Love Bombing

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Love bombing is the deliberate show of affection or friendship by an individual or a group of people toward another individual. Critics have asserted that this action may be motivated in part by the desire to recruit, convert or otherwise influence.

As of 2005, the phrase can be used in two slightly different ways.

Members of the Unification Church, and perhaps members of other groups, use or have used the phrase themselves to mean a genuine expression of friendship, fellowship, interest, or concern.

Critics of cults use the phrase with the implication that the "love" is feigned and the practice is manipulative. "Love bombing" is often cited by critics as one of the methods used by some cults and religions to recruit and retain members. Abusers in romantic relationships also do this to victims in the early stages of a relationship, showering their partners with praise, gifts, and affection.

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History

The term was used within, and is often associated with, the Unification Church, especially the San Francisco Bay area church known as the "Oakland family." In 1999 testimony to the Maryland Cult Task Force, Ronald Loomis, Director of Education for the International Cultic Studies Association, reflecting his belief that the term was not invented by critics, asserted: We did not make up this term. The term 'love bombing' originated with the Unification Church, the Moonies. Another group that's active on many Maryland campuses, the International Churches of Christ, also uses that term."

Though the term was already widely used by the media at the time, the Unification Church used it at least as early as 1978. Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church, used the term "love bomb" in a July 23, 1978 speech (translated):

Unification Church members are smiling all of the time, even at four in the morning. The man who is full of love must live that way. When you go out witnessing you can caress the wall and say that it can expect you to witness well and be smiling when you return. What face could better represent love than a smiling face? This is why we talk about love bomb; Moonies have that kind of happy problem.

Former members of the Family International, including Deborah Davis, daughter of the founder of the Children of God, and Kristina Jones, daughter of an early member, have used the term in describing the early days of the organization.

Criticism and response

Critics of cults often cite love bombing as one of the features that may identify an organization as a cult. When used by critics, the phrase is defined to mean affection that is feigned or with an ulterior motive and that is used to reduce the subject's resistance to recruitment.

The term was popularized by psychology professor Margaret Singer, who has become closely identified with the love-bombing-as-brainwashing point of view. In her 1996 book, Cults in Our Midst, she described the technique:

As soon as any interest is shown by the recruits, they may be love bombed by the recruiter or other cult members. This process of feigning friendship and interest in the recruit was originally associated with one of the early youth cults, but soon it was taken up by a number of groups as part of their program for luring people in. Love bombing is a coordinated effort, usually under the direction of leadership, that involves long-term members' flooding recruits and newer members with flattery, verbal seduction, affectionate but usually nonsexual touching, and lots of attention to their every remark. Love bombing - or the offer of instant companionship - is a deceptive ploy accounting for many successful recruitment drives.

The Unification Church rejects this view of its practice. Church leader Damian Anderson has written:

One man's love-bombing is another man's being showered with attention. Everyone likes such care and attention, so it is unfortunate that when we love as Jesus taught us to love, that we are then accused of having ulterior motives.

Steven Hassan and Keith Henson are among the other cult critics to write about love bombing, postulating that it is similar, in terms of effects on neutrotransmitters within the brain, emotional state, and conduct, to the administration of drugs of abuse, temporarily producing intense euphoria when under its influence, and encouraging the actions from which the stimulus was derived. Pursuit of the stimulus often becomes an obsessive focus that is detrimental to financial status and human relationships.

Dr. Geri-Ann Galanti (in a sympathetic article) writes: "A basic human need is for self-esteem.... Basically consists of giving someone a lot of positive attention."

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