab one of us by the ears and bang us against the wall. And we all stood there and watched and felt really bad. . . She [the teacher] was doing it to all of us. (Interview 1992)

Maybe what [name of *ashram* teacher] was doing to [name of student] was hurting others [students] more than him. For [name of student] it was an everyday thing. I was standing right next to [him] and I was crying. I was freaked out. I was afraid I was gonna be next because I knew he was gettin' it for no reason. If he could get it for no reason so could I. (Group interview 1993)

In the school in Vrindavan, India, abusive treatment became so commonplace that students sought to routinise their mistreatment as a protective strategy.

It was like boot camp, but it wasn't temporary. You became part of a unit. Boot camp was a full-time thing for us. They're just constantly knocking you down, knocking you down. . . lower, lower, lower. What are they gonna do? Beat me again? Go ahead. (Laughter). Big deal! (Group interview 1993)

But beyond the question of young people being abused by adults working in the *gurukula* 15 was the general environment of neglect that existed. Without parents present, many felt abandoned, or as one second generation youth remarked, 'We were just unwanted.' Many of the young people interviewed described the atmosphere in the *gurukula* as one lacking in love and compassion. They felt invisible, abandoned and unworthy of love and affection from both their parents and adult caregivers.16

Accounting for child abuse
In this section, I explore a number of factors that combined to create a context conducive to child abuse within the *gurukula* during the 1970s and 1980s. The first of these is somewhat different from the others because it defines the broader milieu in which parents and children lived within ISKCON's communities. Put simply, marriage and family life came to symbolise spiritual failure, and children a sexual product of that failure. Following this discussion, I then consider three specific factors which fostered child abuse and neglect: (1) *Sankirtan* and competing demands on parents; (2) Lack of institutional support for the *gurukula;* and, (3) Exclusion of parents from the *gurukula* and, thereby, from the everyday lives of their children.17 I end this section by considering how some children were able to escape abuse.

Attitudes Toward Marriage, Family Life, and Children
ISKCON scholar and leader Ravindra Svarupa dasa argues that marriage and family life were viewed

favourably during ISKCON's early days. As he states, 'When I joined ISKCON [1971] it was assumed that everyone would become married, and indeed devotees were urged to do so' (1994:9). But this view changed after Prabhupada became increasingly discouraged by the marital problems encountered by his disciples. In a 1972 letter he wrote 'I am so much disgusted with this troublesome business of marriage, because nearly every day I receive some complaint from husband or wife. . .so henceforth I am not sanctioning any more marriages . . .' (Prabhupada 1992:866).18 As Prabhupada withdrew from 'the troublesome business of marriage,' local Temple Presidents and other ISKCON authorities (that is, regional secretaries, GBC representatives) assumed the responsibility for arranging marriages and otherwise dealing with the problems and needs of householders. The result was married life underwent a fundamental transformation in meaning and value within ISKCON.

Marriage came to represent a sign of spiritual weakness, a concession for those too weak to control their sexual desires. Such a view applied differently to men and women however. The ideal for a man was to maintain a life of renunciation, avoiding marriage if at all possible. Spiritual and material fulfilment for women by contrast was defined in terms of marriage and family life (Rochford 1997). Given the prevalence of these ideas, women became threats to a man's spiritual advancement.

The changed atmosphere surrounding marriage and family life turned contentious by the mid-1970s as renunciate leaders undertook a preaching campaign against householder life and women. As Ravindra Svarupa dasa suggests, this brought about growing conflict and factionalism within ISKCON.

Some of these *sannyasis* embarked on preaching campaigns against householders and even more so against women, whose life in the movement at this time became extremely trying. Feelings grew so heated that in 1976, a clash between householder temple presidents in North America and a powerful association of peripatetic *sannyasis* and *brahmacaris* escalated into a conflict so major that Srila Prabhupada called it a 'fratricidal war' (1994:9).

Despite the ongoing denigration of marriage and family life and the corresponding loss of status accorded householders, most devotees ultimately married. By 1980, there appears to have been about an equal number of married and unmarried devotees residing within ISKCON's North American communities. About one-quarter had children (Rochford 1997). Conversely, a survey in 1991-92 (N=268) revealed that a sizeable majority of ISKCON's North American membership were married, or previously married. Only 15% had never been married. Family life also expanded with a substantial majority (70%) of those surveyed in 1991-92 having one or more children.19 By the onset of the 1990s, ISKCON had become a householder's movement in North America (Rochford 1997), and increasingly world-wide (Rochford 1995b).

Even with the rapid expansion of marriage and family life, anti-householder attitudes changed little organisationally.20 Householder life remained a 'dark-well' spiritually. Many parents who accepted the leadership's ideas about marriage and family sought to counteract their lowly status by placing their commitment to ISKCON and Krishna Consciousness above their family obligations. This presented a burden of considerable proportions for both parents and their children. One second generation woman suggests just how difficult this proved to be for her own mother.

But sometimes I would look at her and I could see her being torn apart inside. I could see how she yearned to be a mother once again; sewing by the fire, cooking our dinners, and helping us with our

hard days at school, and at the same time trying her hardest to please the Guru and the community by showing her *detachment to her family*. (My emphasis; Devi Dasi, K. 1990:14)

As householder life became disparaged children too were defined and redefined in ways that undermined their status, and ultimately the care they received within the *gurukula.* Up until the early 1980s, children born within ISKCON were commonly portrayed as being spiritually pure. After all, it was believed that their souls had progressed spiritually to the point where they had gained the good fortune of taking birth in a devotee family. Yet this view changed by the mid-1980s as some leaders complained that ISKCON's children were turning out to be little more than 'karmis' (that is, non-religious outsiders), and, therefore, *gurukula* had failed in its mission to produce spiritually advanced children. Both of these frameworks, I want to argue, became justifications used by the leadership to dismiss the gurukula, the children, and their responsibility toward both.21

As two long-time ISKCON teachers recount,

They [leadership] put a lot of energy into making new devotees from outside the community. But you didn't have to put any energy into making children into devotees, or so they thought . . . And I think there was a lot of misconception about how Prabhupada thought the children [were] conceived. They thought that if the children were conceived properly then it was a cinch. And that makes no sense at all. I compare it to going through a store and buying good seeds and then you don't plant them, you don't water them, you just throw them around . . . So many things that we assumed, that we never sat down and analysed. We just took it for granted; That the children were born into the movement, and particularly if they were conceived properly of chanting five hours of Hare Krishna. Does that make sense? It never made sense to me. I always assumed that we would train the children, that we could never take their Krishna Consciousness, or their character, or anything for granted. (Interview 1990)

And everyone just thought that you send them away to the *gurukula* and when they came back they were going to be like Prahlada Maharaja [a spiritually-realised child devotee of Krishna]. They were going to be chanting *japa.* They were going to be shaved-up. They were going to be distributing books. They were going to be nice little chaste wives, rolling *chapatis.* (Interview 1997)

Yet, by the mid-1980s, as the children were growing into teenagers, understandings of the second generation and the *gurukula* began to change. To the surprise of many leaders and parents alike, the children raised in the *gurukula* were less than pure spiritually. Few were committed to a life of renunciation and full-time involvement in ISKCON (Rochford forthcoming). As a result, some leaders openly challenged the need for the *gurukula* altogether. Economic decline, as I discuss below, made this view all the more attractive to some leaders.

But they [the leaders] did not go back and become introspective and say 'Well, we should have been taking care of these things. Let's get it together now. We made a mistake, whether an honest mistake or not. Let's now provide an excellent education for the children. Let's rebuild the community's faith in ISKCON.' They didn't do that. They took (laugh) the opposite track. Instead of saying 'the kids are going to turn out good no matter what,' now they were saying 'things are going to turn out bad no matter what you do.' The leaders' position was, 'No, we did everything right. We did what Prabhupada said. We had *ashrams.* We had these nice schools. These wonderful schools. And everything went bad anyway. So why should we put a lot of energy into it [the *gurukula*]. We're just kidding ourselves. Right.' (Interview, ISKCON teacher 1990)

But these two very different frameworks for constructing ISKCON's children functionally served the same purpose. In the first instance leaders saw no reason to invest resources in the *gurukula* because it couldn't fail, given the elevated spiritual status of the children. The second framework, precisely because it emphasised failure, rather than success, likewise rejected the need to maintain a viable system of education. As I argue in the next section, however, the *gurukula* did serve a crucial function for ISKCON, one that ultimately had little to do with educating and socialising ISKCON's next generation.

Sankirtan and the Gurukula

Although ISKCON's *sannyasi* leadership believed that a loss in standing would discourage marriage, as we have seen, the solid majority of ISKCON's membership married, and most had children. The growth of marriage and family represented a significant threat to *sankirtan,* and thereby to ISKCON itself.22 *Sankirtan* served ISKCON's mission in two respects. First, it represented the principle means by which the movement proselytised its Krishna conscious beliefs. In fact, Prabhupada continually emphasised that book distribution represented *the* means to spread Krishna Consciousness in America and world-wide. Secondly, and of equal importance, *sankirtan* supported ISKCON's communities financially. Without a work force of dedicated *sankirtan* devotees, ISKCON's missionary goals and financial stability were placed in jeopardy. The solution rested with the *gurukula* because it relieved parents of the burdens of childcare, thus affording them the opportunity to work full-time *sankirtan.* Put differently, the *gurukula* allowed ISKCON's leaders to reclaim householders for *sankirtan,* a move that only grew in importance as ISKCON's North American communities faced deepening economic decline by the late 1970s (Rochford 1985, 1995c). As one parent described,

We got the children, the bothersome children from the leader's perspective, we got them out of the way by putting them in the *gurukula.* Now the adults could do some work. Go out on *sankirtan.* This was a very present issue, freeing up the parents. (Interview 1990)

To a leadership concerned primarily with distributing Prabhupada's books and raising funds, the *gurukula* communalised child care, thus freeing parents to work on behalf of ISKCON and its mission. Not surprisingly, many of the young people who attended the *gurukula* during this period saw ISKCON's schools in precisely these terms.

I did feel that my mom used the *gurukula* as a convenience for not keeping me around. My mother later told me her authorities strongly encouraged her to put us there so we would not hinder her *sankirtan* service. (Second Generation Survey 1992)

Findings from my 1992-93 Second Generation Survey in North America make this point more forcefully. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of those surveyed (N=87) agreed with the statement, 'The *ashram gurukula* primarily served the interests of parents and ISKCON, rather than the spiritual and academic needs of children.' One quarter of those surveyed (26%) agreed strongly with the statement.

Freeing parents for *sankirtan* was facilitated by enrolling children in the *gurukula* as early as age three or four, although the majority enrolled at age five. Some ISKCON communities communalised children even earlier, establishing day-care centres for infants and toddlers. One such community was ISKCON's New Vrindaban community, in West Virginia.

Kirtanananda [New Vrindaban's former guru and leader] was very successful because he had a nursery from day one. For those kids born at New Vrindaban, he took the kids and communalised them. They got so much work out of the people in that community. (Interview 1990)

A second generation woman who grew up at New Vrindaban recalls:

[S]oon after Kapila was born . . . the *Guru* of the farm asked her [mother] to go travel and preach in airports, she sadly said 'yes.' Kapila was only three months old when she left him to be brought up by some other lady who lived on the farm. For months she cried at night wondering if he was okay and yet her body could hardly stand any more emotional work after standing nearly twelve hours that day, . . . collecting donations from strangers. (Devi Dasi, K. 1990:14)

An indication of the leadership's motivation in providing child care at New Vrindaban is suggested by a saying used in the community to refer to expectant mothers; 'Dump the load and hit the road.' And to 'hit the road' meant returning to full-time *sankirtan.* While leaders in other ISKCON communities were clearly more subtle and humanistic in their approach, they were no less anxious to return mothers to full-time *sankirtan,* or other work on behalf of the community. For the fact was, women were among the very best *sankirtan* workers in the movement.

Sankirtan represented the foundation of ISKCON's sectarian world, and the movement's *sannyasi* elite took measures to assure that it was protected against the presumed deleterious effects associated with the expansion of marriage and family life. While initially established to spiritually educate ISKCON's children, the *gurukula* ultimately served the interests of ISKCON's missionary activity, and the need to raise money in support of the movement's communal way of life. One long-time teacher from this era underscores the primary interest of ISKCON's *sannyasi* leadership.

And you had to have a vision for the future to even understand why you were doing this [the *gurukula*]. For the teachers this might have been there but for the administration of ISKCON, what it means is that you are paying for a day-care centre. These kids cause trouble wherever they are . . . You are talking about *sannyasis* who are thinking like, 'Get these kids out of here. And look how much money I am having to pay to get these kids out of here. And look at how many devotees have to be there [in the *gurukula*] to get these kids out of the way.' That was the whole psyche surrounding how the school was put together. (Interview 1997)

The importance placed on *sankirtan* by ISKCON's leadership meant that the significance of the *gurukula* rested on its childcare function, rather than as an educational institution. Moreover, as parents faced increasing pressures to engage in *sankirtan* many had little ability to commit time to the needs of their children. Children and family life threatened ISKCON's purpose as a missionary movement, but each also threatened the financial base upon which the authority of the leadership rested.

Lack of Institutional Support for Gurukula

Given the leadership's view of *gurukula* and its purposes, it failed to provide the support necessary to maintain an educational institution. Throughout its existence the *gurukula* operated with insufficient staffing, funding and oversight. I want to suggest now that in failing to provide the resources and management necessary to maintain the *gurukula,* it became an institution defined by neglect, isolation

and marginalisation. Because of these qualities, the *gurukula* also became a context in which ISKCON's children became subject to abuse.

From the inception of the gurukula system in Dallas it faced a shortage of trained and qualified staff to serve as academic and ashram teachers. In American culture we have a saying, 'Those who can't do otherwise, teach.' ISKCON, during the 1970s and 1980s, had its equivalent, 'Those who can't do *sankirtan,* work in the *gurukula*.' As a *gurukula* teacher of some twenty years commented, 'The *gurukula* was the dumping ground as far as getting staff went. When devotees couldn't do other things like going on *sankirtan* they were sent to work in the *gurukula*.' The result was that outside of a limited number of professional academic teachers, ISKCON's schools were staffed by devotees untrained and generally ill-prepared to take on the demands of working with children. Moreover, because there was little or no status attached to working in the *gurukula,* many devotees had little or no desire to be there. Success at *sankirtan* brought individual recognition within the devotee community, working with children, invisibility and a loss of status.[23] As one ISKCON parent commented.

I was concerned that the teachers were often selected based on their inability to do *sankirtan,* rather than because they loved children and education. As far as I could see, there were no mandatory classes in childhood development for teachers or staff either. How could anyone expect those in charge to know what was normal or abnormal behaviours and how it should be dealt with? (Anonymous a 1996)

As a former *gurukula* teacher and Headmaster makes clear, it was assumed that any devotee who was steady in his or her spiritual practice was qualified to work in the *gurukula.* Yet as he further explains, few were able to stand up to the everyday demands of working with children.

There were very few qualified or experienced teachers in the early *Gurukula* at Dallas . . . At that time in ISKCON in general there was a hubris about individual qualification. It was thought that a devotee who was chanting his rounds was empowered to do anything and that he did not need any special training. The task of dealing with a hundred children or so from morning to night on tough schedule through *mangal arati* to bedtime was too much for most of them. (Brzezinski 1997)

As the above remarks make clear, working in the *gurukula* was stressful, especially for an untrained staff lacking sufficient interest in children. This was all the more so in instances where a single *ashram* teacher was responsible for the care of 20 or more children. These conditions contributed directly to acts of child abuse by teachers. As one teacher from this era observes, 'There may have been some [teachers involved in abusing children] who were actually diabolical. But in most cases it was a lack of expertise, lack of training, lack of assistance, lack of knowing who to go to.' And, as the former Headmaster of one school, described,

Therefore, we have someone like [name of *ashram* teacher] who is put into a situation in which he does not belong. It is so stressful. So therefore a kid gets out of line-what to speak of his other transgressions-and he pushes him hard and the kid falls on the floor and breaks his arm. And that's what happened. (Interview 1997)

But while finding people capable of working in the *gurukula* was an ongoing problem, retaining them represented another. Many second generation youth tell of having as many as 15, 20, or more, *ashram*-teachers during their time in the *gurukula.* Eight in ten (82%) of the second generation youth surveyed in

1991-92 agree that, 'The major reason for the demise of the *ashram*-based *gurukulas* was the lack of qualified teachers.' The former Headmaster quoted above suggests one reason why.

At one point they sent all the kids from [region of the country] to our school in Lake Huntington. So now we have this big regional school. Then at one point [*guru* from that region] decides that he needs the *ashram* teacher [for the oldest boys] to do some other service . . . So I call him [*guru*] and say, 'Listen there is no one but me. I am the Headmaster. I'm already doing this and that. Now I am going to have to do the *ashram*. There is nobody here that can do it.' He just said, 'Well you are just going to have to get somebody. Good-bye.' Pull the man out so now we have 16 older boys who don't have a teacher. What to do? (Interview 1997)

The effect of an ever-changing complement of *gurukula* teachers and staff meant that the children were unable to build and sustain meaningful and perhaps loving relationships with their adult caregivers. This very fact only increased the likelihood that children might be neglected and/or abused.24

The question of 'What to do?' only intensified as ISKCON in North America faced growing economic decline. By 1982, the level of ISKCON's book distribution in North America was less than half its 1978 peak (Rochford 1985, 1995c). The corresponding drop in *sankirtan* revenues had a devastating effect on ISKCON's communities. It also had a dramatic impact on the *gurukula,* which, even in the best of economic times, faced hardship. As the Headmaster of one school made clear, 'Even at the peak of our movement's resources . . . the *gurukula* was getting barely anything. Anything. And so as soon as there was less to go around it barely got anything at all' (interview, 1997). Below he describes the financial difficulties encountered by the Lake Huntington *gurukula* just prior to its closing in 1986.

More difficult was our financial situation. And what happened. When New York was broken up, Lake Huntington, Long Island, New Jersey, and Manhattan each of these areas was assigned a certain number of collectors, . . . *sankirtan* devotees. Four months after the break-up I was shifted from Long Island to Lake Huntington and I took over the project. Within a few months I became the Headmaster. We had eight *sankirtan* devotees. We were struggling but were making it. But the zone was collapsing [financially]. So the new GBC man . . . came in and took all the *sankirtan* devotees and centralised it. The plan was to just give money to the different temples in the zone. We lost our eight *sankirtan* devotees and we were promised $8 000 a month, which we got for one month. They reduced and reduced the amount until we got $2 100 to pay the mortgage. When we asked what to do they said take more students [thereby gaining more tuitions]. And that's what we did. Until finally it dawned on us that we were killing our teachers and cheating our students. We can't run a school like this. That was the environment we were actually functioning in. 25 (Interview1997)

A final issue here has to do with the apparent lack of oversight the *gurukula* received by ISKCON leaders. While it is true that there was a Minister of Education whose responsibility was to provide guidance and leadership for ISKCON's schools, it appears, nonetheless, that the *gurukula* failed to gain the attention and supervision required. And, without it, the likelihood of child neglect and abuse grew. As one teacher described, the leadership simply placed too little importance on the *gurukula.*

I have come to the conclusion that they [the leadership] aren't going to do anything; at all, not anything. They should have done something twenty years ago, or fifteen years ago. They had plenty of opportunity. They had money. They had man-power. They had Srila Prabhupada right there behind

them. Why didn't they take it? I can tell you why they didn't do it. They didn't think it was important. Obviously. (Interview, 1990)

One indication of the leaders' disinterest can be seen in the way ISKCON's renunciate leaders responded when parents complained about the mistreatment of children in the *gurukula.* As a second generation youth recounts:

When I was five and a half years old, I'd been in gurukula (Dallas) since its insemination (about three years). My dad had gone to Dallas (against the wishes of his temple authority who only cared about my dad's money-making ability on *sankirtan*) after discovering bruises all over my body on a *Rathayatra* [festival] visit. After much discussion with the school authority he found that he could not get them to change the policy of daily beatings. He removed me from the school. Very disillusioned he nearly left ISKCON. On hearing that Prabhupada would be in LA, we went there. When Prabhupada saw me he asked why I was not in the *gurukula.* My father told him that he'd removed me because of the daily beatings. Prabhupada told him that I belonged in *gurukula* and that if my dad had a problem with the treatment he should work to resolve it . . . [Prabhupada] did nothing to resolve the situation. Instead of going himself or sending one of his top people to resolve the problems he sent my dad who had never had any power. Needless to say when my dad returned to Dallas nobody listened to him. If a problem arose at some temple or other, Prabhupada was more than willing to go or send someone effective to handle the situation, but for the kids he sent my dad who was effective at getting people to give him money. (Anonymous b 1996) (See footnote 26 for further discussion of Prabhupada's response to allegations of child abuse.)

After Prabhupada's death, the response of the newly appointed *gurus* was apparently much the same.

Kutila [woman gurukula teacher] was furious when she saw the cuts and beating marks and she ran to tell Bhaktipada who coolly said, 'Don't complain, do something about it, if you think you can do any better.' (Devi Dasi, K. 1990:1)

Initially the leadership's disinterest in the gurukula stemmed from an overriding concern with maintaining and indeed expanding *sankirtan.* Yet with Prabhupada's death in November, 1977, however, ISKCON faced years of succession problems that preoccupied the movement as a whole. As ISKCON's newly appointed *gurus* struggled to establish their own religious and political authority, and attract disciples, householders and their children lost further relevance organisationally (Rochford 1995a). This became all the more so in the early 1980s as book distribution virtually collapsed in North America, and parents were pushed outside of ISKCON's communities to find employment in support of themselves and their families (see Rochford 1997). (For a treatment of ISKCON's succession problems, see Rochford 1985: 221-55, 1998a. On how acceptance or rejection of ISKCON leaders' authority influences types and levels of ISKCON involvement, see Rochford 1995a.)

Exclusion of Parents from the Gurukula

One potential safeguard against child abuse rested with parental involvement and oversight of the *gurukula.* If children were being abused and neglected there is reason to believe that involved parents might well have become aware and taken corrective actions. Yet in most instances this did not happen, and when it did, parental concerns were often ignored or dismissed, as we saw in the previous section. The fact was parents were actively discouraged from becoming involved in the *gurukula,* and, thereby, from the day-to-day lives of their children.

Prabhupada himself discouraged parent involvement in the *gurukula.* He reasoned that the best interests of ISKCON's children were served by communalising them within the context of the *gurukula.* Away from parental influence, a child would more readily take to a life of spiritual practice and renunciation. As Prabhupada stated in a 1973 letter, 'Regarding *gurukula,* it is not required that parents live there with their children. We can take care of children, but not the parents' (1992:794). While relinquishing their children to the *gurukula* proved difficult for many parents, they took solace in the knowledge that their children were advancing spiritually.

The idea that parents represented a threat to the spiritual lives of children was widely promoted throughout ISKCON, and was accepted by many devotee parents. As we have seen, ISKCON's leadership promoted this idea as a means to reclaim parents for *sankirtan.* Accepting the 'ideological work' (Berger 1981; Rochford 1985:191-220) of the leadership, many parents maintained minimal contact with their children. In fact, it appears that in some cases parents essentially abandoned their children to the *gurukula.* Teachers, too, considered parents as threats to the spiritual well-being of their children. In the words of one teacher:

There is a problem with parents. The experience that we have had in *gurukula* is that much of the training that you are trying to give the child is lost when the child is with the parents. Because the parent is not maintaining the same standards, or doesn't have the same abilities, whatever it is . . . And you knew as a teacher that when you sent a kid home for three and a half weeks [for vacation] you knew you were going to get a basket case when they came back. (Interview 1997)

As this teacher further suggests, this way of thinking influenced strongly how those working in the *gurukula* treated parents.

And so maybe unfortunately, in retrospect, the wrong attitude was conveyed about parents. The parents are a problem; keep the parents away, all of that. (Interview 1997)

The larger consequence of these ideas was the virtual exclusion of parents from the *gurukula.* Parental involvement with their children was largely unwelcome. Moreover, when children did return to their parents' home community for school vacations, these visits very often afforded limited opportunities for parent and child to spend time together. As one mother and teacher explained:

You have to remember that parents didn't have houses. They didn't have their own place. We never had a house . . . So when you say a kid went home, that's a euphemism. He went to the temple. His mother had service that she was doing all along. His father had service that he was doing all along. And now all of a sudden this kid is there. So now what does he do? He hangs around the temple. He gets stepped on by people as they are coming up the stairs [into the temple] . . . And he wants his mother's attention when she is cooking for the deities. The fact is no one took care of the kids . . . The kid did whatever he did. And the parents just kept on doing whatever it was they were doing. (Interview 1997)

A second generation devotee recounts her vacations from school and the burden these visits placed on her and other family members.

When I got older, I started to spend my vacations with my *Mata.* But vacation time for me was not vacation time for her. For Kapila [her brother] and I, she would get a motel room every night but her service to the temple still came first. Only after she had chanted all of her rounds without interruption and she had collected at least three hundred dollars did Kapila and I get to do anything. We usually

would sit for six hours in the cold van parked outside a shopping mall and wait for her. Finally she would finish, and even though her back was aching and her shoulders were heavy from carrying a ninety pound bag of books all day, she somehow would find the energy to sneak us into a nearby pool and then take us to ice cream. But most of the time we didn't see how tired she really was and so, whining and complaining about how little attention we got, we sometimes drove her to tears. (Devi Dasi, K. 1990:12)

The *gurukulas* in India undertook what can only be described as extreme efforts to further isolate children from their parents. In the Vrindavan *gurukula* it appears that the administration of the school monitored, and sometimes censured, letters written by students to their parents. When a student attempted to write his parents about the negligent and abusive conditions found at the school, he was reprimanded and told to re-write his letter.

X: I used to write letters to my mom, during the rough times, saying, 'Get me out of here.' And he [school administrator] read them and would tear'em up and make me write new ones.
XX: He did that to me too. (Group Interview, 1993)

In other cases, students in the Vrindavan *gurukula* avoided writing to their parents about the conditions found at the school because they assumed their letters would be read by the administration, or, as in the case below, they feared their parents would reject allegations of abuse. As one mother explained.

My son complains bitterly about what went on in Vrindavan. Of course I have asked him a million times why he didn't tell me what was going on. Because I used to go and visit him every year. And he wouldn't say anything to me. He would just give me his shopping list. When I asked him in retrospect why didn't you tell me he just said, 'Because you wouldn't believe me.' . . . He assumed I wouldn't believe him. And he assumed his letters would be censured. And so he never wrote anything that would cause him to be censured. (Interview 1997)27

In still other instances the administration of the school in Vrindavan apparently sought to hide the abuse taking place there during the early 1980s.

He [Headmaster] knowingly covered-up . . . There are two or three incidents that I can think of where I was beaten or something happened to me. He would take me into his room and he'd lock me in there for like a day with him and he was like constantly preaching to me and so finally I just went 'Okay! I won't say anything to anybody. It didn't happen!' And he would let me out of the room. (Interview 1993)28

On final analysis it seems clear that the *gurukula* became an institution unto itself, in Goffman's (1961) terms, a 'total institution.' Within the *gurukula* children remained largely separate from the day-to-day lives of their parents, and, very often, from ISKCON community life more generally. From an institution meant to train and educate, the *gurukula* instead became the functional equivalent of an orphanage. As one teacher from this period remarked.

The whole scenario set up an orphanage . . . Even though you have kids with parents. Because we didn't allow the parents to become part of their children's lives. (Interview 1997)

Avoiding Child Abuse: Resources and Victimisation
Although my focus thus far has sought to understand a number of factors and processes that contributed to child abuse within ISKCON's schools, I now want to consider why some young people did

not experience abuse and neglect. As I have already suggested, a proportion of the students who attended the *gurukula* during the 1970s and 1980s escaped being victims of child abuse. This happened despite the fact that in some cases their classmates were targeted for abuse, while they were spared.

Perhaps the most obvious factor in whether a child was abused or not, related to the school environment itself. It seems that some *gurukulas* experienced far less child abuse, while others were defined by neglect and abuse. To a significant degree, where a student was sent to *gurukula* had a profound influence on whether he or she became targets of abuse. Perhaps the most vivid example is provided by the schools in India, where abuse and neglect were, by all reports, commonplace. Since only adolescent boys were sent to the schools in India they faced far more abuse than their female counterparts. In the United States several of ISKCON's schools also experienced relatively high levels of child abuse (for example, Dallas, Seattle, New Vrindaban), whereas others experienced considerably less (for example, Bhaktivedanta Village, California; New Talavan, Mississippi). It appears also that child abuse was far less prevalent in Europe and Australia than in either India or North America.

But what explains these differences? I think several things. First some schools had a more stable *gurukula* staff-both academic and *ashram* teachers, as well as the school's administration. While teachers in these schools may have been more devoted to working in the *gurukula,* they also were able to establish enduring and caring relationships with the children they worked with. Two former *gurukula* students suggest why a particular school proved especially positive for them in ways that highlight the role of the teacher.

It was M[other] Kutila who changed our lives and who let us know that someone could love us; that devotees *did* love one another. I swear for the first week I thought I was a princess. We were never hit any more, we had all new clothes, our own bags, filled with our own soap, brushes and hot water showers. It was then that I knew I had a mother and father, they were Kutila and Kuladri (her husband). (Author's emphasis; Devi Dasi, K. 1990:1).

One of the high points of my life in *gurukula* was because the teacher, (name), took us in as his sons (original Vedic standard) and treated us like adults. We had incredible camaraderie as well as growth-including fitness, mental strength, creativity and Krishna Consciousness. (Second Generation Survey 1992-93)

A second factor that played an especially important role in limiting the possibility of abuse had to do with the level of parental involvement in the *gurukula.* While the leadership and the *gurukula* staff each pressured against parental involvement, some parents found ways to remain involved nonetheless. In some cases this was made easier as parents resided in the same community as their child/children's *gurukula.* In other cases parents wrote letters, made phone calls, and visited their child or children on a regular basis.

The sad irony is that parents who accepted the ideological justifications offered by the leadership and chose to remain 'detached' and minimally involved in the lives of their children, effectively left them vulnerable to neglect and abuse. Simply put, children without involved parents became ready victims for abusers. As one second generation devotee concluded.

Usually, if our parents showed an interest in us, by sending us mail and gifts, visiting us, and maintaining a tight bond, the abusive teachers would view that child as a liability to them. (Hickey and Charnell, 1997)

To assure regular involvement with their children, some parents-especially mothers-chose to work in the *gurukula* as teachers. As the Headmaster of one school commented, 'Practically every teacher had their children in the school. And that was an important factor [limiting the potential for abuse] that those parents' eyes were there. It was important.' As this suggests, the presence of parents working in the *gurukula* served to protect all children against abuse, not simply the child of the teacher. Because mothers were much more likely than fathers to have a position in the *gurukula,* girls more so than boys gained parental protection against abuse. As one woman teacher recounts:

With my daughter it was a little different because I had some ability and determination to keep my daughters with me. So I was a teacher and I taught my daughters, or at least I knew where my daughters were being taught. But with my son it wasn't allowed. He had to be removed from my presence. (Interview 1997)

A child also gained protection against abuse if he or she had a male parent who was an ISKCON leader, or was otherwise recognised as important and influential within the movement. For an abuser, these children presented substantial risks and thereby were less likely to be targeted. Even in India, where abuse was more commonplace, children with influential fathers normally escaped being targets of abuse. As one mother whose son spent years at a *gurukula* in India reported.

My son tells me that he didn't get abused. And it's funny isn't it in light of his [activism over the abuse issue]. But this is because of who his father was [a member of the GBC].29 (Interview 1997)

For children whose parents remained largely uninvolved in their lives, there was one available means to create a protective resource against abuse. Again, India was the context. Apparently adolescent boys in the *gurukula* were less subject to abuse if they received initiation from one of ISKCON's *gurus.* In effect, initiation created an interested and powerful ally who could expose or punish an abuser. Initiation thus served as a means to create an interested party in the absence of involved and/or influential parents.

Conclusion

Marriage and family life have played a central role in the development of religious communities and institutions (Berger 1969:133; Dobbelaere 1987; Foster 1991; Kanter 1972:86-92, 1973). Kanter's investigation of 19th century American communities demonstrated that successful utopian communities-religious and secular-controlled or otherwise regulated two-person intimacy and family relationships. Only by renouncing couple and family relationships could intimacy become a collective good serving the interests of the community as a whole. As such, utopian communities face the task of building and maintaining relational structures 'which do not compete with the community for emotional fulfilment' (Kanter 1972:91).

Beginning in the 1970s ISKCON sought increasingly to control marriage and family life. This involved several processes: First, marriage itself was redefined such that it became symbolic of spiritual weakness, an institution suited only for those unable to control their sexual desires. Secondly, in order to educate children separate from their parents, Prabhupada established the *gurukula.* While founded

initially as an educational institution, the *gurukula* also freed parents to work full-time on behalf of ISKCON and its communities. For many parents this involved performing *sankirtan*.30

In important respects *sankirtan* and children represent interrelated and pivotal issues in ISKCON's North American and world-wide development. To ISKCON's largely *sannyasi* leadership, *sankirtan* represented the means by which the movement could fulfil its missionary objectives. It served too, to bring substantial resources into ISKCON's communities during the 1970s (Rochford 1985:171-89). Children, on the other hand, represented a potential threat to each of these objectives. With a decline in recruitment beginning as early as 1974 in North America (Rochford 1985:278), ISKCON leaned ever harder on householders to perform *sankirtan.* The result was the purpose of the *gurukula* organisationally came to rest on its ability to provide childcare. Unfortunately, as I have described, the *gurukula* became an institution defined by neglect and the abuse of children.

Prior to widespread allegations of child abuse, ISKCON represented what Shupe (1995) refers to as a 'trusted hierarchy.' Religious groups and organisations are distinct from their secular counterparts precisely because 'those occupying lower statuses in religious organisations trust or believe in the good intentions, nonselfish motives, benevolence, and spiritual insights/wisdom of those in the upper echelons (and often are encouraged or admonished to do so)' (italics in the original, Shupe 1995:29). Indeed parents often socialise their children to respect the religious authority of church leaders, thus perpetuating the very basis of trust within religious organisations. It was such unquestioned trust in the leadership, and in ISKCON as a whole, that led parents to readily assume that their children were being properly educated and cared for in the *gurukula.* As we have seen, this very assumption helped create opportunity structures facilitating abuse and exploitation (see Krebs 1998; Shupe 1995 for other examples).

As one might expect, child abuse affects far more people than those directly victimised. As Pullen suggests 'religious congregations can collectively share psychological, emotional, and spiritual trauma when faced with the reality that their most vulnerable members have been sexually violated by individuals the community invested with authority' (1998:68). Among members of a support group formed in response to clerical sexual abuse of children in California, Pullen found members making reference to their own 'spiritual abuse.' Although not directly abused themselves, group members nonetheless expressed 'that their trust and faith in the credibility and integrity of their religious leaders had been shattered' (1998:68-9). Nason-Clark (1998) found much the same response among female congregants in the aftermath of child sexual abuse by Church officials in Canada. In organisational terms, child abuse and malfeasance by clergy precipitates a crisis of trust among rank and file members. As Seligman argues the 'existence of trust is an essential component of all enduring social relationships' (1997:13) and is indeed necessary for the continuation of any social order.

The betrayal of trust represented by child abuse has challenged, if not undermined, the ISKCON commitment of many first and second generation members alike. Child abuse stands as a powerful symbol of the failure of ISKCON's leadership, and that form of social organisation (that is, communalism) which supported its political and spiritual authority. As trust gave way to anger and doubt, householders became less willing to commit their lives to ISKCON as they had in the past. Needless to say, many second generation devotees also rejected their ISKCON collective identity. This fact, perhaps more than any other, accounts for the fragmentation and decline of ISKCON in North America. (But see Rochford 1997 for another interpretation). In failing to maintain a safe and healthy environment for the

movement's most vulnerable members, ISKCON faced being discredited from within, and a corresponding loss of legitimacy in the eyes of many long-time members. Many abandoned ISKCON, while others joined an emerging congregation of independent householders and their families residing on the margins of ISKCON's North American communities. As this implies, the tragedy of child abuse has shaped, and continues to shape, the career of ISKCON as a religious organisation newly arrived on the North American Scene.

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Anonymous b. 1996. Letter, *VOICE* web site (December 28)

Footnotes

1. This article has been painful to write, and certainly many readers will feel distressed by the story told here. Many past and present ISKCON members-second generation devotees and their parents alike- have personally been touched by child abuse. And, as I suggest here, ISKCON's larger membership has also been affected. One result is that child abuse has become an issue of growing political significance within ISKCON and the broader movement. While I am not so naive as to believe that this paper will not become part of this ongoing politic, my attempt here is to maintain a sociological stance to the issue. Yet it seems likely that some readers will find reason to charge me with partisanship of one sort or another, and perhaps even dismiss what is said here (see for example, Rochford 1992). I would only ask that devotees in and outside of ISKCON who care deeply about this issue do something constructive to aid young adults abused as children within ISKCON's schools. In need of support too are the largely forgotten parents, who often suffer in silence, riddled with guilt because of what happened to their children.

2. I had planned to address the ongoing efforts by ISKCON authorities to address the problem of child abuse, including assistance for abuse victims, child protection policies, and so forth. Because of the length of the present article this did not prove feasible. See Bharata Shrestha Das in this volume for details of the response that members of ISKCON made in the 1990s towards the problem of child abuse.

3. Yet there is no reason to assume that child abuse is absent from ISKCON's communities. To the extent it does exist, it is far more likely to occur within the context of nuclear family life. Thus child abuse within ISKCON today likely mirrors causes and patterns found within mainstream cultures.

4. While research and official statistics demonstrate that child abuse has been on the rise, the question of why remains less certain. Surprisingly, before the 1960s there were no laws which prohibited child abuse in the United States (Pfohl 1985:309). Yet within a few short years all fifty states 'discovered' the problem and passed legislation to control it (Pfhol 1985:309). The question is why, then? Violence against children was hardly new in the 1960s. One researcher has shown that 'child abuse' only gained legal status as the medical profession-specifically paediatric radiology-was able to 'break the legal hold that parents held over children' (Pfohl 1977, 1985:309). Thus the legal basis of child abuse is derived from professional expertise and power. Beating a troublesome child, an act taken for granted by many parents even a single generation ago, is now often considered 'abusive', if not illegal behaviour. Obviously these issues are critical to understanding child abuse as a social problem. Just as obviously, such a treatment goes well beyond the scope of the present paper. (For a social constructionist account of religion and child abuse, see Jenkins 1996.)

5. Some researchers have expressed concern that data from the American Association for Protecting Children (AAPC) overstates the amount of child abuse in the USA. This is because the AAPC data fails to account for duplicate reports involving a single child. In counting the total number of abuse *reports* these data overstate the actual number of abuse cases. Costin et al. (1996:136) assert that the result is a 20% inflation of the actual incidence rate. This conclusion seems born out by a study conducted by Westat (1981) who found an incidence rate of child abuse in the USA of 22.6 per 1 000 children. By contrast the AAPC incidence rate was 32.8 per 1 000 children, 23% above the Westat figure (Costin et al. 1996:136).

6. Defining what we mean by child abuse and child neglect is an important yet difficult task. Moreover, how we use the term 'child abuse' in ordinary language often differs from legal and social science definitions. What one person defines as physical abuse, for example, another may view as necessary discipline for an unruly child. Physical abuse is often defined as inflicting physical injury by other than accidental means (Costin et al. 1996:5). Corporal punishment by contrast is 'the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not injury' (Straus 1994:4). Physical abuse and corporal punishment involve the use of violence in that both *intend* to cause pain and suffering (Straus 1994:7). Child sexual abuse involves a number of specific acts from fondling a child's sexual organs, vaginal intercourse and sodomy (including oral and anal intercourse). It may also involve an adult forcing a child to fondle his or her sexual organs and child pornography. Psychological abuse involves the attempt to inflict 'mental or emotional injury that results in the child's physical or emotional deterioration' (Costin et al. 1996:5). Child neglect is even a more ambiguous concept to define. Typically, a neglected child is one that lacks proper care and supervision from a parent or adult, or where the environment represents a threat to his or her health (Costin et al. 1996:5). Apart from these formal definitions there is another offered by Rabbi Lawrence S. Kushner. While he speaks specifically about 'parents' we could substitute 'adult'. In his address on the occasion of Yom Kippur, he argues that child abuse 'is when parents deliberately treat children as objects so as to gratify themselves. It is using a child for one's own pleasure, without regard to the child as an autonomous person . . . using them as lightening rods for our own misdirected hostility, manipulating their trust and love for our gratification against their will . . . The child is deprived of personhood, autonomy, spontaneity, the ability to respond freely and appropriately, sense of self worth and holy uniqueness' (1990:7).

7. Medical neglect of children has also been identified as a form of abuse associated with religion. The Jehovah's Witnesses, who do not believe in blood transfusions, and Christian Scientists, who often favour prayer over medical expertise and procedures, are perhaps the two most well known examples (Bottoms et al. 1995:88). Citing First Amendment protections against government intrusion in religion, these, and other religious groups, have generally retained the right to refuse medical treatment. This trend may be changing however as some states have

successfully challenged these legal exemptions, especially when a child's life is placed at risk. (See for example, Skolnick 1994, on changes in Massachusetts' exemption laws following the death of two and a half year old Robyn Twitchell who died of a bowel obstruction after his Christian Science parents denied him treatment.)

8. These figures should be viewed with a certain amount of suspicion, however. Information collected relied heavily on individuals already undergoing therapy. Cases included were therefore selective, and the findings reported *un*representative. It is worth noting however the relatively large number of sex abuse cases for both celibate and non-celibate clergy. This questions the view that the Church's policy of celibacy explains paedophilia among Catholic priests (see for example, Berry 1992).

9. The noted author, sociologist and Catholic priest, Andrew Greely, wrote the following in the foreward to Jason Berry's book *Lead Us Not into Temptation: Catholic priests and the sexual abuse of children*: 'Bishops have with what seems like programmed consistency tried to hide, cover up, bribe, stonewall; often they have sent back into parishes men whom they knew to be a danger to the faithful . . . Catholicism will survive, but that will be despite the present leadership and not because of them' (1992:xiiv-xiv).

10. In 1979 I served as a teacher's assistant for a boy's *ashram* at the Los Angeles *gurukula.* In 1989, thinking about the young boys who I often took to the park and beach, I began an investigation of ISKCON's second generation. I began by interviewing seventy first-generation parents in four ISKCON communities in the USA Over the past eight years I have also interviewed dozens of second generation youth about their experiences in the *gurukula.* In 1992-3 I conducted a non-random survey of second generation youth in North America (N=87). I have also attended four *gurukula* reunions in Los Angeles and at New Vrindaban, and served as a member of ISKCON's North American Board of Education.

11. It was assumed that adolescent girls would marry at an early age and hence none were sent to India for further schooling. The rather 'primitive' living conditions in India also were deemed unsuitable for adolescent girls. At ISKCON's New Vrindaban community in West Virginia, for example, it was not uncommon for girls as young as thirteen to be married or betrothed in the late 1970s. When many of these marriages failed, and girls and their parents began to resist the idea of early marriage, adolescent girls began attending local public schools. Lacking secondary schools for girls within ISKCON, and with few other acceptable alternatives such as home schooling, schooling children outside became a solution, even if it was not always a preferred one. (For a discussion of how attending state-supported secondary schools has influenced the collective identity and religious involvements of ISKCON youth in North America, see Rochford

forthcoming.)

12. In the midst of writing this article the teacher and Headmaster of the Vaisnava School for Boys in Alachua, Florida, was accused of sexually molesting four of his former students some 10 years ago. He admitted his sexual misconduct and left the ISKCON community in Alachua. The case was investigated by Florida State officials, as well as by the Alachua ISKCON community and ISKCON's Governing Body Commission (GBC). The school now only accepts day students, having disbanded its *ashram* in response to the molestation charges (Das, N. et al. 1998).

13. Relying on estimates of child abuse is especially tricky. For the fact is child abuse and children in general represent ongoing social and political issues within ISKCON. Dedicated 'moral entrepreneurs' (Becker 1963) are actively at work attempting to make child abuse and the plight of ISKCON's children a publicly defined social problem. As one might expect, many of those involved are young adults who attended the *gurukula.* Many were themselves abused. While opposition within ISKCON appears to be lessening, a few leaders and some other ISKCON members continue to argue that child abuse was only a minor and isolated problem involving relatively few children. I raise these issues here not to in any way diminish the seriousness of the abuse that took place. Rather, I want to underscore the fact that no one knows with any degree of precision how extensive child abuse actually was. Obviously, systematic research on this question is long overdue.

14. The reader will note that normally individual's names are avoided in order to maintain the anonymity of my interviewees. In a limited number of instances, where I quote from *published* sources, names are used, including the author's. However, in every case, I avoid using names of alleged abusers in published and unpublished sources, including the VOICE Web Page. The latter source is an internet site established by ex-*gurukula* students to expose the child abuse that they and their peers suffered. This web site has become very controversial within ISKCON. Because ISKCON leaders are concerned about the adverse public relations impact of VOICE, the latter has exerted considerable pressure on the leadership to respond constructively to the problem of child abuse in general, and to the young people abused as children.

15. It appears that sexual abuse of children was not limited to teachers and others working within the *gurukula.* There are reports that single renunciate men (*brahmacaris*) were involved in molesting children in India (Brzezinski 1997). Allegations also persist that some male leaders associated with the Mayapur, India, *gurukula* were involved in sexually abusing children (Brzezinski 1997; Prabhupada Anti-defamation Association 1993).

16. This situation contrasts sharply with other groups that have communalised children and child-rearing. In the Oneida community, founded in northern New York during mid-1800s by John Humphrey Noyes, children were also raised separate from their parents in a community school. Yet as Kephart explains this system of communal child-rearing was based on 'ample affection and kindness . . . [and] that childhood in the Old Community was a happy and exhilarating experience' (1963:268). This suggests that the communalisation of children and child-rearing is not in itself neglectful or abusive. (For a discussion of children in the Kibbutzim, see Spiro 1958; Talmon 1973.)

17. There is a fourth factor that I have been forced to forego considering here because of limitations of space. This involves a selective understanding of Prabhupada's views on disciplining children held by some teachers and others working in the *gurukula.* Simply put, some teachers felt that corporal punishment was fully sanctioned by Prabhupada as a means to deal with unruly children. And it appears that there is some evidence to support such a conclusion. Yet, a close inspection of Prabhupada's ideas on child discipline suggests that overall he was not in favour of physical punishment.
    It is worth noting however that Prabhupada's letters and conversations, now widely available from ISKCON's Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, were not available to any great degree during this period. Most members of ISKCON, including *gurukula* teachers, had limited and certainly incomplete information concerning Prabhupada's views on child discipline and other issues.

18. Ravindra Svarupa dasa (1994) states that Prabhupada refused to sanction any further marriages beginning in 1974. His 1972 letter suggests the decision came earlier, although it is possible that Prabhupada did not actively withdraw from marital concerns until sometime after the letter was written.

19. The findings reported should be taken as reasonable estimates rather than precise figures. Neither the 1980 or the 1991-2 surveys were based upon probability samples.

20. Prabhupada provided somewhat mixed messages on the spiritual status of householders. He often reminded his disciples that the entanglements associated with marriage and family made it 'difficult to make any progress in Krishna Consciousness' (Prabhupada 1992:852). The spiritual ideal therefore was to remain an unmarried renunciate. Yet Prabhupada also said that,

    . . . if you cannot [avoid sex life], then get yourself married, live with wife, but have sex only for progeny. Not for sense enjoyment. Therefore even [if] one is married, then the husband is also

called *brahmacari.* Even though he is *grihastha* [householder]. And wife is called chaste (quoted in Devi Dasi, U. 1992:6).

21. This attitude continues to the present day. ISKCON's leaders remain hesitant to engage issues relating to children and family life, claiming that neither is the proper domain of *sannyasis.* The result is that leaders have essentially turned their collective backs on those issues most salient to the lives of ISKCON's membership. There is evidence that this stance may be changing however. See Das, B. in this volume.

22. During the 1970s and early 1980s it was common for marriage partners to be selected by the leadership with an eye toward reducing the likelihood that a particularly productive *sankirtan* devotee would be lost to his or her local ISKCON community (See Rochford 1997).

23. As one second generation devotee commenting on an earlier draft of this paper said. 'I agree one hundred percent. Every day in the morning, *sankirtan* scores [were] read out to inspire the devotees and praise the individuals who [did] good collecting money, or distributing the most books. Never, never ever [were] the teachers praised, or the kids who [did] good at school.'

24. It also resulted in long-term emotional consequences for some second generation youth. As one reported:

    We don't want to trust anyone else with our feelings, our emotions, our love . . . because we 'know' that that person will just turn around and hurt us . . . They'll leave, they'll reject us . . .'They don't really care about us . . . ' we think. I'm 26 years old. I'm still struggling to trust someone on an emotional, 'feelings' level, and to share my feelings with them. It's hard for me. Damn hard. Being raised by 26 parents/caretakers from age 7 to 15 makes it damn hard to place my love and trust in someone again. (Personal communication 1998)

25. Things became so bad financially that one winter the school ran out of funds for coal to heat the school. Realising that the GBC man responsible for the school was unlikely to help, the Headmaster was forced to call on some of his temple president friends for assistance. As he said, '. . . and they sent money just because they realised "Our friend is in need." '

26. Questioning of Prabhupada's role in the child abuse that occurred in the *gurukula* has only recently surfaced as an issue among second generation youth. In fact the VOICE Web page has given considerable attention to the issue. Those implicating Prabhupada charge that he knew that children were being physically punished, yet failed to directly intervene, or have leaders under him put a stop to such behaviour. It does seem clear from Prabhupada's letters that he was aware, as early as 1972, that physical punishment was being administered to children in the *gurukula* (see for example, Prabhupada 1992:797, 799). There is also evidence suggesting that he did intervene (Prabhupada 1992:797). In a 1972 letter to a disciple who had complained that her child was being mistreated in the *gurukula* in Dallas, Prabhupada wrote:

    But you may be assured that I am always anxious about the welfare of my disciples, so that I am taking steps to rectify the unfortunate situation . . . [C]hildren should not be beaten at all, that I have told. They should simply be shown the stick strongly. So if one cannot manage in that way then he is not fit as a teacher . . . [H]e must have two things, love and education. So if there is beating of child, that will be difficult for him to accept in loving spirit, and when he is old enough he may want to go away-that is the danger (1992:793).

    Yet physical punishment and various forms of abuse only escalated in the years to follow. Some former *gurukula* students believe that Prabhupada ' . . . did not implement appropriate measures to guarantee the safety of children in his movement from his disciples. [And] that the programmes he established and interpretations of his words greatly fostered an environment under which child abuse flourished' (Hickey et al. 1997).

27. This raises another issue about parental involvement. Many of those who attended the *gurukula* had less than close relationships with their parents. This may have dissuaded some from telling their parents of the neglect and abuse present within the *gurukula,* including their own abuse.

28. In one instance parents sending their child to the Vrindavan gurukula developed a strategy to circumvent the monitoring system in place. Responding to rumours about child abuse, and the censuring of student mail by the administration, the parents and child developed a code that would sound the alarm if harmful things were occurring. In a letter to his parents, the student would request pizza be sent to him through the mail. This served as a request to be removed from the school.

29. I am aware of one influential ISKCON member whose son was sexually molested.

30. It may be worth noting here that the state-supported school system in North America and elsewhere also serves the latent function of providing childcare. In my own community some parents were outraged when teachers at the local elementary school wanted to release students early one afternoon a month so they could discuss curriculum. Working parents were upset largely because they had to find alternative child care arrangements.

Jennifer Heinlein is an undergraduate student in Sociology and Anthropology at Middlebury College, Vermont, USA. She helped to research the literature on child abuse for the present paper.

Child Abuse in the Hare Krishna Movement: 1971-1986

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E. Burke Rochford, Jr. with Jennifer Heinlein

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All these boys must be taken care of very nicely. They are the future hope. (Prabhupada letter, July, 1974, in Prabhupada 1992:795).

These kids were growing up and seriously leaving [ISKCON]. Not a little bit leaving. Not leaving and being favourable, still chanting and living outside. Nothing like that. They were leaving. And suddenly it was like 'What happened?' *And then it started to be revealed that the kids were molested.* (Long-time ISKCON teacher, interview 1990)1

Religion and child abuse, ' "perfect together" . . .and mutually attractive.' So concludes Donald Capps in his 1992 presidential address to members of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Mutually attractive in spite of the fact that religion has often vigorously defended the rights of children, including condemning child abuse and neglect (Capps 1992; Costin et al. 1996:47). Yet research on child abuse suggests that religious beliefs can foster, encourage, and justify the abuse of children (Capps 1992; Ellison and Sherkat 1993; Greven 1990; Jenkins 1996). Moreover, church structures may provide opportunities for abusive clergy (Krebs 1998; Shupe 1995).

This paper deals with how children in a religious organisation were abused physically, psychologically and sexually by people responsible for their care and well being. My purpose is to describe the problem as it existed within the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), more popularly known as the Hare Krishna movement. This discussion of child abuse within ISKCON is a historical one.2 I consider child abuse and neglect within the context of ISKCON's boarding schools-or *ashram*-based gurukulas- as they existed from 1972 until the mid-1980s. I develop a sociologically informed framework to understand how and why child abuse and neglect took place. Thus my attempt is not concerned with identifying or explaining the 'causes' of child abuse by focusing on the abuser per se. Rather attention is given to a variety of organisational factors that fostered, and indeed created opportunities for child abuse to occur within ISKCON's schools.

I argue that child abuse must be understood within the broader context of ISKCON's development as a religious organisation. The expansion of marriage and family life has defined ISKCON's transition from a communally-organised sectarian movement, to one characterised by a loosely organised congregation of financially independent householders and their children (Rochford 1995a, 1995b, 1997). As the number of marriages and children began to grow in the mid-1970s, householder life was redefined by ISKCON's renunciate elite as a symbol of spiritual weakness. As a stigmatised and politically marginal group, householders were left powerless to assert their parental authority over the lives of their children. Children were abused in part because they were not valued by leaders, and even, very often, by their own parents who accepted theological and other justifications offered by the leadership for remaining uninvolved in the lives of their children.

In recent years, child abuse has played an influential role in the ongoing politic surrounding the authority and legitimacy of ISKCON's leadership. For many ISKCON members, and devotees marginal to or outside of the organisation, child abuse stands as a powerful symbol of the failure of ISKCON's traditionalist, communal, hierarchical (that is, sectarian) form of social organisation. Child abuse has come to represent a fundamental betrayal of trust, not only for abused children and their parents but also for the membership more generally. (Also, see Rochford 1998a on leader misconduct and changing sources of religious authority within ISKCON.)

It is important to make clear from the start that no one knows how many of ISKCON's children were abused in the *gurukula.* It is also the case that ISKCON's *gurukulas* did not uniformly experience problems of child abuse. Finally, the virtual collapse of these institutions in North America and world-wide in favour of community day-schools, has all but eliminated the context of abuse considered here.3

Before turning to the substantive issues raised above, I first want to build a broader context for my discussion. One only has to pick up the local newspaper to realise that child abuse occurs all too frequently in the communities in which we live. Moreover, while we might assume that religious life would remain immune to the tragedy of child abuse, the facts suggest otherwise. Various religious groups-conventional and unconventional alike-have been shaken by allegations of child abuse, especially sexual misconduct on the part of church authorities (Jenkins 1996:50-52; Palmer 1997; Shupe 1995, 1998).

Defining the problem of child abuse

Reported cases of child abuse and neglect have been on the rise in the USA in recent years (Costin et al., 1996:136-7; Daro 1988).4 More than a million young people suffer abuse and mistreatment annually (Daro 1988:13; US Bureau of the Census 1997:218). The American Association for Protecting Children found that 1.7 million children suffered neglect or abuse in 1984, an increase of 156% since 1976, the first year this agency began collecting data on child abuse (Daro 1988:13). 5 In 1995, there were just under two million reported cases of child abuse involving 2.95 million children in the United States. After investigation by State child protective services, evidence suggests that 1 million children were abused or neglected (US Bureau of the Census 1997:219). Because many cases of child abuse go unreported, the actual number of abused children may well be substantially higher (Daro 1988:14-15).

Although overall rates remain high, the prevalence of various types of child abuse and neglect appear to be changing. Physical abuse has decreased while sexual abuse has expanded as a proportion of the total percentage of reported cases of child abuse (Costin et al. 1996:138). The latter trend may be changing however as the percentage of *substantiated* cases of child sexual abuse actually declined between 1990

and 1995 (US Bureau of the Census 1997:218). A majority of parents in the USA continue to use physical punishment, however, and the percentage of parents favouring corporal punishment declined only slightly during the 1970s and 1980s (Straus and Gelles 1986; Straus 1994:23-24).6

While child abuse is no doubt present within any community in the USA, it can also be found within a variety of religious groups and denominations-perhaps especially among those adhering to a Judaic-Christian tradition. Both the Old and the New Testaments recommend the use of physical punishment on the part of parents to help tame the will of a child (Ellison and Sherkat 1993; Greven 1991). Such intervention is mandated because all persons are believed to be born sinful (that is, displaying ego-centrism and selfishness). Parents thus face the responsibility of 'shaping the will' of their children to ensure they become right with God. Biblical passages giving legitimisation to physical punishment of children are many. Among the most commonly cited are: 'He that spareth the rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chaseneth him betimes.' 'Withhold no correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shall beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell' (Proverbs 13:24 and 23:13-14, respectively, quoted in Bottoms et al. 1995:87). Accordingly, parents who subscribe to a doctrine of biblical literalism-such as conservative Protestants- are especially prone to using physical punishment as a form of discipline (Ellison and Sherkat 1993). Corporal punishment is viewed both as a necessary and legitimate means to combat the sinfulness of a child, while simultaneously re-enforcing parental (that is, patriarchal) authority.

Apart from encouraging and justifying corporal punishment, religious ideas have also been used by parents and religious institutions alike to 'cause emotional pain' by tormenting children through the excessive use of shame and fear (Capps 1992:7-9). The latter researcher concludes that 'religious ideas might be as abusive as physical punishment for children' (1992:8).7

When the average person reflects on child abuse and religion today he or she is likely to identify sexual misconduct by religious officials, particularly on the part of Catholic priests (Berry 1992; Jenkins 1996, 1998). This is largely because sexual misconduct by Catholic priests has received widespread media coverage in the USA and world-wide (for a review, see Jenkins 1996:53-76, 1998). Yet, child sexual abuse by clergy is hardly limited to Catholicism (Isely and Isely 1990). The most often quoted survey dealing with sexual problems among Protestant clergy found that 10 percent were involved in sexual misconduct of one sort or another, and that 'about two to three percent' were paedophiles (Rediger 1990:55, quoted in Jenkins 1996). This rate is equal to or perhaps even slightly higher than for Catholic priests (Jenkins 1996:50).8

While the sexual abuse of children is troubling, it becomes doubly so when religious figures are involved. After all, clergy are viewed in most religious traditions as God's ordained representatives, this comprising the very basis of their religious authority. In cases of clergy sexual abuse, religious authority is directly or indirectly used to exploit children, and to cover it up. Clergy who sexually abuse children are often able to escape disclosure, because their status as religious figures shields them from accusations of abuse (Barry 1992; Bottoms et al. 1995). Allegations made by a child concerning clergy sexual misconduct are likely to be ignored, or dismissed as fabrication by parents and other adults (see for example, Barry 1992). Clergy sexual abuse of children, in significant respects, parallels familial incest because it is 'often characterised by the same guilt, betrayal of trust, and shame . . .' (Bottoms et al. 1995:90; also see Blanchard 1991:239-240). It is thus hardly surprising to find allegations of clergy sexual misconduct being made by adults victimised as children.

As one might expect, sexual abuse by religious authorities is especially damaging to victims. One study concluded that abuse by religious authorities 'is as psychologically damaging, and perhaps *more* damaging, than even the violently physical abuses of parents whose religious beliefs led them to view their children as evil incarnate' (Bottoms et al. 1995:100). Children molested by religious authorities often suffer from depression, suicidal ideation and affective disorders (Bottoms et al. 1995:99). Moreover, it is not uncommon for those sexually abused by clergy to change religions, or more likely still, to repudiate religion altogether (Bottoms et al. 1995:99). Such an outcome appears even more likely when clergy sexual misconduct is hidden or otherwise covered-up by the church hierarchy. 9

Child abuse within ISKCON schools

Unlike most instances of child abuse that occur in the home, ISKCON's children were abused and neglected within the confines of the movement's schools, by unrelated adults and older children acting on a teacher's behalf. During these formative years of ISKCON's development, the movement's children were educated in boarding schools, living more or less separate lives from their parents. It was here that some of ISKCON's children were physically, psychologically, and sexually abused.10

As Prabhupada saw the public school system in America as indoctrinating 'children in sense gratification and mental speculation, he referred to the schools as "slaughterhouses"'(J. Goswami 1984:1). By contrast, the *gurukula,* as he envisioned it, was specifically meant to train students in spiritual life, so that they could return back to Godhead. Given that the fundamental goal of the *gurukula* was to train students in sense control, children were removed from their family as early as age four or five years. Prabhupada believed little hope existed for a child to learn self-control within the nuclear family because of the 'ropes of affection' between parent and child. Children thus attended the *gurukula* on a year-round basis, with occasional vacations to visit with parents. They resided in *ashrams* with children of similar age and sex. *Ashrams* varied in size and the number of children they took in. In 1979 there were 6-8 students living in each of the boys *ashrams* in Los Angeles. Reports indicate that in other *gurukulas* the number of students residing in an *ashram* ranged as high as 20 or more. An adult teacher lived in the *ashram* and took responsibility for supervising the children, and tending to their day-to-day needs (Rochford 1997).

ISKCON's first formal *gurukula* was established in Dallas, Texas, in 1971. The Dallas *gurukula* remained the only school of its type within the movement, until 1976, when it was forced to close by state authorities. At the time of its closing the school had approximately 100 students, the majority of whom were between the ages of four and eight. With the impending demise of the Dallas school, *gurukulas* were established in Los Angeles and at New Vrindaban in 1975. In 1976, the Bhaktivedanta Swami International Gurukula began accepting adolescent boys as students in Vrindavan, India.11 Between 1975 and 1978 a total of 11 ISKCON schools opened in the North America. *Gurukulas* also started in France, Australia, South Africa, England and Sweden, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Regional schools appeared in Lake Huntington, New York, and central California (Bhaktivedanta Village), in 1980 and 1981 respectively (Das, M. 1998).

As the last two regionally based *ashram-gurukulas* closed in North America by 1986, ISKCON schools became almost exclusively day-schools. The only exception in North America today is the Vaisnava Academy for Girls located in Alachua, Florida, for high school aged women. The school has both day-students and students living full-time in the *ashram*.12 World-wide only the Vrindavan and Mayapur,

India, schools remain *ashram*-only *gurukulas.* A sizeable majority of ISKCON's children in North America presently attend state-supported schools (Rochford 1997, forthcoming), a trend found in a number of other countries as well.

Reports by second generation youth, parents and educators alike suggest that a proportion of the children who attended the *gurukula* suffered psychological, physical and sexual abuse. Yet it remains unclear just how many children were abused directly, or otherwise witnessed their friends and classmates being abused. The latter represents a form of psychological abuse in its own right.

Lacking reliable quantitative findings, it becomes extremely difficult to determine with any degree of precision what the actual incidence of child abuse was within ISKCON's *gurukulas.* Unfortunately, we are left to estimates of uncertain quality. Over the years any number of estimates have been offered ranging from 20% of all students who attended an *ashram-gurukula* suffering some form of abuse, to as many as 75% of the boys enrolled at the Vrindavan, India, *gurukula* having been sexually molested during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Whatever the actual incidence of child abuse, it remains clear that abuse directly and indirectly influenced the lives of a sizeable number of children. Yet, child abuse did not occur uniformly, either across *gurukulas,* or, very often, even within the same school. As one long-time teacher concluded,

child abuse . . . wasn't all-pervasive. It wasn't in all *gurukulas.* It didn't affect all children. But it was in enough schools and affected enough children and it went on for enough time . . . (Interview 1990)13

Abuse and neglect within the *gurukula* took a variety of forms. The following statements from young adults and former *gurukula* students indicate the kinds of abuse that occurred.

. . . I remember dark closets filled with flying dates (large three inch, flying cockroaches) and such, while beatings and 'no *prasadam*' for dinner became everyday affairs. (Devi Dasi, K. 1990:1)

Seattle was hell because I was only six years old, my mom lived in Hawaii and I had always been a very shy mommy's girl. The movement was in its earlier stages and the devotees were fanatical-beyond fanatical. I mean, they would give us a bowl of hot milk at night, so I would, of course, pee in my bed. Then as punishment they would spank me very hard and make me wear the contaminated panties on my head. In general, at that time, because I was so young, I was so spaced out and confused. I would cry. . .for my mom, but that wasn't allowed, so I would say I was crying in devotional ecstasy. I really regret Seattle because I had a dire need for my mother's warmth and reassurance at that time in my life. (Second Generation Survey 1992)

The teacher use to say, 'Oh, you don't know when you are going to die. You could die in your sleep.' And one day I was really bad and one of my teachers said, 'Who knows you might die tonight. Krishna might be punishing you. He might be taking away your life . . .' And from that night on I use to pray every night, 'Krishna please don't kill me. I promise I will be a good girl tomorrow. Please let me get fixed up enough so I can go back to Godhead. Don't take me in my sleep.' And for years I had insomnia. I was too afraid to go back to sleep. (Interview 1991)14

Two young men recount their days as students in the Vrindavan, India, *gurukula* during the early 1980s.

X: I wasn't afraid of being sexually molested. I don't think I was afraid of being mentally abused either. I was definitely afraid of being physically abused . . . Sexual molestation, all of us, man, we'd just take it,

you know. . . That's what we all felt. We didn't even consider it abuse back then.
XX: Yeah, that was just normal. . .The ironic thing about that, though, is probably the mental thing [abuse] was probably the longest lasting.
X: There was no way to escape that. (Group Interview 1993)

As word of child abuse within the *gurukula* came to the attention of ISKCON authorities, some efforts were made to intervene. Yet this very intervention sometimes resulted in new strategies of coercive abuse. Most significant was enlisting older boys in the Vrindavan *gurukula* to physically abuse younger students who were deemed troublesome and unruly by teachers.

X: The other thing was that older boys acting in the capacity of monitors were used to abuse the younger students. Some started to realise that 'Hey, teachers can't be beating kids.' They did it in a new way.
EBR: With the monitors.
X: Yeah. Which was the older boys beating the younger boys, and I was one of the older ones . . .and they [teachers] would call me in on occasion and I would just have to knock the living s--- [out of a younger student] . . . I'd be sitting there going 'Man, I love you. I don't want to be doing this. . .' [I]t's like,' what are you gonna do? If I don't do it to you, they're gonna do it to me.'
XX: That's another kind of mental abuse. (Group Interview, 1993)

While a porportion of ISKCON's children were themselves abused, others experienced the abuse as they watched their friends and classmates being mistreated by teachers and others responsible for their care.

If the teachers treated one of our friends bad then we all felt bad. I remember there was one teacher that use to grab one of us by the ears and bang us against the wall. And we all stood there and watched and felt really bad. . . She [the teacher] was doing it to all of us. (Interview 1992)

Maybe what [name of *ashram* teacher] was doing to [name of student] was hurting others [students] more than him. For [name of student] it was an everyday thing. I was standing right next to [him] and I was crying. I was freaked out. I was afraid I was gonna be next because I knew he was gettin' it for no reason. If he could get it for no reason so could I. (Group interview 1993)

In the school in Vrindavan, India, abusive treatment became so commonplace that students sought to routinise their mistreatment as a protective strategy.

It was like boot camp, but it wasn't temporary. You became part of a unit. Boot camp was a full-time thing for us. They're just constantly knocking you down, knocking you down. . . lower, lower, lower. What are they gonna do? Beat me again? Go ahead. (Laughter). Big deal! (Group interview 1993)

But beyond the question of young people being abused by adults working in the *gurukula* 15 was the general environment of neglect that existed. Without parents present, many felt abandoned, or as one second generation youth remarked, 'We were just unwanted.' Many of the young people interviewed described the atmosphere in the *gurukula* as one lacking in love and compassion. They felt invisible, abandoned and unworthy of love and affection from both their parents and adult caregivers.16

Accounting for child abuse
In this section, I explore a number of factors that combined to create a context conducive to child abuse within the *gurukula* during the 1970s and 1980s. The first of these is somewhat different from the

others because it defines the broader milieu in which parents and children lived within ISKCON's communities. Put simply, marriage and family life came to symbolise spiritual failure, and children a sexual product of that failure. Following this discussion, I then consider three specific factors which fostered child abuse and neglect: (1) *Sankirtan* and competing demands on parents; (2) Lack of institutional support for the *gurukula;* and, (3) Exclusion of parents from the *gurukula* and, thereby, from the everyday lives of their children.17 I end this section by considering how some children were able to escape abuse.

Attitudes Toward Marriage, Family Life, and Children

ISKCON scholar and leader Ravindra Svarupa dasa argues that marriage and family life were viewed favourably during ISKCON's early days. As he states, 'When I joined ISKCON [1971] it was assumed that everyone would become married, and indeed devotees were urged to do so' (1994:9). But this view changed after Prabhupada became increasingly discouraged by the marital problems encountered by his disciples. In a 1972 letter he wrote 'I am so much disgusted with this troublesome business of marriage, because nearly every day I receive some complaint from husband or wife. . .so henceforth I am not sanctioning any more marriages . . .' (Prabhupada 1992:866).18 As Prabhupada withdrew from 'the troublesome business of marriage,' local Temple Presidents and other ISKCON authorities (that is, regional secretaries, GBC representatives) assumed the responsibility for arranging marriages and otherwise dealing with the problems and needs of householders. The result was married life underwent a fundamental transformation in meaning and value within ISKCON.

Marriage came to represent a sign of spiritual weakness, a concession for those too weak to control their sexual desires. Such a view applied differently to men and women however. The ideal for a man was to maintain a life of renunciation, avoiding marriage if at all possible. Spiritual and material fulfilment for women by contrast was defined in terms of marriage and family life (Rochford 1997). Given the prevalence of these ideas, women became threats to a man's spiritual advancement.

The changed atmosphere surrounding marriage and family life turned contentious by the mid-1970s as renunciate leaders undertook a preaching campaign against householder life and women. As Ravindra Svarupa dasa suggests, this brought about growing conflict and factionalism within ISKCON.

Some of these *sannyasis* embarked on preaching campaigns against householders and even more so against women, whose life in the movement at this time became extremely trying. Feelings grew so heated that in 1976, a clash between householder temple presidents in North America and a powerful association of peripatetic *sannyasis* and *brahmacaris* escalated into a conflict so major that Srila Prabhupada called it a 'fratricidal war' (1994:9).

Despite the ongoing denigration of marriage and family life and the corresponding loss of status accorded householders, most devotees ultimately married. By 1980, there appears to have been about an equal number of married and unmarried devotees residing within ISKCON's North American communities. About one-quarter had children (Rochford 1997). Conversely, a survey in 1991-92 (N=268) revealed that a sizeable majority of ISKCON's North American membership were married, or previously married. Only 15% had never been married. Family life also expanded with a substantial majority (70%) of those surveyed in 1991-92 having one or more children.19 By the onset of the 1990s, ISKCON had become a householder's movement in North America (Rochford 1997), and increasingly world-wide (Rochford 1995b).

Even with the rapid expansion of marriage and family life, anti-householder attitudes changed little organisationally.[20] Householder life remained a 'dark-well' spiritually. Many parents who accepted the leadership's ideas about marriage and family sought to counteract their lowly status by placing their commitment to ISKCON and Krishna Consciousness above their family obligations. This presented a burden of considerable proportions for both parents and their children. One second generation woman suggests just how difficult this proved to be for her own mother.

But sometimes I would look at her and I could see her being torn apart inside. I could see how she yearned to be a mother once again; sewing by the fire, cooking our dinners, and helping us with our hard days at school, and at the same time trying her hardest to please the Guru and the community by showing her *detachment to her family*. (My emphasis; Devi Dasi, K. 1990:14)

As householder life became disparaged children too were defined and redefined in ways that undermined their status, and ultimately the care they received within the *gurukula.* Up until the early 1980s, children born within ISKCON were commonly portrayed as being spiritually pure. After all, it was believed that their souls had progressed spiritually to the point where they had gained the good fortune of taking birth in a devotee family. Yet this view changed by the mid-1980s as some leaders complained that ISKCON's children were turning out to be little more than 'karmis' (that is, non-religious outsiders), and, therefore, *gurukula* had failed in its mission to produce spiritually advanced children. Both of these frameworks, I want to argue, became justifications used by the leadership to dismiss the gurukula, the children, and their responsibility toward both.[21]

As two long-time ISKCON teachers recount,

They [leadership] put a lot of energy into making new devotees from outside the community. But you didn't have to put any energy into making children into devotees, or so they thought . . . And I think there was a lot of misconception about how Prabhupada thought the children [were] conceived. They thought that if the children were conceived properly then it was a cinch. And that makes no sense at all. I compare it to going through a store and buying good seeds and then you don't plant them, you don't water them, you just throw them around . . . So many things that we assumed, that we never sat down and analysed. We just took it for granted; That the children were born into the movement, and particularly if they were conceived properly of chanting five hours of Hare Krishna. Does that make sense? It never made sense to me. I always assumed that we would train the children, that we could never take their Krishna Consciousness, or their character, or anything for granted. (Interview 1990)

And everyone just thought that you send them away to the *gurukula* and when they came back they were going to be like Prahlada Maharaja [a spiritually-realised child devotee of Krishna]. They were going to be chanting *japa.* They were going to be shaved-up. They were going to be distributing books. They were going to be nice little chaste wives, rolling *chapatis.* (Interview 1997)

Yet, by the mid-1980s, as the children were growing into teenagers, understandings of the second generation and the *gurukula* began to change. To the surprise of many leaders and parents alike, the children raised in the *gurukula* were less than pure spiritually. Few were committed to a life of renunciation and full-time involvement in ISKCON (Rochford forthcoming). As a result, some leaders openly challenged the need for the *gurukula* altogether. Economic decline, as I discuss below, made this view all the more attractive to some leaders.

But they [the leaders] did not go back and become introspective and say 'Well, we should have been taking care of these things. Let's get it together now. We made a mistake, whether an honest mistake or not. Let's now provide an excellent education for the children. Let's rebuild the community's faith in ISKCON.' They didn't do that. They took (laugh) the opposite track. Instead of saying 'the kids are going to turn out good no matter what,' now they were saying 'things are going to turn out bad no matter what you do.' The leaders' position was, 'No, we did everything right. We did what Prabhupada said. We had *ashrams.* We had these nice schools. These wonderful schools. And everything went bad anyway. So why should we put a lot of energy into it [the *gurukula*]. We're just kidding ourselves. Right.' (Interview, ISKCON teacher 1990)

But these two very different frameworks for constructing ISKCON's children functionally served the same purpose. In the first instance leaders saw no reason to invest resources in the *gurukula* because it couldn't fail, given the elevated spiritual status of the children. The second framework, precisely because it emphasised failure, rather than success, likewise rejected the need to maintain a viable system of education. As I argue in the next section, however, the *gurukula* did serve a crucial function for ISKCON, one that ultimately had little to do with educating and socialising ISKCON's next generation.

Sankirtan and the Gurukula

Although ISKCON's *sannyasi* leadership believed that a loss in standing would discourage marriage, as we have seen, the solid majority of ISKCON's membership married, and most had children. The growth of marriage and family represented a significant threat to *sankirtan,* and thereby to ISKCON itself.22 *Sankirtan* served ISKCON's mission in two respects. First, it represented the principle means by which the movement proselytised its Krishna conscious beliefs. In fact, Prabhupada continually emphasised that book distribution represented *the* means to spread Krishna Consciousness in America and world-wide. Secondly, and of equal importance, *sankirtan* supported ISKCON's communities financially. Without a work force of dedicated *sankirtan* devotees, ISKCON's missionary goals and financial stability were placed in jeopardy. The solution rested with the *gurukula* because it relieved parents of the burdens of childcare, thus affording them the opportunity to work full-time *sankirtan.* Put differently, the *gurukula* allowed ISKCON's leaders to reclaim householders for *sankirtan,* a move that only grew in importance as ISKCON's North American communities faced deepening economic decline by the late 1970s (Rochford 1985, 1995c). As one parent described,

We got the children, the bothersome children from the leader's perspective, we got them out of the way by putting them in the *gurukula.* Now the adults could do some work. Go out on *sankirtan.* This was a very present issue, freeing up the parents. (Interview 1990)

To a leadership concerned primarily with distributing Prabhupada's books and raising funds, the *gurukula* communalised child care, thus freeing parents to work on behalf of ISKCON and its mission. Not surprisingly, many of the young people who attended the *gurukula* during this period saw ISKCON's schools in precisely these terms.

I did feel that my mom used the *gurukula* as a convenience for not keeping me around. My mother later told me her authorities strongly encouraged her to put us there so we would not hinder her *sankirtan* service. (Second Generation Survey 1992)

Findings from my 1992-93 Second Generation Survey in North America make this point more forcefully. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of those surveyed (N=87) agreed with the statement, 'The *ashram*

gurukula primarily served the interests of parents and ISKCON, rather than the spiritual and academic needs of children.' One quarter of those surveyed (26%) agreed strongly with the statement.

Freeing parents for *sankirtan* was facilitated by enrolling children in the *gurukula* as early as age three or four, although the majority enrolled at age five. Some ISKCON communities communalised children even earlier, establishing day-care centres for infants and toddlers. One such community was ISKCON's New Vrindaban community, in West Virginia.

Kirtanananda [New Vrindaban's former guru and leader] was very successful because he had a nursery from day one. For those kids born at New Vrindaban, he took the kids and communalised them. They got so much work out of the people in that community. (Interview 1990)

A second generation woman who grew up at New Vrindaban recalls:

[S]oon after Kapila was born . . . the *Guru* of the farm asked her [mother] to go travel and preach in airports, she sadly said 'yes.' Kapila was only three months old when she left him to be brought up by some other lady who lived on the farm. For months she cried at night wondering if he was okay and yet her body could hardly stand any more emotional work after standing nearly twelve hours that day, . . . collecting donations from strangers. (Devi Dasi, K. 1990:14)

An indication of the leadership's motivation in providing child care at New Vrindaban is suggested by a saying used in the community to refer to expectant mothers; 'Dump the load and hit the road.' And to 'hit the road' meant returning to full-time *sankirtan.* While leaders in other ISKCON communities were clearly more subtle and humanistic in their approach, they were no less anxious to return mothers to full-time *sankirtan,* or other work on behalf of the community. For the fact was, women were among the very best *sankirtan* workers in the movement.

Sankirtan represented the foundation of ISKCON's sectarian world, and the movement's *sannyasi* elite took measures to assure that it was protected against the presumed deleterious effects associated with the expansion of marriage and family life. While initially established to spiritually educate ISKCON's children, the *gurukula* ultimately served the interests of ISKCON's missionary activity, and the need to raise money in support of the movement's communal way of life. One long-time teacher from this era underscores the primary interest of ISKCON's *sannyasi* leadership.

And you had to have a vision for the future to even understand why you were doing this [the *gurukula*]. For the teachers this might have been there but for the administration of ISKCON, what it means is that you are paying for a day-care centre. These kids cause trouble wherever they are . . . You are talking about *sannyasis* who are thinking like, 'Get these kids out of here. And look how much money I am having to pay to get these kids out of here. And look at how many devotees have to be there [in the *gurukula*] to get these kids out of the way.' That was the whole psyche surrounding how the school was put together. (Interview 1997)

The importance placed on *sankirtan* by ISKCON's leadership meant that the significance of the *gurukula* rested on its childcare function, rather than as an educational institution. Moreover, as parents faced increasing pressures to engage in *sankirtan* many had little ability to commit time to the needs of their children. Children and family life threatened ISKCON's purpose as a missionary movement, but each also threatened the financial base upon which the authority of the leadership rested.

Lack of Institutional Support for Gurukula

Given the leadership's view of *gurukula* and its purposes, it failed to provide the support necessary to maintain an educational institution. Throughout its existence the *gurukula* operated with insufficient staffing, funding and oversight. I want to suggest now that in failing to provide the resources and management necessary to maintain the *gurukula,* it became an institution defined by neglect, isolation and marginalisation. Because of these qualities, the *gurukula* also became a context in which ISKCON's children became subject to abuse.

From the inception of the gurukula system in Dallas it faced a shortage of trained and qualified staff to serve as academic and ashram teachers. In American culture we have a saying, 'Those who can't do otherwise, teach.' ISKCON, during the 1970s and 1980s, had its equivalent, 'Those who can't do *sankirtan,* work in the *gurukula*.' As a *gurukula* teacher of some twenty years commented, 'The *gurukula* was the dumping ground as far as getting staff went. When devotees couldn't do other things like going on *sankirtan* they were sent to work in the *gurukula*.' The result was that outside of a limited number of professional academic teachers, ISKCON's schools were staffed by devotees untrained and generally ill-prepared to take on the demands of working with children. Moreover, because there was little or no status attached to working in the *gurukula,* many devotees had little or no desire to be there. Success at *sankirtan* brought individual recognition within the devotee community, working with children, invisibility and a loss of status.[23] As one ISKCON parent commented.

I was concerned that the teachers were often selected based on their inability to do *sankirtan,* rather than because they loved children and education. As far as I could see, there were no mandatory classes in childhood development for teachers or staff either. How could anyone expect those in charge to know what was normal or abnormal behaviours and how it should be dealt with? (Anonymous a 1996)

As a former *gurukula* teacher and Headmaster makes clear, it was assumed that any devotee who was steady in his or her spiritual practice was qualified to work in the *gurukula.* Yet as he further explains, few were able to stand up to the everyday demands of working with children.

There were very few qualified or experienced teachers in the early *Gurukula* at Dallas . . . At that time in ISKCON in general there was a hubris about individual qualification. It was thought that a devotee who was chanting his rounds was empowered to do anything and that he did not need any special training. The task of dealing with a hundred children or so from morning to night on tough schedule through *mangal arati* to bedtime was too much for most of them. (Brzezinski 1997)

As the above remarks make clear, working in the *gurukula* was stressful, especially for an untrained staff lacking sufficient interest in children. This was all the more so in instances where a single *ashram* teacher was responsible for the care of 20 or more children. These conditions contributed directly to acts of child abuse by teachers. As one teacher from this era observes, 'There may have been some [teachers involved in abusing children] who were actually diabolical. But in most cases it was a lack of expertise, lack of training, lack of assistance, lack of knowing who to go to.' And, as the former Headmaster of one school, described,

Therefore, we have someone like [name of *ashram* teacher] who is put into a situation in which he does not belong. It is so stressful. So therefore a kid gets out of line-what to speak of his other transgressions-and he pushes him hard and the kid falls on the floor and breaks his arm. And that's what happened. (Interview 1997)

But while finding people capable of working in the *gurukula* was an ongoing problem, retaining them represented another. Many second generation youth tell of having as many as 15, 20, or more, *ashram*-teachers during their time in the *gurukula.* Eight in ten (82%) of the second generation youth surveyed in 1991-92 agree that, 'The major reason for the demise of the *ashram*-based *gurukulas* was the lack of qualified teachers.' The former Headmaster quoted above suggests one reason why.

At one point they sent all the kids from [region of the country] to our school in Lake Huntington. So now we have this big regional school. Then at one point [*guru* from that region] decides that he needs the *ashram* teacher [for the oldest boys] to do some other service . . . So I call him [*guru*] and say, 'Listen there is no one but me. I am the Headmaster. I'm already doing this and that. Now I am going to have to do the *ashram*. There is nobody here that can do it.' He just said, 'Well you are just going to have to get somebody. Good-bye.' Pull the man out so now we have 16 older boys who don't have a teacher. What to do? (Interview 1997)

The effect of an ever-changing complement of *gurukula* teachers and staff meant that the children were unable to build and sustain meaningful and perhaps loving relationships with their adult caregivers. This very fact only increased the likelihood that children might be neglected and/or abused.24

The question of 'What to do?' only intensified as ISKCON in North America faced growing economic decline. By 1982, the level of ISKCON's book distribution in North America was less than half its 1978 peak (Rochford 1985, 1995c). The corresponding drop in *sankirtan* revenues had a devastating effect on ISKCON's communities. It also had a dramatic impact on the *gurukula,* which, even in the best of economic times, faced hardship. As the Headmaster of one school made clear, 'Even at the peak of our movement's resources . . . the *gurukula* was getting barely anything. Anything. And so as soon as there was less to go around it barely got anything at all' (interview, 1997). Below he describes the financial difficulties encountered by the Lake Huntington *gurukula* just prior to its closing in 1986.

More difficult was our financial situation. And what happened. When New York was broken up, Lake Huntington, Long Island, New Jersey, and Manhattan each of these areas was assigned a certain number of collectors, . . . *sankirtan* devotees. Four months after the break-up I was shifted from Long Island to Lake Huntington and I took over the project. Within a few months I became the Headmaster. We had eight *sankirtan* devotees. We were struggling but were making it. But the zone was collapsing [financially]. So the new GBC man . . . came in and took all the *sankirtan* devotees and centralised it. The plan was to just give money to the different temples in the zone. We lost our eight *sankirtan* devotees and we were promised $8 000 a month, which we got for one month. They reduced and reduced the amount until we got $2 100 to pay the mortgage. When we asked what to do they said take more students [thereby gaining more tuitions]. And that's what we did. Until finally it dawned on us that we were killing our teachers and cheating our students. We can't run a school like this. That was the environment we were actually functioning in. 25 (Interview1997)

A final issue here has to do with the apparent lack of oversight the *gurukula* received by ISKCON leaders. While it is true that there was a Minister of Education whose responsibility was to provide guidance and leadership for ISKCON's schools, it appears, nonetheless, that the *gurukula* failed to gain the attention and supervision required. And, without it, the likelihood of child neglect and abuse grew. As one teacher described, the leadership simply placed too little importance on the *gurukula.*

I have come to the conclusion that they [the leadership] aren't going to do anything; at all, not anything. They should have done something twenty years ago, or fifteen years ago. They had plenty of opportunity. They had money. They had man-power. They had Srila Prabhupada right there behind them. Why didn't they take it? I can tell you why they didn't do it. They didn't think it was important. Obviously. (Interview, 1990)

One indication of the leaders' disinterest can be seen in the way ISKCON's renunciate leaders responded when parents complained about the mistreatment of children in the *gurukula.* As a second generation youth recounts:

When I was five and a half years old, I'd been in gurukula (Dallas) since its insemination (about three years). My dad had gone to Dallas (against the wishes of his temple authority who only cared about my dad's money-making ability on *sankirtan*) after discovering bruises all over my body on a *Rathayatra* [festival] visit. After much discussion with the school authority he found that he could not get them to change the policy of daily beatings. He removed me from the school. Very disillusioned he nearly left ISKCON. On hearing that Prabhupada would be in LA, we went there. When Prabhupada saw me he asked why I was not in the *gurukula.* My father told him that he'd removed me because of the daily beatings. Prabhupada told him that I belonged in *gurukula* and that if my dad had a problem with the treatment he should work to resolve it . . . [Prabhupada] did nothing to resolve the situation. Instead of going himself or sending one of his top people to resolve the problems he sent my dad who had never had any power. Needless to say when my dad returned to Dallas nobody listened to him. If a problem arose at some temple or other, Prabhupada was more than willing to go or send someone effective to handle the situation, but for the kids he sent my dad who was effective at getting people to give him money. (Anonymous b 1996) (See footnote 26 for further discussion of Prabhupada's response to allegations of child abuse.)

After Prabhupada's death, the response of the newly appointed *gurus* was apparently much the same.

Kutila [woman gurukula teacher] was furious when she saw the cuts and beating marks and she ran to tell Bhaktipada who coolly said, 'Don't complain, do something about it, if you think you can do any better.' (Devi Dasi, K. 1990:1)

Initially the leadership's disinterest in the gurukula stemmed from an overriding concern with maintaining and indeed expanding *sankirtan.* Yet with Prabhupada's death in November, 1977, however, ISKCON faced years of succession problems that preoccupied the movement as a whole. As ISKCON's newly appointed *gurus* struggled to establish their own religious and political authority, and attract disciples, householders and their children lost further relevance organisationally (Rochford 1995a). This became all the more so in the early 1980s as book distribution virtually collapsed in North America, and parents were pushed outside of ISKCON's communities to find employment in support of themselves and their families (see Rochford 1997). (For a treatment of ISKCON's succession problems, see Rochford 1985: 221-55, 1998a. On how acceptance or rejection of ISKCON leaders' authority influences types and levels of ISKCON involvement, see Rochford 1995a.)

Exclusion of Parents from the Gurukula

One potential safeguard against child abuse rested with parental involvement and oversight of the *gurukula.* If children were being abused and neglected there is reason to believe that involved parents might well have become aware and taken corrective actions. Yet in most instances this did not

happen, and when it did, parental concerns were often ignored or dismissed, as we saw in the previous section. The fact was parents were actively discouraged from becoming involved in the *gurukula,* and, thereby, from the day-to-day lives of their children.

Prabhupada himself discouraged parent involvement in the *gurukula.* He reasoned that the best interests of ISKCON's children were served by communalising them within the context of the *gurukula.* Away from parental influence, a child would more readily take to a life of spiritual practice and renunciation. As Prabhupada stated in a 1973 letter, 'Regarding *gurukula,* it is not required that parents live there with their children. We can take care of children, but not the parents' (1992:794). While relinquishing their children to the *gurukula* proved difficult for many parents, they took solace in the knowledge that their children were advancing spiritually.

The idea that parents represented a threat to the spiritual lives of children was widely promoted throughout ISKCON, and was accepted by many devotee parents. As we have seen, ISKCON's leadership promoted this idea as a means to reclaim parents for *sankirtan.* Accepting the 'ideological work' (Berger 1981; Rochford 1985:191-220) of the leadership, many parents maintained minimal contact with their children. In fact, it appears that in some cases parents essentially abandoned their children to the *gurukula.* Teachers, too, considered parents as threats to the spiritual well-being of their children. In the words of one teacher:

There is a problem with parents. The experience that we have had in *gurukula* is that much of the training that you are trying to give the child is lost when the child is with the parents. Because the parent is not maintaining the same standards, or doesn't have the same abilities, whatever it is . . . And you knew as a teacher that when you sent a kid home for three and a half weeks [for vacation] you knew you were going to get a basket case when they came back. (Interview 1997)

As this teacher further suggests, this way of thinking influenced strongly how those working in the *gurukula* treated parents.

And so maybe unfortunately, in retrospect, the wrong attitude was conveyed about parents. The parents are a problem; keep the parents away, all of that. (Interview 1997)

The larger consequence of these ideas was the virtual exclusion of parents from the *gurukula.* Parental involvement with their children was largely unwelcome. Moreover, when children did return to their parents' home community for school vacations, these visits very often afforded limited opportunities for parent and child to spend time together. As one mother and teacher explained:

You have to remember that parents didn't have houses. They didn't have their own place. We never had a house . . . So when you say a kid went home, that's a euphemism. He went to the temple. His mother had service that she was doing all along. His father had service that he was doing all along. And now all of a sudden this kid is there. So now what does he do? He hangs around the temple. He gets stepped on by people as they are coming up the stairs [into the temple] . . . And he wants his mother's attention when she is cooking for the deities. The fact is no one took care of the kids . . . The kid did whatever he did. And the parents just kept on doing whatever it was they were doing. (Interview 1997)

A second generation devotee recounts her vacations from school and the burden these visits placed on her and other family members.

When I got older, I started to spend my vacations with my *Mata.* But vacation time for me was not vacation time for her. For Kapila [her brother] and I, she would get a motel room every night but her service to the temple still came first. Only after she had chanted all of her rounds without interruption and she had collected at least three hundred dollars did Kapila and I get to do anything. We usually would sit for six hours in the cold van parked outside a shopping mall and wait for her. Finally she would finish, and even though her back was aching and her shoulders were heavy from carrying a ninety pound bag of books all day, she somehow would find the energy to sneak us into a nearby pool and then take us to ice cream. But most of the time we didn't see how tired she really was and so, whining and complaining about how little attention we got, we sometimes drove her to tears. (Devi Dasi, K. 1990:12)

The *gurukulas* in India undertook what can only be described as extreme efforts to further isolate children from their parents. In the Vrindavan *gurukula* it appears that the administration of the school monitored, and sometimes censured, letters written by students to their parents. When a student attempted to write his parents about the negligent and abusive conditions found at the school, he was reprimanded and told to re-write his letter.

X: I used to write letters to my mom, during the rough times, saying, 'Get me out of here.' And he [school administrator] read them and would tear'em up and make me write new ones.
XX: He did that to me too. (Group Interview, 1993)

In other cases, students in the Vrindavan *gurukula* avoided writing to their parents about the conditions found at the school because they assumed their letters would be read by the administration, or, as in the case below, they feared their parents would reject allegations of abuse. As one mother explained.

My son complains bitterly about what went on in Vrindavan. Of course I have asked him a million times why he didn't tell me what was going on. Because I used to go and visit him every year. And he wouldn't say anything to me. He would just give me his shopping list. When I asked him in retrospect why didn't you tell me he just said, 'Because you wouldn't believe me.' . . . He assumed I wouldn't believe him. And he assumed his letters would be censured. And so he never wrote anything that would cause him to be censured. (Interview 1997)27

In still other instances the administration of the school in Vrindavan apparently sought to hide the abuse taking place there during the early 1980s.

He [Headmaster] knowingly covered-up . . . There are two or three incidents that I can think of where I was beaten or something happened to me. He would take me into his room and he'd lock me in there for like a day with him and he was like constantly preaching to me and so finally I just went 'Okay! I won't say anything to anybody. It didn't happen!' And he would let me out of the room. (Interview 1993)28

On final analysis it seems clear that the *gurukula* became an institution unto itself, in Goffman's (1961) terms, a 'total institution.' Within the *gurukula* children remained largely separate from the day-to-day lives of their parents, and, very often, from ISKCON community life more generally. From an institution meant to train and educate, the *gurukula* instead became the functional equivalent of an orphanage. As one teacher from this period remarked.

The whole scenario set up an orphanage . . . Even though you have kids with parents. Because we didn't allow the parents to become part of their children's lives. (Interview 1997)

Avoiding Child Abuse: Resources and Victimisation

Although my focus thus far has sought to understand a number of factors and processes that contributed to child abuse within ISKCON's schools, I now want to consider why some young people did not experience abuse and neglect. As I have already suggested, a proportion of the students who attended the *gurukula* during the 1970s and 1980s escaped being victims of child abuse. This happened despite the fact that in some cases their classmates were targeted for abuse, while they were spared.

Perhaps the most obvious factor in whether a child was abused or not, related to the school environment itself. It seems that some *gurukulas* experienced far less child abuse, while others were defined by neglect and abuse. To a significant degree, where a student was sent to *gurukula* had a profound influence on whether he or she became targets of abuse. Perhaps the most vivid example is provided by the schools in India, where abuse and neglect were, by all reports, commonplace. Since only adolescent boys were sent to the schools in India they faced far more abuse than their female counterparts. In the United States several of ISKCON's schools also experienced relatively high levels of child abuse (for example, Dallas, Seattle, New Vrindaban), whereas others experienced considerably less (for example, Bhaktivedanta Village, California; New Talavan, Mississippi). It appears also that child abuse was far less prevalent in Europe and Australia than in either India or North America.

But what explains these differences? I think several things. First some schools had a more stable *gurukula* staff-both academic and *ashram* teachers, as well as the school's administration. While teachers in these schools may have been more devoted to working in the *gurukula,* they also were able to establish enduring and caring relationships with the children they worked with. Two former *gurukula* students suggest why a particular school proved especially positive for them in ways that highlight the role of the teacher.

It was M[other] Kutila who changed our lives and who let us know that someone could love us; that devotees *did* love one another. I swear for the first week I thought I was a princess. We were never hit any more, we had all new clothes, our own bags, filled with our own soap, brushes and hot water showers. It was then that I knew I had a mother and father, they were Kutila and Kuladri (her husband). (Author's emphasis; Devi Dasi, K. 1990:1).

One of the high points of my life in *gurukula* was because the teacher, (name), took us in as his sons (original Vedic standard) and treated us like adults. We had incredible camaraderie as well as growth-including fitness, mental strength, creativity and Krishna Consciousness. (Second Generation Survey 1992-93)

A second factor that played an especially important role in limiting the possibility of abuse had to do with the level of parental involvement in the *gurukula.* While the leadership and the *gurukula* staff each pressured against parental involvement, some parents found ways to remain involved nonetheless. In some cases this was made easier as parents resided in the same community as their child/children's *gurukula.* In other cases parents wrote letters, made phone calls, and visited their child or children on a regular basis.

The sad irony is that parents who accepted the ideological justifications offered by the leadership and chose to remain 'detached' and minimally involved in the lives of their children, effectively left them vulnerable to neglect and abuse. Simply put, children without involved parents became ready victims for abusers. As one second generation devotee concluded.

Usually, if our parents showed an interest in us, by sending us mail and gifts, visiting us, and maintaining a tight bond, the abusive teachers would view that child as a liability to them. (Hickey and Charnell, 1997)

To assure regular involvement with their children, some parents-especially mothers-chose to work in the *gurukula* as teachers. As the Headmaster of one school commented, 'Practically every teacher had their children in the school. And that was an important factor [limiting the potential for abuse] that those parents' eyes were there. It was important.' As this suggests, the presence of parents working in the *gurukula* served to protect all children against abuse, not simply the child of the teacher. Because mothers were much more likely than fathers to have a position in the *gurukula,* girls more so than boys gained parental protection against abuse. As one woman teacher recounts:

With my daughter it was a little different because I had some ability and determination to keep my daughters with me. So I was a teacher and I taught my daughters, or at least I knew where my daughters were being taught. But with my son it wasn't allowed. He had to be removed from my presence. (Interview 1997)

A child also gained protection against abuse if he or she had a male parent who was an ISKCON leader, or was otherwise recognised as important and influential within the movement. For an abuser, these children presented substantial risks and thereby were less likely to be targeted. Even in India, where abuse was more commonplace, children with influential fathers normally escaped being targets of abuse. As one mother whose son spent years at a *gurukula* in India reported.

My son tells me that he didn't get abused. And it's funny isn't it in light of his [activism over the abuse issue]. But this is because of who his father was [a member of the GBC].29 (Interview 1997)

For children whose parents remained largely uninvolved in their lives, there was one available means to create a protective resource against abuse. Again, India was the context. Apparently adolescent boys in the *gurukula* were less subject to abuse if they received initiation from one of ISKCON's *gurus.* In effect, initiation created an interested and powerful ally who could expose or punish an abuser. Initiation thus served as a means to create an interested party in the absence of involved and/or influential parents.

Conclusion

Marriage and family life have played a central role in the development of religious communities and institutions (Berger 1969:133; Dobbelaere 1987; Foster 1991; Kanter 1972:86-92, 1973). Kanter's investigation of 19th century American communities demonstrated that successful utopian communities-religious and secular-controlled or otherwise regulated two-person intimacy and family relationships. Only by renouncing couple and family relationships could intimacy become a collective good serving the interests of the community as a whole. As such, utopian communities face the task of building and maintaining relational structures 'which do not compete with the community for emotional fulfilment' (Kanter 1972:91).

Beginning in the 1970s ISKCON sought increasingly to control marriage and family life. This involved several processes: First, marriage itself was redefined such that it became symbolic of spiritual weakness, an institution suited only for those unable to control their sexual desires. Secondly, in order to educate children separate from their parents, Prabhupada established the *gurukula.* While founded

initially as an educational institution, the *gurukula* also freed parents to work full-time on behalf of ISKCON and its communities. For many parents this involved performing *sankirtan*.30

In important respects *sankirtan* and children represent interrelated and pivotal issues in ISKCON's North American and world-wide development. To ISKCON's largely *sannyasi* leadership, *sankirtan* represented the means by which the movement could fulfil its missionary objectives. It served too, to bring substantial resources into ISKCON's communities during the 1970s (Rochford 1985:171-89). Children, on the other hand, represented a potential threat to each of these objectives. With a decline in recruitment beginning as early as 1974 in North America (Rochford 1985:278), ISKCON leaned ever harder on householders to perform *sankirtan.* The result was the purpose of the *gurukula* organisationally came to rest on its ability to provide childcare. Unfortunately, as I have described, the *gurukula* became an institution defined by neglect and the abuse of children.

Prior to widespread allegations of child abuse, ISKCON represented what Shupe (1995) refers to as a 'trusted hierarchy.' Religious groups and organisations are distinct from their secular counterparts precisely because 'those occupying lower statuses in religious organisations trust or believe in the good intentions, nonselfish motives, benevolence, and spiritual insights/wisdom of those in the upper echelons (and often are encouraged or admonished to do so)' (italics in the original, Shupe 1995:29). Indeed parents often socialise their children to respect the religious authority of church leaders, thus perpetuating the very basis of trust within religious organisations. It was such unquestioned trust in the leadership, and in ISKCON as a whole, that led parents to readily assume that their children were being properly educated and cared for in the *gurukula.* As we have seen, this very assumption helped create opportunity structures facilitating abuse and exploitation (see Krebs 1998; Shupe 1995 for other examples).

As one might expect, child abuse affects far more people than those directly victimised. As Pullen suggests 'religious congregations can collectively share psychological, emotional, and spiritual trauma when faced with the reality that their most vulnerable members have been sexually violated by individuals the community invested with authority' (1998:68). Among members of a support group formed in response to clerical sexual abuse of children in California, Pullen found members making reference to their own 'spiritual abuse.' Although not directly abused themselves, group members nonetheless expressed 'that their trust and faith in the credibility and integrity of their religious leaders had been shattered' (1998:68-9). Nason-Clark (1998) found much the same response among female congregants in the aftermath of child sexual abuse by Church officials in Canada. In organisational terms, child abuse and malfeasance by clergy precipitates a crisis of trust among rank and file members. As Seligman argues the 'existence of trust is an essential component of all enduring social relationships' (1997:13) and is indeed necessary for the continuation of any social order.

The betrayal of trust represented by child abuse has challenged, if not undermined, the ISKCON commitment of many first and second generation members alike. Child abuse stands as a powerful symbol of the failure of ISKCON's leadership, and that form of social organisation (that is, communalism) which supported its political and spiritual authority. As trust gave way to anger and doubt, householders became less willing to commit their lives to ISKCON as they had in the past. Needless to say, many second generation devotees also rejected their ISKCON collective identity. This fact, perhaps more than any other, accounts for the fragmentation and decline of ISKCON in North America. (But see Rochford 1997 for another interpretation). In failing to maintain a safe and healthy environment for the

movement's most vulnerable members, ISKCON faced being discredited from within, and a corresponding loss of legitimacy in the eyes of many long-time members. Many abandoned ISKCON, while others joined an emerging congregation of independent householders and their families residing on the margins of ISKCON's North American communities. As this implies, the tragedy of child abuse has shaped, and continues to shape, the career of ISKCON as a religious organisation newly arrived on the North American Scene.

Footnotes and References

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Anonymous b. 1996. Letter, *VOICE* web site (December 28)

Footnotes

1. This article has been painful to write, and certainly many readers will feel distressed by the story told here. Many past and present ISKCON members-second generation devotees and their parents alike- have personally been touched by child abuse. And, as I suggest here, ISKCON's larger membership has also been affected. One result is that child abuse has become an issue of growing political significance within ISKCON and the broader movement. While I am not so naive as to believe that this paper will not become part of this ongoing politic, my attempt here is to maintain a sociological stance to the issue. Yet it seems likely that some readers will find reason to charge me with partisanship of one sort or another, and perhaps even dismiss what is said here (see for example, Rochford 1992). I would only ask that devotees in and outside of ISKCON who care deeply about this issue do something constructive to aid young adults abused as children within ISKCON's schools. In need of support too are the largely forgotten parents, who often suffer in silence, riddled with guilt because of what happened to their children.

2. I had planned to address the ongoing efforts by ISKCON authorities to address the problem of child abuse, including assistance for abuse victims, child protection policies, and so forth. Because of the length of the present article this did not prove feasible. See Bharata Shrestha Das in this volume for details of the response that members of ISKCON made in the 1990s towards the problem of child abuse.

3. Yet there is no reason to assume that child abuse is absent from ISKCON's communities. To the extent it does exist, it is far more likely to occur within the context of nuclear family life. Thus child abuse within ISKCON today likely mirrors causes and patterns found within mainstream cultures.

4. While research and official statistics demonstrate that child abuse has been on the rise, the question of why remains less certain. Surprisingly, before the 1960s there were no laws which prohibited child abuse in the United States (Pfohl 1985:309). Yet within a few short years all fifty states 'discovered' the problem and passed legislation to control it (Pfhol 1985:309). The question is why, then? Violence against children was hardly new in the 1960s. One researcher has shown that 'child abuse' only gained legal status as the medical profession-specifically paediatric radiology-was able to 'break the legal hold that parents held over children' (Pfohl 1977, 1985:309). Thus the legal basis of child abuse is derived from professional expertise and power. Beating a troublesome child, an act taken for granted by many parents even a single generation ago, is now often considered 'abusive', if not illegal behaviour. Obviously these issues are critical to understanding child abuse as a social problem. Just as obviously, such a treatment goes well beyond the scope of the present paper. (For a social constructionist account of religion and child abuse, see Jenkins 1996.)

5. Some researchers have expressed concern that data from the American Association for Protecting Children (AAPC) overstates the amount of child abuse in the USA. This is because the AAPC data fails to account for duplicate reports involving a single child. In counting the total number of abuse *reports* these data overstate the actual number of abuse cases. Costin et al. (1996:136) assert that the result is a 20% inflation of the actual incidence rate. This conclusion seems born out by a study conducted by Westat (1981) who found an incidence rate of child abuse in the USA of 22.6 per 1 000 children. By contrast the AAPC incidence rate was 32.8 per 1 000 children, 23% above the Westat figure (Costin et al. 1996:136).

6. Defining what we mean by child abuse and child neglect is an important yet difficult task. Moreover, how we use the term 'child abuse' in ordinary language often differs from legal and social science definitions. What one person defines as physical abuse, for example, another may view as necessary discipline for an unruly child. Physical abuse is often defined as inflicting physical injury by other than accidental means (Costin et al. 1996:5). Corporal punishment by contrast is 'the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not injury' (Straus 1994:4). Physical abuse and corporal punishment involve the use of violence in that both *intend* to cause pain and suffering (Straus 1994:7). Child sexual abuse involves a number of specific acts from fondling a child's sexual organs, vaginal intercourse and sodomy (including oral and anal intercourse). It may also involve an adult forcing a child to fondle his or her sexual organs and child pornography. Psychological abuse involves the attempt to inflict 'mental or emotional injury that results in the child's physical or emotional deterioration' (Costin et al. 1996:5). Child neglect is even a more ambiguous concept to define. Typically, a neglected child is one that lacks proper care and supervision from a parent or adult, or where the environment represents a threat to his or her health (Costin et al. 1996:5). Apart from these formal definitions there is another offered by Rabbi Lawrence S. Kushner. While he speaks specifically about 'parents' we could substitute 'adult'. In his address on the occasion of Yom Kippur, he argues that child abuse 'is when parents deliberately treat children as objects so as to gratify themselves. It is using a child for one's own pleasure, without regard to the child as an autonomous person . . . using them as lightening rods for our own misdirected hostility, manipulating their trust and love for our gratification against their will . . . The child is deprived of personhood, autonomy, spontaneity, the ability to respond freely and appropriately, sense of self worth and holy uniqueness' (1990:7).

7. Medical neglect of children has also been identified as a form of abuse associated with religion. The Jehovah's Witnesses, who do not believe in blood transfusions, and Christian Scientists, who often favour prayer over medical expertise and procedures, are perhaps the two most well known examples (Bottoms et al. 1995:88). Citing First Amendment protections against government intrusion in religion, these, and other religious groups, have generally retained the right to refuse medical treatment. This trend may be changing however as some states have

successfully challenged these legal exemptions, especially when a child's life is placed at risk. (See for example, Skolnick 1994, on changes in Massachusetts' exemption laws following the death of two and a half year old Robyn Twitchell who died of a bowel obstruction after his Christian Science parents denied him treatment.)

8. These figures should be viewed with a certain amount of suspicion, however. Information collected relied heavily on individuals already undergoing therapy. Cases included were therefore selective, and the findings reported *un*representative. It is worth noting however the relatively large number of sex abuse cases for both celibate and non-celibate clergy. This questions the view that the Church's policy of celibacy explains paedophilia among Catholic priests (see for example, Berry 1992).

9. The noted author, sociologist and Catholic priest, Andrew Greely, wrote the following in the foreward to Jason Berry's book *Lead Us Not into Temptation: Catholic priests and the sexual abuse of children*: 'Bishops have with what seems like programmed consistency tried to hide, cover up, bribe, stonewall; often they have sent back into parishes men whom they knew to be a danger to the faithful . . . Catholicism will survive, but that will be despite the present leadership and not because of them' (1992:xiiv-xiv).

10. In 1979 I served as a teacher's assistant for a boy's *ashram* at the Los Angeles *gurukula.* In 1989, thinking about the young boys who I often took to the park and beach, I began an investigation of ISKCON's second generation. I began by interviewing seventy first-generation parents in four ISKCON communities in the USA Over the past eight years I have also interviewed dozens of second generation youth about their experiences in the *gurukula.* In 1992-3 I conducted a non-random survey of second generation youth in North America (N=87). I have also attended four *gurukula* reunions in Los Angeles and at New Vrindaban, and served as a member of ISKCON's North American Board of Education.

11. It was assumed that adolescent girls would marry at an early age and hence none were sent to India for further schooling. The rather 'primitive' living conditions in India also were deemed unsuitable for adolescent girls. At ISKCON's New Vrindaban community in West Virginia, for example, it was not uncommon for girls as young as thirteen to be married or betrothed in the late 1970s. When many of these marriages failed, and girls and their parents began to resist the idea of early marriage, adolescent girls began attending local public schools. Lacking secondary schools for girls within ISKCON, and with few other acceptable alternatives such as home schooling, schooling children outside became a solution, even if it was not always a preferred one. (For a discussion of how attending state-supported secondary schools has influenced the collective identity and religious involvements of ISKCON youth in North America, see Rochford

forthcoming.)

12. In the midst of writing this article the teacher and Headmaster of the Vaisnava School for Boys in Alachua, Florida, was accused of sexually molesting four of his former students some 10 years ago. He admitted his sexual misconduct and left the ISKCON community in Alachua. The case was investigated by Florida State officials, as well as by the Alachua ISKCON community and ISKCON's Governing Body Commission (GBC). The school now only accepts day students, having disbanded its *ashram* in response to the molestation charges (Das, N. et al. 1998).

13. Relying on estimates of child abuse is especially tricky. For the fact is child abuse and children in general represent ongoing social and political issues within ISKCON. Dedicated 'moral entrepreneurs' (Becker 1963) are actively at work attempting to make child abuse and the plight of ISKCON's children a publicly defined social problem. As one might expect, many of those involved are young adults who attended the *gurukula.* Many were themselves abused. While opposition within ISKCON appears to be lessening, a few leaders and some other ISKCON members continue to argue that child abuse was only a minor and isolated problem involving relatively few children. I raise these issues here not to in any way diminish the seriousness of the abuse that took place. Rather, I want to underscore the fact that no one knows with any degree of precision how extensive child abuse actually was. Obviously, systematic research on this question is long overdue.

14. The reader will note that normally individual's names are avoided in order to maintain the anonymity of my interviewees. In a limited number of instances, where I quote from *published* sources, names are used, including the author's. However, in every case, I avoid using names of alleged abusers in published and unpublished sources, including the VOICE Web Page. The latter source is an internet site established by ex-*gurukula* students to expose the child abuse that they and their peers suffered. This web site has become very controversial within ISKCON. Because ISKCON leaders are concerned about the adverse public relations impact of VOICE, the latter has exerted considerable pressure on the leadership to respond constructively to the problem of child abuse in general, and to the young people abused as children.

15. It appears that sexual abuse of children was not limited to teachers and others working within the *gurukula.* There are reports that single renunciate men (*brahmacaris*) were involved in molesting children in India (Brzezinski 1997). Allegations also persist that some male leaders associated with the Mayapur, India, *gurukula* were involved in sexually abusing children (Brzezinski 1997; Prabhupada Anti-defamation Association 1993).

16. This situation contrasts sharply with other groups that have communalised children and child-rearing. In the Oneida community, founded in northern New York during mid-1800s by John Humphrey Noyes, children were also raised separate from their parents in a community school. Yet as Kephart explains this system of communal child-rearing was based on 'ample affection and kindness . . . [and] that childhood in the Old Community was a happy and exhilarating experience' (1963:268). This suggests that the communalisation of children and child-rearing is not in itself neglectful or abusive. (For a discussion of children in the Kibbutzim, see Spiro 1958; Talmon 1973.)

17. There is a fourth factor that I have been forced to forego considering here because of limitations of space. This involves a selective understanding of Prabhupada's views on disciplining children held by some teachers and others working in the *gurukula.* Simply put, some teachers felt that corporal punishment was fully sanctioned by Prabhupada as a means to deal with unruly children. And it appears that there is some evidence to support such a conclusion. Yet, a close inspection of Prabhupada's ideas on child discipline suggests that overall he was not in favour of physical punishment.
    It is worth noting however that Prabhupada's letters and conversations, now widely available from ISKCON's Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, were not available to any great degree during this period. Most members of ISKCON, including *gurukula* teachers, had limited and certainly incomplete information concerning Prabhupada's views on child discipline and other issues.

18. Ravindra Svarupa dasa (1994) states that Prabhupada refused to sanction any further marriages beginning in 1974. His 1972 letter suggests the decision came earlier, although it is possible that Prabhupada did not actively withdraw from marital concerns until sometime after the letter was written.

19. The findings reported should be taken as reasonable estimates rather than precise figures. Neither the 1980 or the 1991-2 surveys were based upon probability samples.

20. Prabhupada provided somewhat mixed messages on the spiritual status of householders. He often reminded his disciples that the entanglements associated with marriage and family made it 'difficult to make any progress in Krishna Consciousness' (Prabhupada 1992:852). The spiritual ideal therefore was to remain an unmarried renunciate. Yet Prabhupada also said that,

    . . . if you cannot [avoid sex life], then get yourself married, live with wife, but have sex only for progeny. Not for sense enjoyment. Therefore even [if] one is married, then the husband is also

called *brahmacari.* Even though he is *grihastha* [householder]. And wife is called chaste (quoted in Devi Dasi, U. 1992:6).

21. This attitude continues to the present day. ISKCON's leaders remain hesitant to engage issues relating to children and family life, claiming that neither is the proper domain of *sannyasis.* The result is that leaders have essentially turned their collective backs on those issues most salient to the lives of ISKCON's membership. There is evidence that this stance may be changing however. See Das, B. in this volume.

22. During the 1970s and early 1980s it was common for marriage partners to be selected by the leadership with an eye toward reducing the likelihood that a particularly productive *sankirtan* devotee would be lost to his or her local ISKCON community (See Rochford 1997).

23. As one second generation devotee commenting on an earlier draft of this paper said. 'I agree one hundred percent. Every day in the morning, *sankirtan* scores [were] read out to inspire the devotees and praise the individuals who [did] good collecting money, or distributing the most books. Never, never ever [were] the teachers praised, or the kids who [did] good at school.'

24. It also resulted in long-term emotional consequences for some second generation youth. As one reported:

    We don't want to trust anyone else with our feelings, our emotions, our love . . . because we 'know' that that person will just turn around and hurt us . . . They'll leave, they'll reject us . . .'They don't really care about us . . . ' we think. I'm 26 years old. I'm still struggling to trust someone on an emotional, 'feelings' level, and to share my feelings with them. It's hard for me. Damn hard. Being raised by 26 parents/caretakers from age 7 to 15 makes it damn hard to place my love and trust in someone again. (Personal communication 1998)

25. Things became so bad financially that one winter the school ran out of funds for coal to heat the school. Realising that the GBC man responsible for the school was unlikely to help, the Headmaster was forced to call on some of his temple president friends for assistance. As he said, '. . . and they sent money just because they realised "Our friend is in need." '

26. Questioning of Prabhupada's role in the child abuse that occurred in the *gurukula* has only recently surfaced as an issue among second generation youth. In fact the VOICE Web page has given considerable attention to the issue. Those implicating Prabhupada charge that he knew that children were being physically punished, yet failed to directly intervene, or have leaders under him put a stop to such behaviour. It does seem clear from Prabhupada's letters that he was aware, as early as 1972, that physical punishment was being administered to children in the *gurukula* (see for example, Prabhupada 1992:797, 799). There is also evidence suggesting that he did intervene (Prabhupada 1992:797). In a 1972 letter to a disciple who had complained that her child was being mistreated in the *gurukula* in Dallas, Prabhupada wrote:

    But you may be assured that I am always anxious about the welfare of my disciples, so that I am taking steps to rectify the unfortunate situation . . . [C]hildren should not be beaten at all, that I have told. They should simply be shown the stick strongly. So if one cannot manage in that way then he is not fit as a teacher . . . [H]e must have two things, love and education. So if there is beating of child, that will be difficult for him to accept in loving spirit, and when he is old enough he may want to go away-that is the danger (1992:793).

    Yet physical punishment and various forms of abuse only escalated in the years to follow. Some former *gurukula* students believe that Prabhupada ' . . . did not implement appropriate measures to guarantee the safety of children in his movement from his disciples. [And] that the programmes he established and interpretations of his words greatly fostered an environment under which child abuse flourished' (Hickey et al. 1997).

27. This raises another issue about parental involvement. Many of those who attended the *gurukula* had less than close relationships with their parents. This may have dissuaded some from telling their parents of the neglect and abuse present within the *gurukula,* including their own abuse.

28. In one instance parents sending their child to the Vrindavan gurukula developed a strategy to circumvent the monitoring system in place. Responding to rumours about child abuse, and the censuring of student mail by the administration, the parents and child developed a code that would sound the alarm if harmful things were occurring. In a letter to his parents, the student would request pizza be sent to him through the mail. This served as a request to be removed from the school.

29. I am aware of one influential ISKCON member whose son was sexually molested.

30. It may be worth noting here that the state-supported school system in North America and elsewhere also serves the latent function of providing childcare. In my own community some parents were outraged when teachers at the local elementary school wanted to release students early one afternoon a month so they could discuss curriculum. Working parents were upset largely because they had to find alternative child care arrangements.

Jennifer Heinlein is an undergraduate student in Sociology and Anthropology at Middlebury College, Vermont, USA. She helped to research the literature on child abuse for the present paper.