**Literature Review**

In this article, Amicarelli reviews the difference between the religious interference in the affairs of New Religious Movements, or NRM’s, by the governments in Europe and in the United States. According to Amicarelli, the European governments have a much more active role in regulating the activities of these NRM’s and therefore is more effective in keeping dangerous cult activity to a minimum, but in doing so, violates the human right of religious freedom. European governments have gone as far as trying to appoint the leaders of congregations and other religious organizations in order to prevent any unsavory action from being made. The United States does not violate the right of religious freedom due to its presence in their constitution. Unfortunately, in being lax in their monitoring and regulation of religious groups, cults such as Heaven’s Gate have been able to do more damage to their followers.[[1]](#footnote-1)

According to Dr. Simon Baron Cohen, cult organizations such as Scientology and Kabbalah use Digital Age technology to control their members in various ways. Scientology uses a device known as an E-Meter to assist in convincing members to divulge very personal and dark secrets in order to humiliate and blackmail them into staying in the cult. Kabbalah has obtained illegal “mind-reading” software, which observes facial expressions and fMRI scans to determine what someone is thinking in real time. They use this to their advantage, in combination with hidden cameras and listening devices, to convince members and outsiders that the higher members are able to read their minds. This use of technology is used to psychologically assault their victims and batter them into submission, which causes serious mental illness and allows the cult to assert near complete control over the lives of its members.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In this discussion of science’s effect on the soul, Richard Dawkins and Steven Pinker explore the different ways in in which the prominence of science and its recent leaps forward have begun to cause the human soul to atrophy through lack of religious exposure. Scientific thought has largely replaced that of the religious nature and as such, has deadened the souls of the modern population. They cite that originally a rainbow was thought to be God’s promise of peace to mankind, but now we have deconstructed the rainbow to know it as a combination of light and water vapor in the air. The weakening of the human soul has strengthened modern man’s need to believe in something higher than himself, which makes him particularly susceptible to religious charlatans and cults.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Au.org states that under the faith-based initiatives pushed through by former president George W. Bush violate the constitution and promote religious indoctrination. This also allows religious institutions to receive government funding for their social services. In addition to being protected by federal law, any religious movement that has been recognized as an official religion by the federal government of the United States can receive funds, so long as they are not used for proselytizing. This is poorly constructed and many groups have found that they can incorporate indoctrination into their services, which is not illegal, but it puts unnecessary pressure on non-religious individuals that need help.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In this article, Lefevre asserts that the Internet may be used by cults as a sort of “terrestrial god” to influence people. The ease of access for people and the inexpensive aspect draw cults to it like moths to an open flame. In addition to this, many of the young workforce and college age people have to spend a majority of their time on the computer and the only real connections they get to develop are with other people on social networking sites. The lack of exposure to the outside world that comes from prolonged computer usage also creates very trusting, gullible, and computer savvy people, the holy grail of cult member acquisitions. The Internet also allows cults to bring in funding through technology based businesses such as website design. Finally, the relative freedom of speech and speed of communications allow cult propaganda to be placed all over the World Wide Web and become readily accessible to cult proselytizers.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Martinez states in his article that cults recruit people that feel like they are lacking something in their lives, but are generally normal people that could easily be any face in a crowd. They use techniques that surround the person with the ideals of the cults while simultaneously providing them with intense amounts of love and affection, which encourages the victim to open up and form intimate relationships with members of the cults. Once this is done, the cult replaces your original identity with that of one that is wholly dependent upon the group and cannot stand to be away from it, which creates a fear of being removed from the group for not following their orders. A dangerous aspect of cults is that they can sometimes be very difficult to distinguish from legitimate social and religious organizations.[[6]](#footnote-6)

In this article, Richard Power explains the Internet’s lack of security and the dangers associated with it. He places special emphasis on organized groups such as crime syndicates and cults. Citing Aum Shinrikyo’s cybercrimes which involved hacking into the databases of major corporations and stealing trade secrets in order to use them for their preparations for a violent uprising and the notorious “Phonemasters” hacking group, which was a mercenary hacking group that obtained sensitive government information, Power warns of the coming threat of cybercrimes by organized groups and urges that internet users take adequate steps to protect themselves. Cults such as Aum Shinrikyo target scientists and software engineers to assist them in hacking as well as developing software to be sold for profit to fund other unsavory acts. Thus, the dark side of the Digital Age has been discovered and causes computer users to be cautious.[[7]](#footnote-7)

According to Religionwatch.com, the classic cult stereotype is slowly being shown less on television, exhibiting a departure from the usual perception of cult members as strangely dressed people with odd behaviors and delusional beliefs. This is in part, due to the increase in sitcoms and the rise of interest in terrorist attacks by the populace. The decline in the portrayal of cult members as mindless, suicidal, jumpsuit wearing lunatics has given cults the lack of exposure they need to become prominent in society again.[[8]](#footnote-8)

In this article, the cult of Rama, which has begun to require significant learning regarding ADA programming language, which is primarily used in government encryption, and general computer knowledge, is thoroughly examined based on reports from ex members and exit counselors. This particular cult uses several businesses as fronts for spreading their message and gaining revenue through computer-related activities. Rama also uses mind control techniques to instill extreme paranoia in his followers, so that they trust only their leader. Even other cult members are regarded as potential enemies.[[9]](#footnote-9)

According to Filip Spagnoli, religious liberties are doing just as much harm as they are good. Though they protect benign groups from religious discrimination and protects them from general government interference, it also shelters extremist groups with dangerous and reformative aims. Religious liberty and its implied autonomy present a serious problem for the future because it allows extremist groups to be protected by the government and retain autonomy without fear of persecution for their beliefs, even though they are likely to have very violent plans in mind.[[10]](#footnote-10)

1. Amicarelli, Alessandro. "CESNUR 2006 International Conference - The Autonomy of Religious Communities in the USA and Europe: a Human Rights Perspective (Amicarelli)." *CESNUR - Centro Studi Sulle Nuove Religioni - Center for Studies in New Religions*. 13 Apr. 2006. Web. 25 Oct. 2011. <http://www.cesnur.org/2006/sd\_amicarelli.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cohen, Simon B. "How Cults Use Technology To Mess With The Mind." *Judiciary Report*. 4 Aug. 2008. Web. 25 Oct. 2011. <http://www.judiciaryreport.com/how\_cults\_use\_technology\_to\_mess\_with\_the\_mind.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Dawkins, Richard, and Steven Pinker. "EDGE 3rd Culture: Is Science Killing The Soul?" *Edge : Conversations on the Edge of Human Knowledge*. 8 Apr. 1999. Web. 25 Oct. 2011. <http://www.edge.org/3rd\_culture/dawkins\_pinker/debate\_p1.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. "The Faith-Based Initiative." *Au.org*. Americans United. Web. 25 Oct. 2011. <http://www.au.org/resources/publications/the-faith-based-initiative/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Lefevre, Greg. "CNN - The Internet as a God and Propaganda Tool for Cults - Mar. 27, 1997." *CNN.com - Breaking News, U.S., World, Weather, Entertainment & Video News*. 1997. Web. 25 Oct. 2011. <http://www.cnn.com/TECH/9703/27/techno.pagans/index.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Martinez, Rafael. "How Cults Recruit." *Welcome to the Spiritwatch Ministries Home Page!* Web. 25 Oct. 2011. <http://www.spiritwatch.org/howcults.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Power, Richard. "The Risks - The Dangers Confronting Computer Users, Corporations And Governments | Hackers | FRONTLINE | PBS." *PBS: Public Broadcasting Service*. Web. 25 Oct. 2011. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/hackers/risks/dangers.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Religionwatch.com*. Mar.-Apr. 2011. Web. 25 Oct. 2011. <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CA264093983&v=2.1&u=va\_s\_128\_0920&it=r&p=GPS&sw=w>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. "Report on the "Rama" Computer Cult." *Ex-cult Resource Center*. Feb. 1991. Web. 25 Oct. 2011. <http://www.ex-cult.org/Groups/Rama/rama-report.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Spagnoli, Filip. "CESNUR 2006 International Conference - Religious Liberty in an Age of Religious Extremism (Spagnoli)." *CESNUR - Centro Studi Sulle Nuove Religioni - Center for Studies in New Religions*. 13 July 2006. Web. 25 Oct. 2011. <http://www.cesnur.org/2006/sd\_spagnoli.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)