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How the Church of Scientology Lures in Closeted Individuals

Using Kate Bornstein's memoir, *Queer and Present Danger*, as a primary source, HBO's Alex Gibney's documentary *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief* and several other articles and interview; I will be analyzing the manner in which the Church of Scientology provided closeted homosexual and other 'sexual deviants' a false sense of hope. This is done through the promise of a structured community and the possibility of ridding individuals of their homosexual tendencies, which during this time was seen as a mental and physical illness.

In 1950 L. Ron Hubbard, an American science fiction author, published his groundbreaking novel titled, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*. Four years after first publishing *Dianetics*, Hubbard established the Church of Scientology. The official web page of the Church of Scientology states: "Scientology is a religion that offers a precise path leading to a complete and certain understanding of one's true spiritual nature and one's relationship to self, family, groups, mankind, all life forms, the material universe, the spiritual universe and the Supreme Being"¹. L. Ron Hubbard's background as a science fiction author appears within the beliefs and practices that lay at the center of Scientology. Hubbard's science fiction influence is apparent within the mythological story of Xenu, the closest thing to a creation story that the Church of Scientology 'publicly' acknowledges. Members of Scientology are taught to believe that 75 million years ago Xenu, the dictator of the 'Galactic Confederacy' gathered billions of people, and brought them to earth, leaving them in volcanoes. It is said that Xenu then proceeded

¹ Official Church of Scientology

to drop hydrogen bombs into the volcanoes killing everyone. The souls of the being that were captured and brought to earth represent the origin of body *thetans*, it is said that each human on earth has his or her own thetan.² L. Ron Hubbard described a *thetan* as the creation of energy that in itself creates life. In Kate Bornstein's memoir, *Queer and Present Danger* she recalls a conversation she had when first entering the life of a Scientologist. "They [the Church of Scientology] said I'm not my body, and I'm not even my mind. They told me that I am a spiritual being called a thetan... male and female is for bodies, they told me. Thetans have no gender... You're not your body, your brain, or your mind! You are an immortal spiritual being, completely free from the physical universe of matter, energy, space and time!"³ Through this definition and description of a thetan as a genderless and bodiless being, many individuals like Kate Bornstein saw Scientology as an opportunity to transcend beyond their internal struggle of sexuality, gender, and identity.⁴

As the Church of Scientology was developing and spreading across the world so was the second wave of feminism. The second wave of feminism began in the early 1960's and represented a period of time where feminist activity was on the rise. The second wave of feminism covered many issues including: sexuality, reproductive rights, family dynamics, women in the workplace, legal and de facto inequalities, domestic violence, and rape issues. While many activists were fighting to create an equal playing field for women and members of the LGBTQ community, there was still an enormous amount of shame and stigma that was associated with being a homosexual or identifying within the LGBTQ community. As a result of the stigma around sexuality, many closeted individuals searched for alternative lifestyles and the

² The Underground Bunker.

³ Bornstein, Kate. *A Queer and Pleasant Danger: A Memoir*. Boston, Mass: Beacon, n.d. Print. (49-54)

⁴ Ibid

possibility of a cure for their ‘illness’. It is through the search for a ‘cure’ to homosexuality that many closeted individuals found their way to the steps of the Church of Scientology. Throughout society, homosexuals were taught that they were impure and an abomination, and were not viewed any differently within the Church of Scientology. However, the Church of Scientology offered up an opportunity for homosexuals and societal deviants to rid themselves of their impurity and redeem themselves.

The Church of Scientology is based off of a system of beliefs that promise members a form of “spiritual rehabilitation” done so through counselling sessions known as *auditing*. It is through auditing session that one is able to look at their own existence and work to improve their ability to confront *where* they are and *what* they are. As a way to identify one's spiritual and emotional progress, as well as to predict and understand human behaviors, L. Ron Hubbard created the “Tone Scale.” The tone scale is a tool used in auditing which laid out all human emotions on a hierarchical scale, each emotion was assigned to a numerical value extending anywhere between +40.0 representing total serenity, 0 representing death, and -40.0 representing absolute failure. Hubbard even included homosexuality as its own entity on the Tone Scale chart as a human emotion, registering it at a low 1.1.⁵ The creation of the tone scale allowed the Church of Scientology to numerically rate members of the church. The closer to +40.0 the closer the being is to achieving true clarity.

The official Church of Scientology’s position on homosexuality is difficult to pin down; however like many other organized religions the doctrines of the Church of Scientology is not publicly in support of members acting upon their homosexual tendencies; and often times referred to homosexuality as a psychological illness. Within *Dianetics: The Modern Science of*

⁵ Ortega, Tony. "Scientology's Homophobia: Even the Church's Token Gay Guy Was Disgusted." *Village Voice*. N.p., 26 May 2016. Web

Mental Health, Hubbard refers to homosexuality both as a ‘perversion’ and later characterized homosexuality as ‘covert hostility’. While homosexuality automatically stationed an individual at 1.1 on the tone scale, it was taught that homosexual individuals must ‘handle’ their homosexuality and through series of extensive auditing sessions, they are given the opportunity to move above 1.1 to a higher status on the Tone Scale.⁶ Having the ability to rise higher on the tone scale through auditing sessions was appealing to outsiders individuals because it created an opportunity for personal and spiritual growth.

Within the Church of Scientology there is an emphasis on their desire for a sane civilization and a world without insanity. In *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, Hubbard states “The sexual pervert such as homosexuality, lesbianism, sexual sadism, etc., is actually quite ill physically... he is very far from culpable for his condition, but he is also far from normal and extremely dangerous to society.”⁷ Within their goal to make ‘insanity’ obsolete the Church of Scientology was able to add another reason to shame homosexuals and other societal deviants. While the Church of Scientology is not established to be an all inclusive religious community, Scientology has a particular allure to individuals who feel as if they exist on the outskirts of societal norms and those who are in search of a purpose or a cure for their ailments. The teachings of the church claim that the technology and structures of Scientology could make “the blind see, the lame walk, and bring sanity to the insane”.⁸ The promise of social, physical, and mental rehabilitation that the Church of Scientology claims, gives a sense of false hope to exposed individuals seeking out solutions to their problems. Homosexuality and other sexual ‘deviants’ were viewed as mentally and physically inept. Scientology deemed

⁶ L. Ron Hubbard, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* (Commerce: Bridge Publications, [1950] 2007)

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Bornstein, Kate. *A Queer and Pleasant Danger: A Memoir*. Boston, Mass: Beacon, n.d. Print. 56

anyone who identified as or was a member of the LGBTQ community to be physically and mentally ill. Kate Bornstein recalls being told by a high ranking member of the Church or Scientology that “without scientology, you are gonna degrade into mindless slug of spiritual being. You’re gonna be a body thetan, attached to the toe of some street bum.”⁹ The Church of Scientology openly speaks about homosexuality as an illness that has the ability to prevent individuals from reaching a level of true clarity. The Church of Scientology went so far as to say that they had the right technology to ‘cure’ them.¹⁰ It is only through the processing and courses of Scientology that homosexuals and other deviates had the opportunity to become ‘healthy and happy’ people.

When it came down to it, the Church of Scientology did not possess a ‘cure’ or ‘solution’ to homosexuality, predominantly because homosexuality is not an illness. However, through the promise of curing homosexuality the Church of Scientolgoy fed vulnerable individuals a false sense of hope, which in return led to many closeted individuals joining the Church of Scientology.

⁹ Ibid 142

¹⁰ Jeffrey S. Siker, The Church of Scientology, *Homosexuality and Religion: An Encyclopedia*

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