

# Introduction to the IJCAM *Special Edition: Comparative Reflections on Scientology And NXIVM*

Stephen A. Kent

Department of Sociology, University of Alberta

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This special issue of the *International Journal of Coercion, Abuse, and Manipulation* is dedicated to articles about Scientology and NXIVM, so it offers an opportunity to present evidence, in an academic setting, about Scientology's possible influence on Keith Raniere (b. 1960) and the organization that he founded. I provide, therefore, a summary of comments that former members and critics of both groups have made about the (alleged) Scientology influence on NXIVM, and I conclude with my own interpretations of why some apparent similarities exist between the two groups and their creators. I realize that my comments are only preliminary (pending the discovery of new information), and I identify some lacuna in both evidence and interpretation that further researchers may want to pursue.

Since most of these introductory reflections discuss possible *similarities* between Scientology and NXIVM, one must keep in mind that significant *differences* also exist. These differences must not be overlooked or downplayed, since coercion, abuse, and manipulation issues involving the two groups are too serious and complex for unhelpful, simplistic, or one-sided comparisons. At least four differences are significant, and we must not forget them as we undertake comparative analyses.

First, however controversial Scientology's American status as a charity may be, the "Church of Scientology" and dozens of its "related entities" did receive tax exempt charitable status based partly upon its religious claims in 1993 according to a (leaked) document from the Department of

the Treasury (Internal Revenue Service, 1993). By contrast, NXIVM leaders never attempted nor received religious status for the group, instead running the overall organization as a business with only two of its creations, the Ethical Science Foundation and A Cappella Innovations Inc, obtaining nonprofit (501(c)3 status (ProPublica, 2019; ProPublica, 2021).

Second, Keith Raniere and five close associates were convicted for having operated "a racketeering enterprise victimizing women through sex trafficking and other crimes" (Donoghue, 2019a). Robin Boyle-Laisure provides an excellent discussion of the trafficking aspects of this case in her article in this volume (see also her comments in Helmore, 2019). In addition, evidence presented in Raniere's trial identified an extensive spying operation that NXIVM had conducted (Moynihan, 2019e). Scientology's creator, L. Ron Hubbard (1911-1986) also had overseen spying operations against perceived enemies, and court documents named him as an "unindicted co-conspirator" (Banoun, 1979, p. 69; Banoun, 1980, p. 17) in two cases, which lead to the convictions and imprisonment of eleven Scientologists. He was not charged, however, so he was not put on trial. (I will discuss these two trials later in this analysis.) In a separate case, Hubbard was convicted in absentia by a French court in 1978 and sentenced to four years in prison (which he never served) "for making false claims that his methods could cure illness" (Murphy, 2009). Nevertheless, nothing in these three cases that involved Hubbard

suggested that he had anything to do with the sex trade (as did Raniere).

Third, although neither Hubbard nor Scientologists have faced convictions related to sex trafficking and forced labor conspiracy, the organization did undergo an FBI investigation around human trafficking, and it faced a court challenge alleging forced labor. In 2009, former Scientologists Marc and Claire Headley sued Scientology in civil court, accusing it of “labor law violations, human trafficking and forced abortions” (Tobin, 2010). Also, in October of that year, the FBI initiated a “Full Investigation” involving human trafficking into Scientology (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2009, p. 1), which (judging by dates on documents) continued in some diminished form until very early September 2010 ([Federal Bureau of Investigation], 2010). A federal Court of Appeals dismissed the Headley case in early August 2010, and an appeals court upheld the dismissal in July 2012 (*United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit*, 2012).

A number of factors may have contributed to the FBI’s decision not to pursue charges (including data-and-witness-handling problems [Ortega, 2013; Tobin, 2013]), but the early August 2010 court decision dismissing the Headley’s civil case may have put up an insurmountable barrier. The Headleys had been members of Scientology’s full-time work force, the Sea Organization (or Sea Org), and the group’s charitable status gave it certain protections under the law. The judge ruled “that the Sea Org is protected by the First Amendment’s guarantee of free exercise of religion,” so “the Sea Org falls within the ‘ministerial exception’ commonly granted to religious groups in employment cases” (Tobin, 2010; see *Claire Headley v. The Church of Scientology International et al.*, 2010, p. 7).

Moreover, while in the Sea Org, “the Headleys performed religious duties . . .”

(Tobin, 2010; see *United States Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit*, 2012, section IV B). Since the human trafficking allegations in the Headleys’ civil suit failed, FBI officials likely realized that the much higher level of evidence needed in criminal cases doomed their Scientology investigation, especially because of inevitable religious entanglements (Tobin, 2013). In this special edition, Robin Boyle-Laisure almost certainly is correct when she concludes that “*United States v. Raniere* will serve as useful precedent for future prosecutions against cult leaders; the federal trafficking statute continues to provide an appropriate template for future prosecution of other high-demand groups.” (Boyle-Laisure, 2021, p. 30). At least in the United States, however, it seems likely that such prosecutions will be complicated if the groups involved have federal charitable status based to some extent on religious claims.

Fourth and finally, lawyers for co-conspirator Allison Mack (b. 1982) in the NXIVM case used the 2012 Appeal Court’s ruling in the Headleys’ case in an attempt to get the court to dismiss the indictment against her. (Her indictment included one count of sex trafficking involving two women, a second count of sex trafficking conspiracy, and a third count of conspiracy to commit forced labor involving one woman [*United States District Court Eastern District of New York*, 2018a]). In arguing for the dismissal of both the forced labor and trafficking counts, Mack’s lawyers borrowed several arguments from the Headleys’ decision. Their court submission stated that, like the Headleys and “members of the Sea Org, women joined DOS [which was a secret women’s ‘sorority’] voluntarily because they believed participation would be good for them and also gave collateral [i.e., compromising material] voluntarily in order to learn about the organization” (*United States of America v. Keith Raniere, Clare Bronfman, Allison*

Mack, Kathy Russell, Lauren Salzman, and Nancy Salzman, 2018, pp. 15-16, see 24). It also implied that the women in DOS had to do labor, somewhat analogously to what Sea Org members had to perform as part of their duties (*United States of America v. Keith Raniere, Clare Bronfman, Allison Mack, Kathy Russell, Lauren Salzman, and Nancy Salzman*, 2018, pp. 15-16). Moreover, concerns about leaving DOS involving “loss of contact with friends and family,” and being declared a “suppressive person” for doing so “did not qualify as ‘serious harm’ or a cognizable threat” (*United States of America v. Keith Raniere, Clare Bronfman, Allison Mack, Kathy Russell, Lauren Salzman, and Nancy Salzman*, 2018, pp. 15-16). Finally, like the Headleys, women in DOS “had numerous opportunities to leave” (*United States District Court Eastern District of New York*, 2018c, pp. 15-16, see 24). I do not have documents that allow me to determine whether the court ruled on the transferability of concepts from within an American religious context to a secular one, but—less than five months after her lawyers’ legal submission--Mack pleaded “guilty to racketeering and racketeering charges” (Gold and Moynihan, 2019), and “admitted to committing offenses that included extortion and forced labor in her role as a high-ranking member of NXIVM” (Schapiro and Winter, 2019). The court did not examine whether the psychological concept of “trauma-coerced attachment” (Doychak & Raghavan, 2018) may have offered insight into Mack’s apparent willingness to commit such offenses while she herself was simultaneously subject to coercive control (Flowers, 2006; see Dayan, 2018).

Similarly, use of the Headleys’ case in an effort to extract another Raniere co-defendant, Lauren Salzman (b. circa 1977), from trafficking charges (*United States District Court Eastern District of New York*, 2018b, p. 19) came to naught when she

“pleaded guilty to one count of racketeering, and one count of racketeering conspiracy” (Berman, 2019). A reporter explained that “a racketeering conviction requires the accuse participate in at least two indictable acts as part of a criminal enterprise, which in Salzman’s case could be extortion or forced labor and/or something called ‘document servitude’” (Berman, 2019). Document servitude involves illegally controlling people’s legal papers or documents who are in conditions such as sex trafficking, involuntary servitude, forced labor, etc.

The differences between Scientology and NXIVM are, in some ways, quite significant, and one should avoid making imprecise equivalences between the two. They do not cancel, however, what appear to be significant similarities. A very useful framework that facilitates comparison is the one that Susan Raine adopted to analyze NXIVM. She sees it as a “reinventive institution” that promised transformative technologies for self-improvement (Raine, 2021b), but which developed totalistic practices that trapped many members in systems of self- (and organizational-) harm. NXIVM’s public presentation claims of it being a reinventive institution paralleled Scientology’s claim that its purpose “is to make the able more able” (Hubbard, 1961, p. 297; see Scott, 2011, pp. 76-77), and it, too, has been subject to totalistic allegations. These and other apparent similarities are the focus of the remainder of my comments, and to these remaining comments I now turn.

## **Observations About Scientology Influences on NXIVM**

### ***Former NXIVM Members***

Two former NXIVM members specifically mentioned that Raniere read Scientology materials, but these mentions tell us little about what if anything Raniere extracted and transformed for his own purposes. The only *specific* mention of a source by name that

Raniere apparently read of a Scientology document appeared in the autobiography of Raniere's former business-and-life partner, Toni Natalie (b. circa 1960), who reported that he was reading a copy of L. Ron Hubbard's *Dianetics: the Modern Science of Mental Health* in early April 1999, when she was attempting to work with Raniere and Nancy Salzman (b. 1954) on a company (National Health Network) that sold vitamin and mineral supplements (Natalie with Hardin, 2019, p. 107; see 84-85). In Scientology's complicated evolution, members refer to *Dianetics* as "Book One," since it presents Hubbard's initial system of mental health (pseudo-)therapy and serves as the foundation for a counseling-like set of techniques called auditing (which he expanded in the beliefs and practices of Scientology). Pre-dating the formation of Scientology, however, by three years (Kent, 1999a, pp. 108-113), *Dianetics* sheds little if any light on several concepts and techniques that NXIVM observers would state were Scientology borrowings.

Comments from Heidi Hutchinson, who was the sister of a (now-deceased-by-suicide) NXIVM member (Gina Hutchinson), gave a tantalizing account of how Raniere acquired unspecified Scientology materials (Heidi Hutchinson, in Parlato, 2019b). In 1989, Gina was part of Raniere's harem while Heidi was the lead singer in a Los Angeles-based band. The band's agent paid for Heidi to take Scientology courses, and Raniere, upon (presumably) learning about Heidi's Scientology involvement from Gina, solicited Gina's help in getting her sister to provide Scientology documents to him (Parlato, 2019b.) Alas, however, we have no information about which Scientology materials Raniere supposedly acquired, so we cannot determine what Scientology doctrines and policies he may have learned about. Years later, however, Heidi indicated that "he

was fascinated by Scientology," along with several other groups (Bloch et al., 2018a).

A different perspective, however, on Raniere's possible borrowings from Scientology came in an interview with former member Mark Vicente (b. 1965), who for years was Raniere's videographer until he left NXIVM in 2017 and became an activist in exposing Raniere's criminal actions. When asked by Seth Abramovitch of *The Hollywood Reporter*, "did you ever hear Keith [Raniere] talk about L. Ron Hubbard or express that he was using the same blueprint," Vicente replied:

I actually heard him talk negatively about Scientology. He would say that the auditing process actually dissociates people, which I thought was very funny, because in essence, a lot of the processes that were used in NXIVM did exactly that. They dissociated people from different things that they were reacting to. But no, he never spoke about how he got ideas from there. Now, there are people that [sic] knew him that said that he had actually studied Scientology extensively. But I'd certainly never seen any L. Ron Hubbard books, and mostly what he said about Scientology was that it was not as effective as what he was doing in NXIVM and wasn't very good for people. That was his basic story. (Vicente in Abramovitch, 2020 [capitalization in original]; also, Remini and Rinder, 2020, @ 54:20)

Vicente spent hundreds if not thousands of hours with Raniere, so his remarks carry weight. They indicate that Raniere apparently had evaluated at least some of Scientology's auditing techniques, but so many of them exist that we cannot know which one or ones served as the basis of his criticism. The fact that Vicente did not recall seeing any

Scientology books in Raniere's possession is interesting, but his report that Raniere believed more in the effectiveness of his own techniques is to be expected. Regardless of how weak evidence might have been about any direct, documented influence by Scientology on NXIVM, the (proposed) jury questionnaire for Raniere's trial (which was "largely agreed upon by the parties" in the case [Donoghue, 2019b, p. 1]) nevertheless asked, "33. Have you or anyone close to you even taken any Scientology courses? Yes (self)\_\_\_\_\_ Yes (other)\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_ If yes, please describe your (or the other person's) experience?" (*United States v. Raniere et al.*, 2019, pp. 16-17).

### ***Critics Who Claimed NXIVM/Scientology Connections***

Vicente mentioned "people that knew [Raniere] that said he had actually studied Scientology extensively," but he did not say who they were. They probably included Toni Natalie and Heidi Hutchinson. Several critical commentators (some of whom had experiences with NXIVM) were convinced that Scientology influences pervaded Raniere's creation, even if they could not show how, he acquired them. Among the most extensive discussions on the anti-NXIVM web page, *The Frank Report* (run by a former NXIVM public relations manager-turned- critic, Frank Perlato), was a posting written by someone under the pseudonym, John P. Capitalist, who indicated that he was "a Wall Street money manager and IT specialist fascinated by irrationality in all its forms, and Scientology most of all" (Capitalist, 2018a). Capitalist offered six "parallels between NXIVM and Scientology and Their Founders" (Capitalist, 2018a [capitalization in original]), and in doing so demonstrated a thoughtful (even if at times, spotty) set of insights about both groups. I will go through each of them, commenting on and expanding upon them as we go.

**1. Litigation**—Capitalist stated that both groups used "scorched-earth litigation tactics against opponents," and we can add to the ones that he cited. Capitalist linked to an article which suggested that "Mr. Raniere's lawsuits have cost \$50 million in legal fees" (Parlato, 2017; see Capitalist 2018a; Sarah Edmondson, Toni Natalie, et al., v Keith Raniere et al., 2020, pp. 10-12), and that he spent fourteen years in a series of (ultimately unsuccessful) legal actions against anti-cult researcher and NXIVM critic, Rick Ross (b. 1952). In total, wealthy NXIVM member and financial supporter, Clare Bronfman (b. 1979) funded forty NXIVM-related lawsuits, and (as of mid-October 2020) had won only three of them with one still pending (Parlato, 2020). Moreover, Capitalist indicated, Bronfman attempted to get former-member-turned-critic Sarah Edmondson (b. 1977) arrested in Vancouver, British Columbia on false charges of criminal fraud (Edmondson with Gasbarre, 2019, p. 203; see Capitalist, 2018a). Earlier, as part of his years' long litigation campaign against a former lover and business partner (Toni Natalie, who had rejected him), Raniere (and/or his enablers) influenced decisions by both the FBI and New York State Police to investigate her (also on several fabricated allegations [Natalie with Hardin, 2019, pp. 214, 227-228, 229-231]). Turning to Scientology's use of the legal system as a means of harassing opponents, its tactics are sufficiently notorious to have attracted academic attention (e.g., Kent & Willey, 2013, pp. 329-340; Kumar, 1997).

Capitalist could have mentioned that Rick Ross also had been the victim of a successful (but in my opinion, manufactured) Scientology litigation case (Kent & Krebs, 1998, pp. 39-42; Ross, 2014, p. 195). Moreover, after linking to an article about Raniere's lawsuits against journalists (Cohan, 2014; see Capitalist, 2018a),

Capitalist also could have cited the campaign (called Operation Freakout) that L. Ron Hubbard and his organization waged against critical journalist, Paulette Cooper (b. 1942), which involved getting the FBI to investigate her on false bomb-threat allegations (Lane & Kent, 2008, pp. 27-35; Ortega, 2015b, pp. 101-103, 114-121, 165-166, 223-232, 265-271). Future researchers may want to delve into these and other comparisons, but already another NXIVM critic has weighed in on the question of Scientology's influence on Raniere's aggressive litigation strategy.

Nine months after Capitalist presented his sixfold list of Scientology/NXIVM litigation parallels, Frank Parlato produced eight quotes from Hubbard's writings about how he wanted his organization to use litigation against perceived opponents (Parlato, 2019a; see Xiao, 2019). These quotes included passages about: using lawsuits to harass and discourage rather than win; retaliating against people who "attack Scientology;" and finding or manufacturing critics' vulnerabilities for use in neutralizing them. Hubbard also wrote about: labelling an opponent as a "Suppressive Person or group [that] has no rights of any kind," was "fair game," and any "actions taken against them are not punishable." NXIVM critic Rick Ross said that when he first read Raniere's instructions "'about disconnection from suppressive persons . . . , I realized he was copying from Scientology'" (Rick Ross, quoted in Ortega, 2019b). Toni Natalie also figured out that Raniere borrowed the "suppressive" term and concept from Scientology (Natalie, 2019, p. 102), which he overlapped with the negative label, Luciferian (inspired by Lucifer in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*), to mean someone (like her as Raniere saw it) who "disrupt[s] the organization's well-being by committing destructive acts" (United States Patent Application Publication, 2013, p. 1).

Parlato (2019a) continued by quoting Hubbard passages which claimed that Scientology critics actually were criminals against whom the organization was to insist that investigations by authorities were to be carried out about them. Finally, Parlato provided a quote of several sentences in which Hubbard insisted that a commitment to Scientology was "for the duration of the universe," and that Scientologists would "rather have you dead than incapable." (This eternal connection to Scientology plays out in the billion-year contract that the organization's full-time, upper level [Sea Organization] members sign, and which is the subject of Phil Lord's article in this special edition [Lord, 2021]). Parlato concluded that, "after reading some of [Hubbard's] quotes, I suspect Keith Raniere borrowed more than just terminology from Hubbard, but also his strategy for attacking attackers" (Parlato, 2019a). Future researchers who look at these organizational strategies also might want to test Parlato's determination that Raniere went further than Hubbard by wanting to "'even the score' even with people who weren't attacking, but simply trying to leave" (Parlato, 2019a).

**2. Fabricated Background:** The second set of parallels between NXIVM and Scientology that Capitalist (2018a) raised was that the founders of both organizations inflated and fabricated aspects of their backgrounds and credentials. In one of her articles in this special edition, Susan Raine addresses Raniere's inflated and fabricated background claims, including inaccurate ones about his academic achievements. On the February 8, 2011 version of his website, keithraniere.com, he claimed to be a scientist and mathematician (among other achievements), and bragged that, while attending Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, he had "taken most of the graduate-level physics and mathematics courses available at that

time” (Raniere, 2011). In, however, her article in this edition, Raine cites court transcript evidence showing that he had received “an F in advanced ordinary differential equations, an F in theoretical physics, and an F in quantum mechanics,” plus “a D in experimental physics” (*United States of America v. Raniere*, 2019, p. 5131; see Raine, 2021a, p. 44).

Future researchers will want to verify Raniere’s claim that “upon graduation, he became [Rensselaer’s] first triple major, earning degrees in mathematics, biology, and physics with minors in philosophy and psychology, and an expertise in computer science” (Raniere, 2011). One source quotes a Rensselaer spokesperson, Matt McGuire, saying that Raniere’s three degrees were ““an extremely rare accomplishment”” (Matt McGuire, quoted in Keeney, 1988); other sources say that his three degrees remain “unverified” (Myrttil, 2020) or the truth about them are “unknown” (Wick, 2018). (My repeated queries about these claims to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute went unanswered.)

Hubbard, too, made fraudulent claims that he was a physicist, a civil engineer, and a PhD, even lying about having a bachelor’s degree (Kent, 2019). The parallel, however, of credentials-inflation probably does not indicate inspirational borrowing but rather suggests a shared personality disorder between the two founders—a point that we will return to later.

**3. Secrecy of the “Tech”.** The “tech” is the term that both Hubbard and Raniere applied to the techniques that they used in courses that they designed or sanctioned, and Capitalist was aware of both Raniere’s efforts to protect their public circulation and the extensive efforts that Scientology took to keep its own secret doctrines and techniques

off of the internet. Capitalist indicated that “NXIVM students sign extensive non-disclosure agreements, and members of the inner circle give leadership ‘collateral’ that is explicitly intended to be used to keep them from leaving” (Capitalist, 2018a). An alleged breach of a nondisclosure agreement regarding a NXIVM course led to two unsuccessful lawsuits against Rick Ross (Natalie with Hardin, 2019, pp. 160-161), and all NXIVM participants had to “sign a dizzying array of nondisclosure agreements” (Natalie with Hardin, 2019, p. 245). The collateral to which Capitalist referred was (in the words of a former member) “something you valued that you would put on the line when making a commitment” (Edmondson with Gasbarre, 2019, pp. 125, see also pp. 9, 160, 162, 167, 179, 197, 200), but the naked self-photographs that many women had to provide others in the hierarchy were what prosecutors against Raniere called “extortion” (Hong & Piccoli, 2020). (While testifying against Raniere at his trial, former member Mark Vicente sometimes referred to collateral as “blackmail material” [Mark Vicente, quoted in Moynihan 2019b; see Grigoriadis, 2018]).

Both Robin Boyle-Laisure (2021) and Susan Raine (2021a; 2021b) discuss collateral in their respective articles in this special edition, and a somewhat comparative practice in Scientology is auditing, various forms of which involve people identifying traumatic incidents (even supposedly in past lives) that reputedly cause blockages (engrams) that hinder people’s optimal performance. Revealed to, and recorded by, a Scientology auditor, the recounted incidents can be quite personal and traumatic, and the organization’s repeated claim that auditing information remains strictly confidential is belied by its public use of several defectors-turned-critics’ auditing information (Collins, 2018; Tobin & Childs, 2009a). (A practice

similar in many respects to auditing called security checking or sec-checking was an intelligence-gathering procedure that extracted private information without the promise of confidentiality [Kent, 2000b, pp. 38-40.]

Coupled with collateral were penances (involving forms of punishments) for people who failed to meet or honor their commitments (Edmondson with Gassbarre, 2019, p. 125, see also p. 197), and Scientology has a formalized penance program for alleged transgressors who wish to reintegrate themselves into the organization (Straus, 1986). NXIVM leaders used collateral to ensure secrecy about course content, the nature and activities of an abusive female sorority called DOS (Dominus Obsequious Sororium), and the sexual activities in which Raniere engaged with numerous women (BBC, 2019; Grigoriadis, 2018; Meier, 2017). (As his secrets were unraveling in the press, Raniere asserted proof of his own ethics by stating that he had not released any of the DOS collateral [Grigoriadis, 2018], but in 2019, Sarah Edmondson's branding ceremony appeared on a Mexican television news station).

Secrecy within Scientology also attempted to protect course content and related doctrines (Kent & Krebs, 1998, pp. 42-43; Urban, 2017), and was embedded within the organization as dissimulative processes involving "concealment, espionage, and counter-espionage" (Urban, 2006, p. 359). The organization attempts to maintain secrecy partly through the widespread use of nondisclosure agreements and similar contracts—practices that have received academic, legal, and public attention (Lord, 2020; Ortega, 2015a; Papandrea, 2018).

**4. Obsession with "Ethics:"** Capitalist's comparisons between Scientology and NXIVM on the topic of ethics provides little in the way of concrete evidence, other than saying that "Raniere follows the same playbook as Scientology and many other cults, claiming to be 'the most ethical people on the planet'" (Capitalist, 2018a). In Raniere's "12 Point Mission Statement" that participants read at the beginning of the Executive Success Programs courses, each individual pledged "to ethically control as much of the money, wealth and resources of the world as possible within my success plan," also stating that "success, ethics and integrity are co-inspirational" (Raniere, 1998). Eight pages of the Executive Success Program named Advanced Projective Ethics addressed "ethics and self-esteem" (Executive Success Programs, 2000).

Within the organization itself, "members regarded [Raniere] as the most ethical man in the world" (Moynihan, 2019a). The Dalai Lama's visit to Albany in 2009 enhanced that image, during which the revered Buddhist leader presented Raniere with a Tibetan scarf (Grigoriadis, 2018). Also enhancing his image among members was the creation (in 2008) of the Ethical Science Foundation (registered with Clare Bronfman as trustee), whose stated purpose was to study "the effects of a specific and innovative method has on individuals with Tourette's [sic] syndrome and obsessive compulsive disorder" (GuideStar.org., 2020; ProPublica, 2019). (For the moment, we put aside Raniere's development of a peace plan for Mexico, which we will discuss below.) For Raniere, however, his status among followers as being the world's most ethical man was a social control tool that he used to squelch dissent by accusing people who "displeased" him as having committed "ethical breaches" (Moynihan, 2019a).



By the time that Mark Vicente read a statement to the court during Raniere's sentencing in October 2020, his interpretation of Raniere's ethical posture had changed completely.

He has belief that he is the next evolution of humankind. Beyond worldly ethics and morality. Far superior to this court. He thinks he breathes the rarified air of an awakened genius. But he is none of those things. He is a malicious, petty, evil and dangerously vengeful sociopath . . . (Vicente, 2020, p. 3).

Because of the proximity with which Raniere lived and interacted with his followers, he was able to use his ethical status with them as an immediate means of control and manipulation. By contrast, the Scientology organization that Hubbard created was far larger, and his personal interactions became increasingly constricted as his fears grew about any number of governments targeting him for investigations or other legal actions. Consequently, the ethics system that Hubbard developed was less about enhancing his own status through direct interpersonal interactions but more about re-socializing members into the ethical systems that were at the foundation of his organization, including his desire to thrust Scientology into a position of world dominance.

On one level, the Scientology ethics system applied to all people in any Scientology organization, as well as to the organization itself (Straus, 1986, p. 71). On an individual level, the ethics systems consist of twelve types of relationships (called conditions) that persons can have when either entering the Scientology organization or beginning a new job in it (Hubbard [Based on the Works of], 1994, pp. 374-409). These same conditions also apply for Scientology's entry and involvement into societies themselves. On

individual levels, these conditions represent steps for people's integration into Scientology's subculture as their only reference group (Straus, 1986, p. 71).

On a societal level, ethics are the means by which Scientology attempts to enter into, then dominate, the societies in which it operates. In rather cumbersome Scientology language, a definition of ethics in one of the organization's standard dictionaries states, "the purpose of ethics is to remove counter intentions from the environment. And having accomplished that the purpose becomes to remove other intentionedness [sic] from the environment" (Hubbard, 1976, p. 179). In plain English, the first intent of Scientology's ethics is to remove opposition ("counter intentions") to Scientology, and then to eliminate other interests outside of Scientology ("other intentionedness"). Ethics, therefore, were the means by which Scientologists attempted to extend its influence into the world.

**5. Expansion from Core Self-Help Claims into Other Areas:** As an additional pattern of comparison, Capitalist (2018a) indicated that both Scientology and NXIVM developed programs that went beyond their original self-help intents. He mentioned Scientology's entry into education through its "study tech" (probably referring to Applied Scholastics, which licenses Hubbard's 'study technology' and is used in Scientology schools [Kent, 1999b, p. 156; Reitman, 2011, p. 169]), and "drug rehab," which is its controversial Narconon program [Kent, 2017b]). Regarding NXIVM, Capitalist made passing reference to the Rainbow Cultural Garden Program (Capitalist, 2018a; see Nguyen, 2020), which Raniere created ostensibly to raise children in an environment in which their nannies would speak different languages to them, but which some critics believed was an indoctrinating environment

“to teach children that sex is beautiful . . . [and] should be practiced open[ly]” (quoted in Natalie with Hardin, 2019, p. 217). Capitalist speculated that three reasons existed for Hubbard and Raniere to have created their respective programs: 1) the programs validated their “super-genius” origin stories; 2) the programs attempted to create second generation cult members; and 3) the programs (when offered to the general public) were recruitment tools for attracting new members (Capitalist, 2018b).

Capitalist could have mentioned that both Hubbard and Raniere considered their respective programs so important and consequential that they tried to expand their organization’s influence into several nation-states. Hubbard tried “to spread the influence of Scientology” in Rhodesia in 1966, going so far as to have written “a ‘tentative constitution’ for the country, which (along with other actions) got him expelled (Miller, 1987, pp. 257-259). Hubbard unsuccessfully cultivated influence with Corfu’s political and social elites in late 1968 and early 1969 (Forte, 1981; Miller, 1987, pp. 294-296), and in 1972, Scientology attempted to make inroads with the Moroccan bureaucracy, the army, and the secret police (Miller, 1987, p. 311). Globally, Scientology has attempted to increase interest in Hubbard (and, by extension, the organization itself) by marketing a collection of aphorisms that he penned, and publishing them in both booklet (Hubbard, 1989b) and book form (Hubbard, 1989a) as *The Way to Happiness*. These publications are attempts to boost his image as “one of the most acclaimed and widely read authors of all time” (Hubbard, 1989a, [inside back book cover flap]: see Kent, 1999b, p. 155).

One significant effort that Raniere undertook to extend and expand his influence outside of North America involved creation of a social

reform program called In Lak’ Ech (see the link in Raniere, 2011), coupled with the filming of a documentary in which he offered his solution to widespread kidnapping, murders, and drug-related violence in Mexico. Raniere had recruited numerous Mexicans from prominent and wealthy families in the country, with many of them moving into his inner circle (and one with whom he fathered a child). These rich and socially connected members gave him “access to the country’s political elite; [were] gullible followers with deep pockets, and [they lived in] a country in crisis that could offer him both influence and money” (Krauze, 2019). Raniere hoped to use these Mexican members to assist with the dissemination of a film in which he “suggested a path of supposed nonviolent resistance” (Krauze, 2019). For Raniere, poor Mexicans, in particular, were simply to decline “to take part in unlawful activities, accept extortion, or . . . capitulate to criminal demands” (Krauze, 2019). It appears, however, that the American press discovered Raniere’s abuses before the Mexican project was in full swing (see Krauze, 2019), but in a defense memo after a court convicted him, Raniere still “boasted that he made Mexico better” (Gavin, 2020). The memo announced that ““he remains proud to have been permitted to play a part in helping citizens and residents of Mexico strive to bring peace to a country beset by violent gangs, kidnapping and murders, a struggle that continues to the present and that will continue in the future”” (quoted in Gavin, 2020). Apparently, Raniere believed that he had “created a sustainable peace movement” (Gavin, 2020).

**6. Blatant Disregard for Basic Human Rights:** The last parallels between NXIVM and Scientology that Capitalist listed involved the charge that “Scientology has engaged in all sorts of quack research on the

‘tech’ of self-help,” while “NXIVM was accused of conducting experiments in brain activity on several members without consent and without any sort of scientific basis” (Capitalist, 2018a). Capitalist did not specify what allegedly “quack” research he had in mind, but one candidate could have been Hubbard’s implementation of what he called the “Introspection Rundown” for people demonstrating severe psychological decomposition (like psychosis). Several years before Capitalist’s article, a study on Scientology and mental health had summarized Hubbard’s supposed research: (Kent & Manca, 2012, pp. 16-17):

The strongest claim about treating psychotics appeared in a 1974 publication about Hubbard’s “discovery” of something he supposedly developed in 1973 called the Introspection Rundown. In the second revision of the Introspection Rundown, Hubbard (1974a) proclaimed, “THIS MEANS THE LAST REASON TO HAVE PSYCHIATRY AROUND IS GONE” (Hubbard, 1974a, p. 346 [capitalization in original]). He instructed Scientologists to isolate the psychotic, not speak to him or her, give the person-specific vitamins and minerals, and begin auditing (Hubbard, 1974a, p. 347). The auditing case supervisor, whose only required training was Scientology, had the responsibility to decide when to release a supposed psychotic patient from isolation (Hubbard, 1974b, pp. 260-261).

A number of accounts over the years strongly suggest that this pseudo-scientific response to severe psychiatric distress can be very harmful if not deadly (Kent & Manca, 2012, pp. 14-17). Without question it violates a number of “Principles for the protection of persons with mental illness and the improvement of mental health care,” adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 17, 1991, not the least of which

was the principle, “a determination that a person has a mental illness shall be made in accordance with internationally accepted medical standards” (Office of the High Commissioner, United Nations Human Rights, 1996-2020, Principle 4), which Scientologists without medical licenses or psychiatric training are completely unqualified to make.

Hubbard (and then his followers) apparently believed that he was treating psychosis, and in a 1970 *Hubbard Communications Office Bulletin* entitled “Psychosis” he made it clear that “all characteristics classified as those of the ‘suppressive person’ are in fact those of an insane person” (Hubbard, 1970, p. 804; see his detailed discussion of suppression and suppressive persons in Hubbard, 1991). The “suppressive person” term reappears in NXIVM.

For example, Raniere’s NXIVM conducted “experiments” to transform people whom they considered to be suppressive, Luciferian type sociopaths—people who are not sane, who cause “others pain, distress, or unhappiness,” lack remorse, and who are “lacking in conscience and loyalty to others” (United States Patent Application Publication, 2013, p. 1). Beginning in 2016 and continuing into August 2017, NXIVM member, Dr. Brandon Porter (b. circa 1974), conducted what came-to-be-called the “fright study” (see Bloch et al., 2018b; Tripathi, 2020). Without their consent, he subjected subjects to potential mental anguish, nightmares, suffering and exacerbation of prior psychiatric conditions, such as PTSD. [Porter] psychologically shocked the subjects by surprising them with a graphic, violent film clip depicting the real-life beheading and dismemberment of a group of defenseless women in Mexico, a scene described by [psychiatry expert witness Dr. Robert L. Klitzman] as “truly gruesome” and “deeply disturbing.” He also showed the subjects other disturbing film clips from movies,

including *Hannibal*, where Hannibal removed a person's skull, cut out parts of the brain and fed them to the victim, *The Accused*, involving a gang rape and *American History X*, depicting a white male as a neo-Nazi stomping the face of an African American male and killing him (State of New York Department of Health, 2019, p. 24).

For these and other ethical violations (some involving additional research for NXIVM's Executive Success Program and its Ethical Science Foundation on Tourette's syndrome and obsessive-compulsive disorder [(State of New York Department of Health, 2019, p. 7)], Porter lost his license to practice medicine in New York (State of New York Department of Health, 2019, p. 33). Partly because of these unethical experiments, around eighty former NXIVM members are suing Porter, Raniere, and eleven top NXIVM figures (along with four corporations and programs) for significant damages (*Sara Edmondson, Toni Natalie, et al., v Keith Raniere et al.*, 2020, pp. 6-7, 183-185).

Motivating these fright experiments probably was Raniere's fantasy about inventing "a method for determining whether a Luciferian can be rehabilitated," which was the phrase that he used in the first line of his 2013 patent application (United States Patent Application Publication, 2013, [first unnumbered page]). If Toni Natalie's interpretation of her former relationship with Raniere is accurate, then she became (in his mind) the "ultimate Luciferian" (Natalie with Hardin, 2019, p. 102) for breaking up with him on April 1, 1997 (Natalie with Hardin, 2019, p. 107). NXIVM's Executive Success Programs had various sections or training modules, and Natalie learned that one of them "was directly based on my leaving him" (Natalie with Hardin, 2019, p. 101). Indeed, terms that Raniere used to describe a Luciferian in his patent application were ones that furious,

jilted lovers might use to belittle the persons who left them. Here are some examples of how Raniere described the kind of person whom he wanted to rehabilitate: "a person . . . who commits destructive acts;" "a type of sociopath;" one who "has severe behavioral problems that are masked by good psychological adjustment;" "appears on the outside to be sane but is not;" someone who derives pleasure "from achieving his selfish desires such as destroying material objects or relationships, and causing others pain, distress, or unhappiness;" and someone who is "lacking in conscience and loyalty to others" (United States Patent Application Publication, 2013, p. 1).

Susan Raine's article in this edition provides numerous citations from people who identified Raniere as a narcissist (Raine, 2021a), and one recent source identified him as a malignant narcissist (Zeider & Devlin, 2020, pp. 105-108). Malignant narcissists seethe with revenge against people whom they feel have slighted, challenged, mocked, or rejected them. Indeed, in the final fight (over a sweater that Raniere had neglectfully ruined by not following Natalie's drying instructions):

the Little Prince [i.e., Raniere] lost his shit. He cornered me in the laundry room, screaming, spit flying from the corners of his mouth, like a rabid dog. 'You are wrong, Toni. As usual. You are wrong. You don't know what *you* said. I'm the Smartest Man in the World! I have a 240 IQ! Do you really think that *you're* right, and *I'm* wrong? Do it. Tell me you're wrong' (Raniere in Natalie with Hardin, 2019, p. 108 [capitalization and italics in original]).

Natalie refused to tell him what he demanded (and obviously needed) to hear, and it is entirely possible that his challenge to his

narcissistic ego was a factor in his fantasy about Luciferians and their rehabilitation. (I will return to a discussion about malignant narcissism at the end of this analysis.)

### **Miscellaneous Comparative Observations:**

In the process of clarifying and elaborating upon the six comparisons that the pseudonymic author, John P. Capitalist, offered about Scientology and NXIVM (Capitalist, 2018a), I observed a number of additional similarities, big and small, between the founders of these two groups and the groups themselves. I offer a selection of them here, to illustrate some further key comparisons and to provide additional points that others may wish to pursue.<sup>i</sup> I conclude these reflections, however, with one comparison that seems central when examining the two groups—the likelihood that the two founders had variations of the same personality disorder.

**7. Inner circle facilitators:** Both Scientology and NXIVM have/had a group of exclusive supporters who facilitated their charismatic leaders' visions and projects while attempting to protect them from internal and external hostile forces. The famous sociologist, Max Weber, wrote about these kinds of supporters as constituting "a definite social structure with a staff and an apparatus of services and material means that is adapted to the mission of the leader." (Weber, 1922 [1978], p.1119). He named this social structure a "charismatic aristocracy" (p. 1119), envisioning the relatives, friends, and other associates constituting royal courtiers (the aristocracy) who cluster around regal kings and/or queens. Various accounts of NXIVM referred to these supporters as "an 'inner circle' of individuals to carry out his orders" (Ducharme, 2020, p. 3; and see the picture of twenty inner circle people in Natalie with Hardin, 2019, photograph of Exhibit GX 362); "enablers" (Natalie with Hardin, 2019: 86), "co-conspirators," and

"co-dependents" (Donaghue, 2019a, p. 2). Five of these facilitators plead guilty to serious crimes committed at the behest of Raniere himself (Donaghue, 2019b, p. 3). A charismatic aristocracy operated around Raniere, and its social structure and operation extended his pathology far more widely than he could have simply on his own.

Comparing Raniere's inner circle to Hubbard's would be a difficult task for a number of reasons, including the age of Scientology itself (beginning in the early 1950s), the number of persons who have passed through it, the bureaucratized structure of the facilitating organization (the Sea Organization), and the primacy of a successor (David Miscavige [b. 1960]) to the deceased founder. What might be less difficult but certainly manageable is to examine how some inner circle facilitators changed their statuses to critics. Former members of Raniere's inner circle were instrumental in getting law enforcement's attention (Edmondson with Gasbarre, 2019, pp. 195-210; Oxenberg with Stoyanoff, 2018, pp. 198ff.), and former members from Scientology have been whistleblowers for decades. An extensive sociological literature exists about exiting belief-systems (Kent and Samaha, 2015), but the individual stories about exiting *specific* belief systems and groups always expands our overall knowledge about the process. Moreover, the phenomenon of whistleblowing (Tobin and Childs, 2009b), and understanding the price that many whistleblowers pay (Edmondson with Gasbarre, 2019, p. 203; Natalie with Hardin, 2019, p. 170; Oxenberg with Stoyanoff, 2018, pp. 203-206; Tobin and Childs, 2009a) is both vital to democracies and a necessary resistance to tyrants and the authoritarian organizations that they direct.

**8. Wealthy Benefactors:** Both organizations received contributions from wealthy

benefactors. Prosecutors in the Raniere case estimate that Clare Bronfman may have funded NXIVM, Raniere, his lawsuits, and his patents to the tune of at least \$116 million (Hong, 2020). Scientology has numerous donors who have donated millions of dollars (Wright, 2013 p. 278) often through the International Association of Scientologists. One family alone (Trish Duggan and her family) has donated at estimated \$80 million to the International Association of Scientologists, with one source estimating that total donations to various Scientology projects and programs may be as high as \$360 million (Ortega, 2018).

**9. Spying on Critics:** Both organizations surveilled and spied on critics (Donoghue, 2019a, p. 2; Moynihan, 2019d; Ortega, 2011). According to the government's sentencing memorandum against Raniere:

Raniere and his co-conspirators engaged in unlawful surveillance and investigation of his perceived enemies.... The targets of these efforts included federal judges overseeing litigation in which NXIVM was a party, high-ranking politicians, reporters who had published articles critical of Raniere or NXIVM, NXIVM's own lawyers, legal adversaries and their families, an accountant (James Loperfido) who worked for an attorney who had previously done work for NXIVM, and Edgar Bronfman Sr., the father of Clare Bronfman (Ducharme, 2020, p. 8; see Moynihan, 2019d).

After Clare Bronfman's father publicly stated that he thought NXIVM was "a cult" (Edgar Bronfman, quoted in Freedman, 2003), she helped another NXIVM member hack into his emails (Ducharme, 2020, pp. 8-9; Moynihan, 2019f).

Scientology's spying operations on perceived critics, which included "the brazen, systematic and persistent burglaries of the United States Government offices in Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles, California," occurred "over an extended period of at least two years" (Banoun, 1979, p. 2). In addition to numerous federal offices, spying operations included:

the infiltration and theft of documents from a number of prominent national and world organizations, law firms and newspapers; the execution of smear campaigns and baseless law suits to destroy private individuals who had attempted to exercise their First Amendment rights to freedom of expression; the framing of private citizens who had been critical of Scientology, including the forging of documents which led to the indictment of at least one innocent person [i.e., Paulette Cooper]; [and] violation of the civil rights of prominent private and public officials (Banoun, 1979, pp. 2-3)

Called Operation Snow White, this was the program (mentioned earlier) that led to the convictions of eleven Scientologists (including Hubbard's wife [Atack, 1990, p. 241; Kamen, 1983]) and Hubbard's "unindicted co-conspirator" designation (Banoun, 1979, p. 69; Banoun, 1980, p. 32). This domestic spy operation was unprecedented in the United States, and "as many as five thousand Scientologists were covertly placed in 136 governmental agencies worldwide" (Wright, 2013, p. 122 see also p.123).

Operation Snow White received mention in a discussion about a clumsy spy operation that NXIVM conducted against a prominent a cappella music organization that Raniere tried, and failed, to infiltrate. Raniere claimed to have musical skills and “intellectual patents pending in the areas of . . . voice and musical training” (Raniere, 2011), but his interest in voice-only singing likely became aroused when he realized that people who participated in the a cappella performance and workshop community:

were based around elite universities and [were] full of young, slightly nerdy musical theater types who would be a fertile hunting ground for a cult like NXIVM that specialized in charming wealthy philanthropists, scions of blue blood families, and seekers from groups like the acting and yoga communities” (Helmar, 2020a). Consequently, in 2007, NXIVM organized and completely funded an a cappella festival, covering all participants’ travel and accommodation expenses, and the influential head of the Contemporary A Cappella Society, Deke Sharon, attended. Mention of NXIVM throughout the festival was minimal (although some participants noticed it nonetheless), but more obvious was “that attendees were asked intrusive amounts of personal information like social security numbers, home addresses, and other contact information” (Helmar, 2020a).

With the beginning of the second festival in 2008, concerns about NXIVM’s sponsorship erupted when someone posted links (on an influential a cappella internet forum) to negative internet sources about the group. Asked by a cappella members to respond to the criticisms, NXIVM members reacted

poorly, so Deke Sharon (who was not at this second festival) withdrew his support, and most of the singing community followed his lead (Helmar, 2020a). In response, Clare Bronfman paid just under \$900,000 (US) to a Canadian-based private detective agency, Canaprobe, to undertake covert banking investigations of perceived enemies, which included Sharon. In the Canaprobe report that Bronfman received, it stated that Sharon had offshore bank accounts, but it transpired that she had been scammed. According to an FBI agent, “most, if not all of the financial material was inaccurate” (Moynihan, 2019e).

Because of the role of private investigators in this story, and possibly also because an adult child (Bronfman) had been spying on her father, the blogger (Leo Helmar), who reported on NXIVM’s use of Canaprobe, drew readers’ attention to a recently published book by the father (Ron Miscavige [b. 1936]) of Scientology’s current leader, David Miscavige. Helmar informed readers that Ron, who was critical of his son David’s behavior as Scientology’s head, learned that his son had put him under surveillance. When it appeared (incorrectly) that Ron was having a heart attack, the private investigator phoned David, asking what to do. The son instructed the private investigator “to let his father die and to not intervene” (Helmar, 2020b: see Miscavige with Koon, 2016, p. 213). Presenting Ron Miscavige’s recent experience was “important to the [NXIVM] story because NXIVM adapted many of the tactics that had been used by Scientology and its spy wing which was initially known as the Guardian’s Office and has now been rebranded as the Office for [sic: of] Special Affairs” (Helmar, 2020b [capitalization in original]).

**10. Abortions:** According to Toni Natalie, “in the mid-2000s, [Raniere] was having sex with everyone in his inner circle,” believing

that sex was “an ‘energy exchange’ and his ejaculation [was] a sort of magical glue that keeps all of his concubines conjoined” (Natalie with Hardin, 2019, p. 149). Consequently, he did not use condoms, and “all of this unprotected sex led to numerous pregnancies, and these numerous pregnancies led to the same number of terminations.” (Natalie with Hardin, 2019, p. 150). A female member of his inner circle, Pam Cafritz, handled the abortion arrangements (Natalie with Hardin, 2019, pp. 149, 150; see (Ducharme, 2020, p. 5). Only two women saw their pregnancies through to birth (see Raine, 2021a), and for one of the mothers, the baby’s premature arrival almost killed both of them (Natalie with Hardin, pp. 150-151, 239). Susan Raine’s article (2021a) in this journal edition gives a disturbingly insightful analysis of the complex sexual dynamics with and around Raniere, and how these dynamics are essential for understanding the operations of his group.

Credible allegations about abortions among Scientology’s Sea Organization members date back at least to the late 1980s (see Kent, 1999c, p. 10), and continued to appear in subsequent journalistic accounts and lawsuits (DeCrescenzo aka Dieckman 2015, pp. 18-20; Reitman, 2011, pp. 323-325; Wright, 2013, pp. 121, 266). It is unclear if these (alleged) practices continue at present. Assuming that the earlier accounts were reasonably accurate, they probably reflected “the attitude among some Sea Org leadership . . . that children hinder adults from performing their vital assignments” (Kent, 1999c, p. 10; see Scientology Canada, 2020). In sum (and for the sake of argument, assuming that the allegations about Scientology are accurate), abortions took place in both organizations, but future researchers will have to determine if the similarities between the two groups are

indicative of significant doctrinal positions or leadership attitudes and practices.

### **11. Isolated Confinement:**

One aspect of Raniere’s trafficking conviction (which involved a criminal violation overseen by one of his facilitators, Lauren Salzman) was their restraint of a young Mexican woman, Daniela, “for labor and services by confining her to a room for nearly two years on the threat of being sent to Mexico and withholding her birth certificate” (Ducharme, 2020, p. 4; see Ortega, 2019a). As outlined in the government’s sentencing memorandum, “Daniela was confined to the room for nearly two years, during which she went months without human contact” (Ducharme, 2020, p. 5). Remarkably, the unlocked room in which she was confined was on the top floor of a house that her parents rented, who themselves participated in Raniere’s alleged punishment of her for an “ethical breach” against him. (Apparently, they did not know that her “ethical breach” was feeling an attraction to a man her own age during a period when Raniere [who was about three decades older than her] had included her in his sexual circle.) After she finally left the room, Raniere directed that her father and another high-ranking NXIVM member drive her back to Mexico, and even there she was not to receive her birth certificate until she completed book reports for him. Eventually, she had to evoke the assistance of a human rights attorney to obtain it (Ducharme, 2020, p. 6; Moynihan, 2019c).

While the confinement example in NXIVM was limited to one unfortunate person, accounts in Scientology involve a number of people over a period of years. Earlier I discussed the Introspection Rundown, which directs the confined isolation of people having severe psychological or psychiatric episodes of mental breakdown. A review of



sources discussing this policy identify numerous people isolated under these conditions in Scientology facilities around the world (Kent, 2000a, Section IV; Reitman, 2011, pp. 209-223; Wright, 2013, pp. 127, 128-129, 235-236). Other alleged incidents of isolation are interspersed in accounts about hundreds of people who were in Scientology's reeducation, forced labor, brainwashing, or penal system, known as the Rehabilitation Project Force (RPF), which (in various forms) operated from 1974 and at least into the early 2000s (Ortega, 2017). Accounts over the years reported about people in this program being confined and locked in isolation (Kent, 2000b, pp. 26-28). Around the time that the RPF first appeared, other instances of forced isolation apparently occurred on the Scientology ship, *Apollo*, as reported by a former staff member who was there as a teenager. Two of the accounts are of particular interest to us now because (like the NXIVM isolation punishment) it was something that Hubbard imposed upon two young people who had some sort of emotional attractions to others:

While on the *Apollo*, I observed numerous punishments meted out for many minor infractions or mistakes made in connection with Hubbard's very strict and bizarre policies. On a number of occasions, I saw people placed in the 'chain lockers' of the boat on direct orders of Hubbard. These lockers were small, smelly holes, covered by grates where the chain for the anchor was stored. I saw one boy held in there for 30 nights, crying and begging to be released. He was only allowed out to clean the bilges where the sewer and refuse of the ship collected.... I also saw a young boy and a young girl thrown in the chain lockers at separate times because of romantic

involvements they had with other people. Hubbard fanatically prohibited involvement between the sexes, or out-2D, as it is called in Scientology. Married persons were allowed to see each other but it was strictly controlled (Burden, 1980, p. 2)

The fact reported in an account by another person, which indicated that Hubbard used the chain locker as an isolation punishment location for a child, gives credence to Burden's affidavit (Wright, 2013, p. 111).

One wonders why both Hubbard and Raniere became so upset when people had age-appropriate romantic feelings or sexual attractions. A possible explanation is that, to these and other cult leaders, emotional bonds between members may compete and interfere with their members' emotional (and practical) abilities to commit completely to those leaders or the organizations that they have created (see Whitsett and Kent, 2003, p. 492). Eliminating emotional "competition" was paramount for Hubbard and Raniere because both leaders/founders possessed characteristics of malignant narcissists.

## 12. Malignant narcissism:

If we can contextualize the gendered language to its historical context nearly two centuries ago, then we can see that the eminently quotable American essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), understood a basic truth about organizational construction: "an institution is the lengthened shadow of one man" (Emerson, 1841). In the comparative cases of Scientology and NXIVM, however, the gendered pronoun is apt. Earlier scholarship proposed that Hubbard exhibited characteristics of narcissism (Lane and Kent, 2008), and Susan Raine's interpretation (in this volume) of Raniere as a sexually predatory narcissist is chillingly convincing. Extending Emerson's

insight about organizational leaders to include these two groups, the retaliatory and aggressive policies that existed in both Scientology and NXIVM likely reflected the probable personality disorders of their founders.

Using narcissism, therefore, as an interpretive framework for comparing the leaders and their created social structures provides a supplementary perspective to questions around Raniere's possible borrowings from Scientology. If Raniere did have access to Scientology materials (as some former NXIVM members claim), then Raniere's own narcissism may have influenced if not determined, what he borrowed. Hubbard's efforts to keep aspects of his "tech" secret except to the initiated may have struck a chord with Raniere, sharing the common narcissistic concern that others are "envious" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 670) and would want to steal their creations.

Characteristics that the two founders shared—fabricated backgrounds, grandiosity, lack of empathy as demonstrated in human rights violations, entitlements around confining the uncooperative or troublesome, interfering with women's reproductive rights—simply may reflect attitudes and behaviors that grow out of a shared personality disorder. Likewise, Hubbard's demands for "excessive admiration" likely manifested in the billion-year contract that he devised for Sea Org members, signifying their deep commitment to him and his organization (despite, as Phil Lord [2021] points out in this issue, only having significance in Scientology's own "legal" system and none in mainstream law). Perhaps more consequentially, Raniere's authorization of irreversibly permanent, pelvic brands of his initials on women likely seemed to him to be appropriate indicators of

their commitment to his domination. Appropriately, Raine points out that the statement he had women recite before they were branded had them saying that to get it was "an honor I want to wear for the rest of my life" (Raniere, quoted in Raine, 2021a). This violent act was a dramatically extreme example of his narcissistic demand for "excessive admiration" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 669). (Along these lines, Raniere insisted on being called "Vanguard," [*United States District Court Eastern District of New York*, 2018a, p. 1] and Hubbard called himself "Commodore" and "Source" [Hubbard, 1976, pp. 92, 486]).

Both founders' "obsession with ethics" provided opportunities to re-socialize acolytes into their worldviews (which, as Raine in this journal edition shows for Raniere, was deeply misogynistic). In Raniere's ethical system, one of two types of strategies that people learn are "parasite strategies . . . that keep people dependent on others and lower self-esteem" (Raniere, quoted in Natalie with Hardin, 2019, p. 95). As Raniere formulated the concept, it was strikingly similar to Hubbard's definition of "parasitic" as "being dependent on others outside it, without producing more than it consumes" (Hubbard, 1976, p. 381; and see Raine, 2021b, p. 31 for a discussion of the phrase, "being 'at cause'"). We simply cannot be certain, however, that Raniere borrowed, then slightly modified, the term.

Nor can we be certain (but it seems highly likely) that Raniere borrowed Hubbard's term, "suppressives," as a label for opponents and perceived enemies, and its use by Hubbard and Raniere provides insight into both of their minds. They likely were malignant narcissists, reacting "with disdain, rage, or defiant counterattack" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 671; see

Zeider & Devlin, 2020, p. 43) to perceived slights or challenges. A source that Raine (2021a) cites had identified Raniere as a malignant narcissist (Zeider & Devlin, 2020, pp. 105-108), and this variant of a personality disorder would provide an explanation for the “vengeance” (Zeider & Devlin, 2020, p. 43) that he exhibited against Natalie and others whom he believed were Luciferian suppressives. Perhaps Raniere was inspired by Hubbard’s abusive use of litigation and spying, but these aggressive activities simply could have been independent expressions of narcissistic, paranoid, rage.

In political contexts, established research indicates that malignantly narcissistic tyrants “structure an external world that supports [their] grandiose claims” (Glad, 2002, p. 25; see Volkan, 1980, pp. 138-139). In cultic contexts, malignantly narcissistic tyrants do the same. Phil Lord’s article in this special edition provides a glimpse into the alternative pseudo-legal apparatus that Hubbard constructed to enforce his constructed world—an apparatus that Lord has explored in greater depth elsewhere (Lord, 2019). Articles in this issue by both Susan Raine and Robin Boyle-Laisure provide windows into the world that Raniere constructed, and the damage caused by that construct will affect people for the rest of their lives. As Boyle-Laisure’s article reveals, one of the end-results of that construction was a human trafficking network—a network that Raniere could not have built and operated without constant assistance from his “charismatic aristocrats”—his facilitators and enablers, many of whom were women. Raine’s two articles in this issue show how people seeking to reinvent themselves can get groomed into the worldview of a destructive, predatory narcissist, but still it startles to see how talented converts get transformed (through expensive courses) into spies, procurers, and probable pet-killers.

Amidst sobs and near-hysterical tears as she pleaded guilty, Allison Mack told the court that she “was lost” when she joined what she thought was a self-help organization. Speaking to the judge, she took responsibility for her recruitment and enslavement of other women, and amidst her confession managed to proclaim, “I can and will be a better person” (Mack, quoted in Schapiro and Winter, 2019; see Gold & Moynihan, 2019). Perhaps it is never too late to try (again).

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## Footnotes

1 Among the additional similarities are:

A. Both Hubbard and Raniere were/are only children and White males (Miller, 1986, pp. 12-25; Natalie with Hardin, 2019, p. 11).

B. Both Hubbard and Raneire had previous business failures prior to their respective creations of Scientology (Atack, 1990, pp. 121-127; Miller, 1987, pp. 193-200) and NXIVM (Grigoriadis, 2018; Natalie with Hardin, 2019, pp. 61-68, 83; Sarah Edmondson, Toni Natalie, et al., v. Keith Raniere et al., 2020, p. 4).

C. Hubbard owned one patent during his life (United States Patent Office, 1966), was the assignee for a related patent in 1984 (United State Patent, 1984), (and after his death in 1986 was listed as the deceased inventor of patents on file in 1998, 2000, and 2012 (JUSTIA Patents, 2020)). Raniere owned or filed numerous patents, with a Vanity Fair reporter finding (in 2018) forty American patents applications with slightly over twenty having been granted thus far (Bryant, 2018; see Jeff Trexler, quoted in Bryant, 2018).

D. Both Scientology (Kent, 2002; 2017a; 2017c) and Nxium recruited celebrities (Edmondson with Gassbarre, 2019, p. 90; Natalie with Hardin, 2019, pp. 196-1993; Oxenberg with Stoyhoff, 2018).

E. Both Scientology (Hubbard, 1976, p. 201) and NXIVM (Edmondson with Gasbarre, 2019, pp. 51, 91) had a system of commissions for members who recruited others.

F. Participation in both Scientology (Reitman, 2011, p. 284; Wright, 2013, pp. 16-17) and NXIVM (Edmondson with Gasbarre, 2019, p. 151; Grigoriadis, 2018; United States of America against Keith Raniere, 2018a, pp. 3-4.) involved enrolling in expensive courses, workshops, programs, and classes that ran for various lengths of time.

G. Both organizations-built files on perceived political opponents (Moynihan, 2019d; Natalie with Hardin, 2019, pp. 162-163; Shaffer, 1978).

H. Critics of both Scientology (Rahman, 2020; Sappell, 2012; see Blum 1993, p. 37) and NXIVM (Natalie with Hardin, 2019, p. 171) had pet dogs die under suspicious circumstances

## About the Author

**Stephen A. Kent, PhD**, Professor of Sociology, University of Alberta, teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on the sociology of religion and the sociology of sectarian groups. He has published articles in numerous sociology and religious study journals. His 2001 book, *From Slogans to Mantras: Social Protest and Religious Conversion in the Late Vietnam War Era*, was selected by Choice: Current Reviews for Academic Libraries as an Outstanding Academic Title for 2002. In 2012 he received The Margaret Thaler Singer Award for advancing the understanding of coercive persuasion and undue influence from the American Cultic Studies Association.