A Qualitative Study of the Experiences of Former Bible-based Cult Members

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that
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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to contribute to the understanding of cult membership, by examining the "before, during, and after" experiences of former members. Five male and five female former long-term members of bible-based religious cults were interviewed. The transcripts of these interviews were then analysed using procedures based on Strauss and Corbin's (1990) Grounded Theory methodology.

Three models were constructed from the data analysed, which was explored using a variety of psychological and sociological conceptualisations. The study found that experiences of cult membership were too complex to be explained by a single theory or model. However Social Identity Theory proved useful in synthesising theories across a range of disciplines. The main predicators of joining were a searching/idealistic disposition, pre-existing religious convictions, and active cult recruitment tactics. The dynamics of membership were best conceptualised as an active process, involving a "switch" from individual to group identity. A belief that God was the constant audience was fundamentally important in determining the behaviour of members. A number of those interviewed had left involuntarily due to pressure from within the group rather than outside influence, which had not been widely reported before. Individuals appeared to suffer a grief/bereavement reaction after exiting, and treating them as such may provide a useful initial mode of intervention by mental health professionals. Former members themselves stressed the importance of understanding the context of their involvement, as opposed to any clinical approach based on individual pathology.

The study was de facto a pilot, as no previous record of grounded theory research into religious cults was found in the existing literature. The study therefore identified significant scope for further research into this field, and recommends the grounded theory approach as a useful means to do so.

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1. AIMS

The overall aim of this study was to discover what the experiences of joining, being a member of, and leaving a religious cult "mean" to former cult members. Linked to this broad objective were the following ancillary aims:

- To use a data driven approach to examine the effect of cult membership on identity
- To provide information to guide clinical psychologists in the rehabilitation of former cult members
- To escape the polarisation of sociological and psychological positions in this field by examining the possible use of social psychology as a theoretical framework.

The literature review below highlights that there are considerable methodological problems undermining many of the conclusions within the existing cult literature. Moreover, the meaning of these experiences to the individuals involved, and their own understanding of how they were influenced by the cult environment has, for the most part, been neglected. Therefore a discovery-oriented approach will be used to investigate the subjective accounts of former cult members.

2. PROVIDING CONTEXT - REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is a vast and growing research literature analysing cult membership and its effects, using a wide array of methodological approaches. The three definable stages and areas of study are: the circumstances of joining such a group, the experiences of membership, and the effects of leaving. Before examining these however, it is first necessary to clarify what is understood by the term "cult".

(i) Definition of a cult

The term "cult" tends to have pejorative connotations in general usage. Nevertheless, this reflects the fact that a variety of powerful, unconventional religious, political, and therapeutic groups do exhibit common features and organisational structures. In practice, there is no consensual operational definition of a cult, and it may be most useful to think of cultic groups in terms of

their respective position on a continuum, as Rosedale and Langone (1998) propose, *"in which a grey area separates 'cult' from 'noncult'"* (p.69). Nevertheless, distinct, albeit sometimes conflicting approaches and definitions do appear within the literature.

In sociological terms, a cult is the starting point of every religion, although not all cults claim religious status. Its organisation tends to be extremely simple, involving a single charismatic leader with a group of devoted followers, and has an essentially non-conformist stance. This is, firstly, in actively seeking to start a radical new (religious) tradition, and, secondly, in its semi-permanent conflict and tension with what is regarded as a corrupt and troubled world (Bromley, 1993). A broad sociological definition of a cult arising from these various sociological strands is as *"an ideological organisation held together by charismatic relationships and demanding total commitment"* (Zablocki, 1997, p. 2).

By contrast, researchers within the psychological discipline often use an "evidence-based" definition: *"a group or movement that, to a significant degree, (a) exhibits great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea or thing, (b) uses a thought reform programme to persuade, control, and socialise members, (c) systematically induces states of psychological dependency in members, (d) exploits members to advance the leadership's goals, and (e) causes psychological harm to members, their family and the community"* (Langone, 1993, p.5). However, as such definitions tend to be negative or at least "loaded" to some extent, they are therefore at odds with the objectivity and openness inherent in the aims of this study.

As a result, this research will utilise a definition provided by Galanter (1996) because of its neutrality as well as its compatibility with social psychological theory. Although he prefers the term "charismatic group", Galanter cites four defining characteristics of cults (p.270), as reflected in their members, who typically:

♦ adhere to a consensual belief system

♦ sustain a high level of social cohesiveness

♦ are strongly influenced by group behavioural norms

♦ impute charismatic or divine power to the group or its leadership

From the definitions presented, and in light of subsequent findings, it is taken as read that all the groups described in this study can be readily classified as cults, and they are treated as such throughout the rest of the study, as it is not an aim of this thesis to explore the precise definition of what constitutes a religious cult.

(ii)   Joining a cultic group

There is general belief, backed up by significant research findings, that the majority of cult members come from middle and upper-middle class families (e.g. Galanter, Rabkin, Rabkin & Deutsch, 1979). Clinical observations (Clark, 1979; Ash, 1985; Langone, 1991) and research studies also suggest that people often join cults during times of transition or loneliness (Galanter, 1989; Langone, 1994). Beyond this, the research diverges considerably, some focusing on individual circumstances prior to membership, while others concentrate on the mind control techniques allegedly used by cults to recruit new members.

a)   Antecedents to joining

Galanter and Buckley (1979) assert that any comprehensive understanding of the process of initiation and affiliation must include an examination of the antecedents to joining, the process of conversion, and the psychological dynamics that encourage and structure assimilation into active membership in the group. Indeed it is the role, nature and actions of cults in offering a new lifestyle, identity, structure, security and simple solutions to complex problems (e.g. Galanter, 1980, 1996, 1999), plus the specific proactive recruitment methods employed by some, that have sparked much of the debate surrounding cults.

Many psychologists and psychiatrists have used empirically-based research to conclude that individuals who join cults are socially and psychologically "inadequate" (e.g. Walsh, Russell, & Wells, 1995, p. 339). Other researchers and clinicians dispute this on the basis of their own research as *"the most disturbing and persistent myth about those who join cults"* (e.g. West & Martin, 1994, p. 11). Further studies suggest that cult members tend to come from "over-enmeshed," or troubled, families (Nicholi, 1974; Deutsch, 1975; Schwartz & Kaslow, 1979), that may have predisposed them towards cult involvement and post-cult psychological distress (Spero, 1982). However all of these studies tend to only quote statistics from other studies that support their own findings.

The USA based Group for the Advancement of Psychotherapy (GAP report, 1992) similarly suggests that cult membership should be viewed as a maladaptive attempt to achieve adulthood, arising from the developmental challenges associated with late adolescence (e.g. Singer & Lalich, 1995), including possible counter-dependent rebellion against the family. By extension, GAP also argues that remaining in a cult indicates either pervasive and fixed problems (e.g. borderline personality disorder), or the attainment of power and influence within the cult. However, although case studies are again cited, such claims tend to centre on generalisations and causal inferences without any direct supporting evidence as to why people stay in such groups.

Meanwhile, other findings contradict the suggestion in the above research that pre-existing problems are the leading predicator of joining a cult. Whilst around one in three of those recruited into cults in the USA have reportedly sought psychotherapy or counselling for psychological problems prior to cult involvement (Martin, 1989; Singer & Lalich, 1995; Langone, 1995), Martin points out that this rate is only slightly above that of the population of the USA as a whole, namely one in four. Moreover, Singer & Lalich (1995) found that, of this one-third, only five or six percent had suffered "major" psychological difficulties prior to joining a cult; the remainder experienced depression related to personal loss or were struggling with age-related sexual and/or career dilemmas.

Other studies (e.g. Goldberg & Goldberg, 1982; Maron, 1989) and clinical observations (e.g. Clark, Langone, Schecter, & Daly, 1981; Singer, 1986) assert that neither family background nor pre-existing psychological factors adequately predict cult involvement. Langone (1995), for example, found no significant difference between the psychological and family backgrounds of former members of the Boston Church of Christ and two more mainstream churches. Finally, another recent review of research into the question of whether cult membership is psychologically harmful concludes that those entering cults do not necessarily exhibit psychopathology, and the majority of individuals entering a cult do not report any previous psychopathology (Aronoff, Lynn & Malinoski, 2000).

All of the reports reviewed above share a common shortcoming, namely that the accounts of pre-cult adjustment relied on are retrospective in nature. Moreover, studies of pre-cult adjustment tend to be marred by a lack of comparison with other types of group (e.g. Spero, 1982; Martin, Langone, Dole & Wiltrout, 1992). Prospective, controlled comparative studies are therefore a priority for empirical research.

b)   Mind control

The mind control debate revolves around the central questions of why people first join and then remain in cults, as well as the nature of the resultant effects on the individual. It is based on the contention that *"cults look for active, intelligent, energetic individuals who will perform for the cult by fund-raising, recruiting more followers... ".* (Lalich, 1997, p.5).

The "mind control" model emanated from studies of indoctrination techniques performed on American POWs during the Korean war (Lifton, 1961; Schein, Schneier, & Barker, 1961), and rests on the premise that participants are passive, unwilling or unsuspecting victims of calculated, systematic attempts to manufacture conversion and manipulate environments. It is therefore

claimed that a number of techniques, such as confessions, sleep deprivation, and information control, are utilised to induce cognitive dysfunction and heightened receptivity to new ideas. Lifton lists eight characteristics of thought reform that have since been applied to cults:

- milieu control
- mystical manipulation
- demand for purity
- cult of confession

- sacred science
- loaded language
- doctrine over person
- the dispensing of existence.

Although the details differ, the arguments advanced by "mind control" theorists display a remarkable degree of uniformity. As classically delineated by Hunter (1951), Meerloo (1956), Sargent (1957), Lifton (1961), and Schein et al. (1961), "mind control" processes correspond to a three-stage paradigm of radical resocialisation by which an old identity is stripped away and a new one is created. Both Hassan (1988, p. 67-72) and Singer & Lalich (1995, p.74-77) define these stages as "unfreezing", "changing", and "refreezing", however they have also been characterised in other terms such as "stimulus control", "response control", and "normative control".

In the "unfreezing" first stage, the victims of mind control are subjected to various physical, psychological and social conditions designed to induce a nearly complete cognitive, emotional, and social breakdown. In the "changing" second stage, this suggestibility is used to impose a new identity centring on a new set of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. This "mind control" occurs via systematically and ever more intensively introducing individuals to new daily routines, expectations, and activities, reinforced by rewards and punishments, and subject to careful monitoring of activity and social interaction. The "refreezing" final stage, attempts to consolidate and reinforce those changes by rapidly and thoroughly immersing the subjects of mind control in a new, stable, and supportive social environment, suffused with ritualised activities. Working hard on collective tasks, it is argued, generates new bonds of loyalty, as well as new conceptions of happiness, purpose and self-worth. It is further maintained that members can be conditioned to continue to censor and refashion themselves by the repeated and relentless control or manipulation of their behaviour and beliefs (Singer & Lalich, 1995).

The mind control model has given rise to a number of case studies and has found some clinical support (e.g. Singer, 1979, 1989; Clark, Langone, Schacter, & Daly, 1981; Ross & Langone, 1988). Data gathered by snowball sampling techniques (e.g. Enroth, 1977; Conway & Siegelman, 1995) has also reinforced this model, although snowball sampling cannot be

considered representative of a total population as most of the data was collected from former cult members who had been "deprogrammed".

This model has accordingly also been severely critiqued (Ungerleider and Wellisch, 1979; Maleson, 1981; Galanter, 1983, 1988 1996; Levine, 1985; Coleman, 1985). Criticisms include the use of sample sizes that do not allow for sufficient statistical significance (e.g. Singer & Lalich, 1995) and the application of inappropriate statistical techniques (e.g. Conway & Siegelman, 1995). A common accusation is that clinicians focusing on individuals may not fully appreciate the influence of social factors within cults (e.g. Beckford, 1985; Bromley, 1993). Meanwhile, it has been argued from a sociological perspective (e.g. Barker, 1983a, 1984, 1989) that there is a lack of conclusive evidence to support the mind control model, and that conversion is a feature of group attachment, the process of which is more subtle and less sinister than suggested (e.g. Barker, 1983b, 1989; Robbins, 1988). While it is acknowledged that induction may be causally linked to active recruitment policies and reinforcement techniques, it is also maintained that the decision to join is primarily the result of psychological engagement rather than coercion per se. Furthermore, high drop-out rates are cited to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of supposed brainwashing techniques [1], and thus the fallacy of the mind control model. The argument here is that, although cultic groups may exercise comparatively high levels of social control, this is evidently with only limited success. Nevertheless, this emphasis on group processes may equally under-estimate the psychological subtleties detected by clinicians (e.g. Singer & Lalich, 1995).

(iii)   Experiences of membership

The research on the experience of cult membership is also fraught with problems. Early anecdotal accounts by cult members and deprogrammers (Patrick & Dulack, 1976; Conway & Siegelman, 1978) contributed to a sensationalised notion of "brainwashing" and "mind control" by powerful, destructive groups, igniting the debate outlined in the preceding sub-section. At the same time, "cult-supportive" sociologists (e.g. Strupe & Bromley, 1979; & Wright, 1987) tended to supplement their quantitative studies with qualitative data that contradicted their own conclusions (Dole, 1995). Thus, pre-conceptions on the part of researchers has led to bias.

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[1]   Barker's notion of "resistible coercion", 1989

A common reported phenomenon among cult members, is what West and Martin (1994, 1996) term "pseudo-identity". This refers to a dissociative coping response to challenging circumstances, such as marked life changes, prolonged environmental stress, or both. This pseudo-identity becomes superimposed upon the original personality, which is suppressed, often by active "thought-stopping cognitive strategies" such as praying, humming, chanting, or meditating (Dahlen, 1997), while the individual remains in the new stressful environment. Clinical reports have viewed dissociation as central to an individual's adaptation to a demanding and contradictory cult environment, and many such studies have used instruments such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) to try to tap such phenomenon. However, since self-report instruments do not effectively detect dissociation, critics have viewed the dissociation theory with considerable scepticism. Indeed there is evidence within MMPI studies themselves, for example elevated lie scales (Ungerleider & Wellisch, 1979), that suggests that ex-cult members may not always be honest in their responses.

Spero (1984) assessed 51 cult devotees prior to treatment and after 6 months of psychotherapy. Pre- and post-increases were reported for the Verbal and Performance section of the WAIS (Wechsler, 1958). Pre- and post-treatment scores on the Bender Gestalt Test differed, with the post-treatment scores indicating more perceptual openness (i.e. a tendency to process rather than block out visual input). Based on results from the Rorschach (Exner, 1978; Rorschach, 1942) and Embedded Figures tests (Witkin, 1971), Spero (1984) concluded that cult members who do not receive treatment may experience difficulties in performing certain perceptual and cognitive tasks, and associates these inabilities with characteristics such as *"passivity, identity confusion, other-orientedness, unclear sense of self..."* (p.750) that have been used to describe cult devotees. Unfortunately, Spero failed to clarify the meaning of ambiguous terms such as other-orientedness, nor included a test-retest group of non-cult members. Another unresolved issue concerns the validity of the psychological tests applied to cult members and ex-members, in so far as these were not designed to tap the complex issues associated with cult membership. The fact that the ideologies of many cults are at variance with Western norms (e.g. Barker, 1984, 1989) also undermines the appropriateness of the assumptions and values implicit in these tests. Furthermore, the fact that these findings have been presented as scientific is questionable in itself, and reflects the lack of rigorous research on cult members.

Galanter's view (1996, 1999), on the basis of his involvement in various research studies, is that powerful group dynamics hold the key to maintaining affiliation. Thus the establishment

of a cohesive group in which beliefs and behaviours are socially regulated and reinforced, together with the influence of a charismatic leader, ensures a high degree of structure and therefore helps to sustain membership. The suggestion that the lifestyles and practices of many cults could have the same function and outcome as traditional therapies is an original and constructive perspective, not least in terms of evaluating the psychological impact of involvement (e.g. Saliba, 1993, 1995). Galanter (1978, 1990), Kilborne & Richardson (1984), and Wenegrat (1989), all found that both recruits and long-term members experienced a relief from emotional distress when they felt more closely affiliated with the group. Galanter (1996) further claims that as the operant reinforcement of approved behaviours may increase individual compliance and a restructuring of perceptions of their environment, the enhanced well-being inherent in the affiliation process may then contribute to the relief of major psychopathology.

This does not however mean that religious cults necessarily function as therapeutic institutions. Similarly, the fact that active cult members attest to their improved condition and enhanced quality of life cannot be advanced as indisputable evidence that membership has cured them of any pre-existing psychological problems. While some do undoubtedly find membership rewarding, this "relief effect" may be temporary and/or superficial (e.g. Galanter, 1996), and may even be from stresses imposed by the cult environment itself.

In addition, Galanter (1996, 1999) maintains that the responses of current cult members to researchers generally depends on whether they are perceived as sympathetic or threatening to the safe boundaries of the group. Psychologists tend to be regarded with more suspicion than sociologists. The Unification Church for example has boasted that it deliberately deceives researchers who are considered anti-cultist (Barker, 1984, 1989). It may be particularly difficult to elicit honest responses if a given group's leader(s) exploit conformity pressures to present a good image. This might certainly account for some positive self-presentations; indeed, inducing unquestioning alliance to the group's ideology is a basic hall-mark of cultic groups (Latkin, 1990). Despite these factors, Arnoff et al's (2000) review of the research concludes that current cult members appear psychologically well-adjusted and demonstrate few conspicuous symptoms of psychopathology. However they go on to attribute this finding to group factors such as the pressure to conform, rather than to the "therapeutic benefits" of membership. They also point to considerable methodological problems in the studies, for example the fact that sample sizes do not always allow for sufficient statistical power (Ungerleider & Wellisch, 1979; Galanter 1980), and that few of the studies include control or comparison groups (Galanter & Buckley, 1978; Galanter, 1980; Latkin, 1990).

(iv)   Leaving the group

(a)   Why do people leave cults?

Most members do eventually leave cultic groups (Barker, 1984, 1989), although in numerous cases only after many years. In one of the few studies in this area, Wright (1983) identified four main reasons for defection on the basis of structured interviews with 90 subjects:

- a break from the cult's social insulation - only 4 of 12 persons separated from the group for three or more weeks (e.g. to visit family) returned

- unregulated interpersonal intimacy giving individuals an outlet for sharing doubts they might normally suppress; *"in every case where one spouse or mate defected the other also left the movement"* (Wright, 1983, p.112)

- disillusionment with the group's non-achievements or predictions proved wrong, e.g. about the world coming to an end

- disenchantment with the hypocrisy or immorality of the cult's leader(s).

(b)   Effects of leaving

Psychological distress is frequently reported by former cult members (Chambers, Langone, Dole, & Grice, 1994) and most of the studies into former cult members have found some evidence of clinically significant psychological symptoms (Clark, 1979; West & Singer, 1980; Conway & Seilgman, 1982; Goldberg & Goldberg, 1982; Spero, 1982; Galanter, 1983; Conway et al, 1986; Langone et al., in press: Martin et al., 1992, 1996; Swartling & Swartling, 1992; Langone, 1993). This well documented nature of post-cult psychological distress was moreover confirmed by Arnoff et al's (2000) review of the literature on post-cult adjustment.

Many former cult members perceive themselves to have been psychologically abused during their cult involvement (Chambers et al., 1994). There is also empirical support for linking specific cult practices (e.g. social isolation, information control, sensory overload, suppression of critical thought, and unpredictable reward and punishment), with the average length of rehabilitation (Conway, Siegelman, Carmichael, & Logins, 1986) and the nature of subsequent distress (Martin et al., 1992; Yalom & Lieberman, 1971). The effects of pseudo-identity syndrome highlighted earlier are manifested in symptoms such as dissociative, trance-like states, depersonalisation, emotional numbness, and floating, or *"switching back and forth between behaviours characteristic of the two separate personalities"* (West & Martin, 1994, p. 274). West & Martin further claim that returning to mainstream society after leaving a cult may lead directly to a post-traumatic stress reaction, a claim supported by Winocur, Whitney,

Sorensen, Vaughn, Foy (1997). Cognitive deficiencies such as "black and white" thinking and difficulties in making decisions have also been reported (Singer, 1978, 1979; Goldberg & Goldberg, 1982; Levine, 1985; Singer & Ofshe, 1990).

Other commonly reported after-effects of cult involvement experienced (e.g. Singer, 1979; Singer & Lalich, 1995; Langone, 1995) include:

- depression
- loneliness and a sense of alienation
- low self-esteem
- problems explaining how/why they joined such a group
- constriction of social contacts
- fear of groups or commitment

- distrust of their own ideals, motives and decision-making ability
- suspicion of professional services
- problems reactivating value systems
- guilt, shame, and self-blame
- paranoia
- panic attacks

Other research however links post-cult distress to unrelated experiences before or after involvement with the group. Causal factors include family history (Maron, 1989; Sirkin & Grellong, 1988), level of pre-cult adjustment (Galanter, 1978, 1980), and the manner of cult disaffiliation, including the extent of any contact with cult awareness resources (Ungerleider & Wellisch, 1979; Lewis, 1989, 1993). A few studies similarly report only minimal levels of pathology in former cult members (Lewis & Bromley, 1988; Wright, 1991), and only one study with adequate controls has been conducted that indicates that former cult members report greater psychopathology than a matched comparison sample (Aronoff & Lynn, 1996). The fact that the percentages of people experiencing psychopathology reported in these studies varies greatly (27% to 95%) ultimately suggests that there is inconclusive evidence as to its precise causation. It is therefore most likely that post-cult psychological adjustment is multi-determined (West & Singer, 1980; Dubrow-Eichel, 1989; Tobias & Lalich, 1994), with variables from across the life-span interacting with cult experiences to create patterns of adjustment that vary for each individual ex-member.

(c)   Other relevant issues

Case studies (e.g. Goldberg & Goldberg, 1982, 1988; Dubrow-Eichel & Dubrow-Eichel, 1988) have documented the rehabilitation of former cult members via psycho-education, psychotherapy, and exit counselling. However, as implied in the preceding section, one must be careful when attributing post-cult distress exclusively to cult membership, as data may

equally be advanced to show that the impaired mental and psychological condition was the result of deprogramming methods.

Deprogramming usually involves the "kidnap" or temporary restraint of the cultist, while he/she is given information that goes against the ideology of the cult to which he/she has allegiance. Research has indeed shown that ex-cult members are often highly distressed by this process, and such methods have been linked with psychotic episodes and other mental health problems (e.g. Ungerleider & Wellisch 1979; Barker, 1984). The nature of the information given during the deprogramming process has also resulted in accounts of group membership that are significantly more negative than those of individuals who left voluntarily (e.g. Ungerleider & Wellisch, 1979). It is therefore important to distinguish between former cult members who have left voluntarily and those forcibly removed.

Former members are often reluctant to participate in scientific studies. Several factors may motivate this reluctance, such as fear of retaliation from the cult, embarrassment at having been manipulated, ridicule from those who lack understanding, and a need for closure (e.g. Singer, 1995). For this reason, the methodology of the present study was designed with an awareness of these potential sensitivities.

(v)   Methodological problems within the existing literature

Despite being based exclusively on the findings of academic researchers or clinicians, this review of the past research on cult membership reveals numerous methodological problems:

- different definitions of what constitutes a cult or "new religious movement"
- the inability of self-report questionnaires to effectively tap psychological states such as dissociation
- pre-conceptions or bias on the part of interviewers
- the tendency of researchers to over-generalise or make unwarranted causal inferences
- the application of inappropriate statistical techniques
- lack of control or comparison groups
- sample sizes that do not allow for sufficient statistical significance
- inherent biases of subject samples
- active deception of researchers by group members (Dole & Dubrow-Eichel, 1981)

Even the Cultic Journal, edited by a multi-disciplinary team of eminent American academics,

fails to report the methodology used in detail. The resultant non-transparency and non-repeatability of the majority of studies therefore, to some extent, undermines their credibility. Furthermore, as cults are an emotive issue, the literature is highly polarised. As a consequence, methodology is often selected according to its ability to illustrate the desired outcome, whether from a purely individualistic or purely social perspective. Langone (1997), who has conducted several meta-analyses within the field of cult research, further claims that researchers have been known to quote the same empirical data, yet attach different causal slants to it depending on their attitude towards cults. He similarly maintains that the selection of participants is often biased towards proving the researcher's desired result. A further concern, voiced by Aronoff et al (2000) is the extent to which individuals studied after having can be considered representative of ongoing cult members. This latter observation is particularly relevant to this study, and acknowledged at several points throughout this thesis accordingly.

Similarly, most of the non-clinical studies have been conducted by researchers "sympathetic" to cults, and/or have concentrated on involuntary leavers being "deprogrammed" under psychiatric treatment. The result is to undermine the formulation of generalisations about reliability (Saliba, 1995). By the same token, the vast majority of qualitative clinical research into cults originates from case studies involving the use of quantitative measures, such as clinical questionnaires, that are arguably of limited applicability in this field, e.g. in terms of their lack of sensitivity to the collectivist cult ideology.

In summary, few studies demonstrate rigorous methodological procedures, and in many cases the research methodology used is left largely unreported. Thus, the need for a study into cults that directly addresses methodological issues is a justification for this present research in itself.

3. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Past research into cults has been polarised in terms of psychological and sociological positions. One aims of the present research is therefore to help overcome this dichotomy by using a social-psychological framework, in order to reconcile a recognition of the psychological effects on the individual, with the importance of the need to understand social context (e.g. Farr, 1996).

A number of authors support the notion that the psychology of social influence is appropriate to the understanding of cults (e.g. Ash, 1951, 1952: Franks, 1961; Milgram, 1974; Zimbardo, Ebbesen, & Maslach, 1977; Cialdini, 1993; Galanter, 1996; Zimbardo, 1998). Thus Ash (1952) and Milgrams's (1967, 1974) respective landmark experiments into social conformity and obedience to authority have been frequently cited in helping to understand cult dynamics. Ash utilised confident assertive-sounding accomplices to purposefully give wrong answers to basic questions, which led other students to doubt their own judgements, thus illustrating people's inclination towards conforming within certain social situations. Milgram's renowned shock experiments demonstrated how people may obey even a complete stranger if they are perceived to be in a position of authority, to the point of actually causing direct physical pain to another individual. This has been advanced to understand how ordinary people may exhibit extraordinary or seemingly bizarre behaviour within a cult setting. Moreover, social psychology demonstrates that simply adopting a role within a social setting can lead us to unwittingly take on companion roles, whereby for example audiences listen and "true believers" believe (e.g. Goffman, 1971; Hochman, 1990: Milgram, 1992).

The relevance of attribution theory (Bem, 1967) in terms of the under-estimation of situational factors within cults has also been advocated (e.g. Galanter, 1979; Cialdini, 1984). Attribution theory and "cognitive dissonance", first documented by Festinger (1957), are undoubtedly important concepts with regard to gaining a better understanding of how certain groups define consensual validating norms (e.g. Hardyck & Branden, 1962; Bem, 1967). Festinger observed how the members of a "flying saucer" cult rationalised away the fact that the world had not ended on the day their leader had prophesied; indeed, in many cases, their faith became even stronger (e.g. Festinger, Riecken, Schachter, 1956). His explanation for this was that people can only tolerate a certain amount of cognitive dissonance or discrepancy between the different components that make up his or her identity. Thus Festinger explains that in order to alter a person it is necessary to affect at least one of their behaviour, thoughts, or emotions, maintaining that, if there is a conflict between these aspects, those in conflict will change to minimise the contradiction. Conway & Siegelman (1978, 1995) pioneered the addition of another component, the control of information, which they suggest has a profound influence within cults in terms of behaviour modification. Janis's "Groupthink" theory (1977) may also provide an aid to unravelling the closed nature of group decision-making in cults, particularly concerning how members tend to adopt the decisions of the leader(ship).

However useful these social psychological theories may appear to be in relation to understanding the area of cult membership, there is no record of them having been tested in a

methodologically rigorous way. Previous applications of these theories to this area of study have occurred via common sense, hypothesising from other studies, or direct "arm-chair" theorising after talking with and observing present and former cult members, but without any close adherence to a methodological structure.

The present researcher believes that personal and social identity may be a useful social psychological concept relevant to understanding individuals reported experiences of cult membership. There are certainly records of cults such as the Unification Church instructing prospective members to "open their minds" and saturate themselves with new meaning and sense of identity (e.g. Butterworth, 1981; Barker, 1984; Conway & Seligman, 1995). There are also references to the adoption of pseudo-identities as outlined above (e.g. West & Martin, 1994). There are however no records of social identity theory (SIT) or social categorisation theory (SCT) being applied to this area of study.

Tajfel (1978) defines social identity as *"that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership"*(p. 63). SCT abandons the idea that the motive of self-esteem is the central motivational construct of social identity theory, favouring the notion of salience. Hogg & Abrams (1990) suggest that the motivational drive for self-categorisation is related to a search for meaning, according to socially and historically specific criteria. SCT therefore proposes that *"people derive their identity (their sense of self, their self concept) in great part from the social categories to which they belong"* (Hogg and Abrams 1988, p.19). The theoretically important insight into selfhood is that a social identity is acquired through any act of self-categorisation, an act which provides them not just with a label but also points to a set of appropriate attitudes, behaviours and other attributes which can guide their action. To the extent that a given social identity is salient, both attitudes and behaviours will express that identity (Turner, 1982). Essentially the person stereotypes himself and then acts in accordance with that stereotype.

Lastly, Galanter (1996, 1999) suggests that systems theory (c.f. Von Bertalanffy, 1968, Baker, 1970, Miller, 1975) may prove helpful in understanding cults and their interactions with society, by viewing a cult as a functionally integrated whole. This may in turn throw light on the experience of former members, by giving credence to the context in which their experiences occurred. Galanter accordingly argues that the group operates as a close-knit social system to assure its stability. It does this by monitoring and manipulating the activities and views of its members, either via the leadership structure or other general members.

Compliance with the group's norms is thus assured by the individual's desire to avoid the estrangement, dysphoria or conflict that may result from appearing to question group values. Scapegoating of disobedient/unruly members reinforces this and helps to maintain a sense of goodness and trust among members.

Following on from this, Galanter maintains that information is carefully managed, in order to minimise any dissonance between the views of the group and the contrasting attitudes of society at large. This is part of the general boundary control exercised by a group to protect it from threatening external incursions. This may also involve inculcating a suspicious attitude towards society at large, in order to reinforce assimilation and discourage disaffiliation, and include drawing clear distinctions between members and non-members in terms of their moral worth and innate value as people. New members represent implicit "evidence" of the group's rectitude, and recruitment therefore plays an important role in helping to sustain and stabilise the entire system (Galanter, 1999).

Convincing as this conceptualisation of the cult as a social system may appear, it nevertheless provides, another example of a theory being applied without directly accessing the views and perspective of those under discussion, i.e. former members of the cultic system themselves.

4. CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY: a qualitative approach

(i) Introduction – the theoretical backdrop

Given that the aim of this study was to capture an insider's perspective and to remain as close to the data as possible, a qualitative rather than quantitative approach was chosen as the best means to achieve this. Bryman (1988) distinguishes a "technical" and an "epistemological" side to the "quantitative versus qualitative" debate concerning choice of methodology. The technical version concerns the selection of a methodology that best answers the proposed research question; as indicated, this meant a qualitative approach for the purpose of this study, which is explained further below. Meanwhile, the epistemological angle argues that the gathering, analysis, and interpretation of data needs to be conducted within some broader understanding of what constitutes legitimate enquiry and warrantable knowledge (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994). Again, it was felt that qualitative methodology was more in line with the researcher's general outlook and view of research. To further explain the choice of

methodology however, it is necessary to look briefly at the philosophy of science that underpins it.

The earlier, more "traditional" school of social science is positivism. The positivist approach is concerned with objectivity and hypothetical deduction techniques, i.e. testing hypotheses via experimental research designs. This therefore emphasises the use of reliable methods, such as standardised questionnaires (e.g. Follick, Smith & Turk, 1984) and biochemical measures (e.g. Snyder, Burt & Creese, 1976), that can provide answers to questions about relationships between variables. Positivism was widely criticised when applied in the field of social and psychological research during the 1970s (Filmer, Phillipson, Silverman & Walsh, 1972) for ignoring the social and cultural construction of the variables that were being measured and correlated. Moreover, despite yielding some major discoveries in the study of the natural sciences, some researchers also criticised the positivist approach on the basis that the structure of the social world differs from that of the physical realm of natural science, and therefore should not be studied in the same way (Avis, 1995). In response, methodologies were developed that were more sensitive to the complexities and specific nature of social phenomena, and examples of these include discourse analysis and grounded theory.

The alternative school to positivism is that of human science, and qualitative research is its main method. This approach is concerned with subjectivity, e.g. what is it like for people to experience this type of event? It therefore focuses on description, interpretation and the generation of theory, i.e. the achievement of understanding as opposed to the demonstration of truth (Rennie, 1994).

Although qualitative research is not a homogenous category, there are common features that contrast markedly with those of quantitative methodology. Qualitative methods focus on *"naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings"* (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10), and aim to *"produce rounded underpinnings on the basis of rich, contextual, and detailed data"* (Mason, 1996, p. 4), in order to providing more immediate insight into activity in the "real world" (Robson, 1993). The data generated tends to be complex and involve dense descriptions of activity embedded in, rather than stripped of, the subjective context being recounted. Qualitative data equally helps to explore the interpretations of participants themselves. It is also often collected over a sustained period of time, which enables the researcher to study processes, as opposed to "snapshots", as is often the case with quantitative methodology, where the researcher may not even meet the participants. Orford (1995) cites this ability to focus on the insider's view as a great strength of qualitative research, as well as

the ability to focus on the development of substantive theory rather than grand or formal theory.

The researcher is able to address questions that are not amenable to quantification, able to obtain clarification/amplification, and include probes to explore the private sphere. Further, the unconstrained structure not only affords the researcher greater freedom, for example, to adapt and tailor the research to particular circumstances or in the wake of certain findings, but also allows the participant greater freedom of expression than conventional data-collection procedures. Given the underlying philosophy of phenomenology (the focus on meaning and understanding of events, occurrences and happenings as they are perceived and experienced), qualitative methodology is synonymous with its underlying philosophy, since it locates the meanings people place on events, processes and structure of their lives, together with their perceptions, assumptions, pre-judgements and presuppositions. Recognising that there is no truth about any particular thing is a notable strength of qualitative analysis. The particular qualitative methodology chosen for this study is grounded theory.

(ii)   Grounded Theory

This is a structured type of qualitative methodology developed by Glaser & Strauss (1967), and centred on grounding theory in experiences, accounts and local contexts (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995). It arose from their criticisms of the prevailing logico-deductive model of research in psychology and other human sciences, for seldom leading to the construction of new theories. In *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), Glaser & Strauss thus set about articulating a series of techniques and processes that would enable researchers to move from data towards substantive theory-building. Since this initial pioneering work, grounded theory has been adapted and developed by a number of researchers, who have demonstrated its flexibility in terms of the variety of topics investigated and the analytic methods employed (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Within the wider realm of qualitative research, grounded theory also appeals to investigators who prefer to work with language rather than numbers as their focus of interest (Gillet, 1995).

The application of grounded theory is based on the "method of constant comparison" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as a standard analytical technique for the development of theory from raw data, and transcribed interviews are the primary vehicles used to derive information about participant's life experience and personal meanings. The analysis of these typically proceeds

in a line-by-line manner, with the text being broken down into units. These units are given a descriptive category title by the researcher, however titles may change as further material is added (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). Thus, each new quote is compared with those assigned to existing categories and across interviews for similarities, differences and general patterns, in order to ascertain whether a new code is required (Glaser & Strauss, 1990). The process is guided by writing memos and drawing diagrams of conceptual relationships. Category saturation is achieved once no new categories are needed to accommodate new data emerging. There is a constant interplay of data collection and analysis. Categories are continually subsumed as they approach the core meaning of the phenomenon, with the final stage of the analysis consisting of the development of several core themes around which the material can be organised into a clear theoretical statement. The structure or theory developed may also comprise a number of different levels with higher and lower order categories that vary in their degree of abstraction (Coffrey & Atkinson, 1996). In short, the theory is created from and grounded in the data, generated and confirmed through close and direct involvement with a particular group of participants.

Many qualitative researchers (e.g. Charmaz, 1995) recommend delaying the literature review so as not to unduly influence data collection and analysis. Certainly the flexibility of grounded theory means that the organisational skills of the researcher are of paramount importance in executing it effectively. Safeguards are built in to diminish as far as possible the potential influence of pre-existing theory and assumptions on the part of the researcher. Throughout the whole process there are recommended techniques for ensuring and checking reliability and validity, and for producing an adequate audit trial. These will be described in *Chapter Three*.

The acknowledged problem with grounded theory and with the naturalistic paradigm in general is known as the "dilemma of qualitative method" (Hammersley, 1989; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994). This refers to the fact that theory cannot simply "emerge" automatically from the data, but rather is effected by existing concepts and theory. Moreover, as Strauss & Corbin (1994) themselves highlighted, no researcher is a "tabula rasa" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The question thus becomes "what grounds grounded theory?" (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995). There are two partial responses to this, provided by feminist research and the constructivist revision of grounded theory, both of which are relevant to the view taken in the present study.

Feminist standpoint research concentrates on conceiving people within their wider contexts,

and demands awareness of four specific types of subjectivity, namely:

➢ subjects' own understanding

➢ socio-cultural norms/systems determining and underlying the perceptions and attitudes of researchers and participants alike, and which are inherently predicated on issues of power

➢ recognising particular interpretations as valid within social or institutional networks

➢ the perspectives and interpretations of researchers themselves (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995).

This latter point links neatly to the constructivist revision of grounded theory. As outlined by researchers such as Charmaz (1990, 1995), this approach recognises that the research process is necessarily interpretative, and assumes an active, not neutral, observer whose decisions shape both process and product throughout the research (Charmaz, 1990). Thus the researcher brings his or her own particular philosophical stance, school of thought, methodological strategies, experiences, values and priorities to the research. Acknowledging this allows the reader to understand how the researcher interacts with the data. As Henwood & Pidgeon (1994) suggest, the constructivist revision of grounded theory is reinforced by acknowledging the multiple aspects of subjectivity that anchor knowledge claims in science.

(iii)   Reprise of the rationale for the researcher's choice of methodology

The above literature review indicates that, despite the many possibilities afforded by a social psychological theoretical framework in terms of helping to understand the experiences of former cult members, these have generally applied directly at a theoretical level without proper reference to the insider's own perspective. This is certainly a criticism of much of the literature. Moreover the research reviewed above tends to focus mostly upon how individuals join cults and whether or not cultic environments are psychologically harmful, while there is an absence of qualitative research that goes beyond single clinical case studies. Those that have attempted to contextualise the experience of former cult members have not adhered to rigorous methodological procedures, while many of the studies conducted by psychologists have stripped the data from its social context, who have analysed it instead within an individualistic logico-deductive paradigm. In short, there is a two-fold deficit within the existing literature, namely investigating the insider's perspective and adherence to rigorous methodological procedures. This reinforces the justification for the present study, given its avowed aim of using a rigorous grounded theory approach to find out what former cult members actually think and understand about their own experiences and how these have affected them.

Grounded theory is deemed a useful method for elucidating contexts and exploring action-in-context, and arguably most effective when applied to complex phenomena that are difficult to quantify. Furthermore, it offers flexibility, which enables researchers to go beyond initial preconceptions and frameworks. This is important in the field of cult research, as quantitative methods have tended to produce conflicting and confusing evidence, and the methodological problems alluded to limit the conclusions that can be made about the influence of cults on former members. For example, the majority of studies reported that a significant proportion of former cult members experienced clinically significant psychological symptoms and/or adjustment problems after they left the cult, without providing conclusive evidence as to what this degraded post-cult adjustment can be attributed to. Acquiring such information is a priority in so far as it would clarify factors associated with membership in cults and the transition to non-cultic environments, as well as give service providers valuable insights that could be usefully applied to the treatment of former cult members.

Importantly, the positivistic scientific paradigm assumes a "realist ontology" i.e. that reality consists of a world of objectively defined facts (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). This is inherently at odds with the actuality that religious beliefs are founded on faith rather than fact. Moreover, the ideologies of many cults are at variance with secular Western norms, not least in terms of rejecting individualism in favour of collectivism, which may again present a serious barrier to any positivist scientific attempt to understand cult experiences. In addition, the researcher selected qualitative methodology because it is felt that meaning is too often imposed without sufficient reference to context and without consideration of insider views. Finally, "psych-lit", library and internet searches have revealed no example of a study into cults using grounded theory, which provides a concluding firm justification for the proposed study and methodology, i.e. not only to contribute depth of meaning, but also to fill a gap in the research up to now.

CHAPTER TWO: METHOD

1. ETHICS

(i) Introduction

This study has received ethical clearance from the University of Leeds School of Psychology Ethics Committee (*see Appendix A*). The subject matter and approach involved asking participants to talk about a personal and sensitive time of their lives, which put a premium on seeking consent and maintaining anonymity. This was particularly the case given the potential for individuals to be subject to threats from their respective former groups, if they were identifiable.

The following sub-sections detail the attempts made to address the ethical issues raised within the context of the research interviews:

(ii) Confidentiality and informed consent

Each participant was fully informed about the nature and subject of the research matter in writing, by telephone, and in person immediately prior to interview. Confidentiality, the restrictions upon it, and consent were all explicitly discussed with each participant and signed informed consent obtained before the researcher travelled to meet the interviewee and conduct the interview (*see Appendix B*). Similarly, participants were informed that they could ask for the interview to be terminated at any point without justification or pressure to continue. Moreover, specific consent was obtained to record interviews on audio-tape and use anonymised quotes in reports of the study. Each participant was notified that a secretary employed for transcription purposes would hear the tape, and that research supervisors and another qualitative researcher were also required to read parts of the transcripts. All the above information was presented in summary form on a participant information sheet (*see Appendix C*) which was given to participants immediately prior to their interview. Each was asked to indicate whether every point had been clearly explained to them and further clarification was given where sought.

Participants were assured that any identifying information within the transcripts would be altered or removed. All data, whether in written or audio format, was kept in a locked filing cabinet for the duration of the study. Each participant was given the option of having his/her tapes returned once analysis was complete; otherwise they were destroyed.

(iii)   Structure of the research interview and follow-up contacts

Ethical issues were considered when designing the interview format, and it was felt that a semi-structured interview format, that could adapt to the interviewees' topical flow, would allow participants to retain some sense of control over the amount and extent of information they divulged. It was deemed particularly important that the participants knew who the researcher was and understood the basic purpose of the interview. Informants were given the choice as to where they wished the interviews to be conducted; in nine cases this meant their home, while the remaining interview was conducted at a university.

The first part of the interview involved clarifying the interview's boundaries. All the interviews were conducted in as sensitive a manner as possible, and the interviewer's comments throughout were non-judgemental and geared to conveying interest in what the participant had to say. The style of the interviewer is discussed further in *Section 4(i)*. The comments of the pilot interviewees *(see Section 4(iii))* helped to make the interview more comfortable for subsequent participants.

Thus, ethical concerns were addressed by the structure of the interview itself, which ended with a debriefing phase during which participants were asked off-tape whether the interview had left them with any difficult feelings, or whether they felt uncomfortable about any aspect of the interview. Time was similarly allowed for more general conversation so participants could 'wind down' after what was often an emotionally intense experience. Two interviewees became visibly upset during the interview process, but both later stated that they felt that this was inevitable when talking about difficult feelings, and were not uncomfortable at having done so. One of them confirmed that the "wind down" period had helped to contain any difficult feelings.

All participants were given a contact telephone number for the researcher in case they wanted to discuss further any aspect of the interview or the research in general. A follow-up visit was also arranged to enable the informants to provide feedback on the interviewer's analysis, which it was felt would enhance their sense of ownership over their accounts within the research process. Finally, a list of organisations offering confidential support to former cult members was given to each participant in case the interview process gave rise to difficult feelings at a later date.

2. RESEARCHER'S OWN BACKGROUND & EXPERIENCE

The interpretative nature of the analysis when using grounded theory puts a premium on acknowledging any possible preconceptions on the part of the researcher. This section accordingly profiles the researcher's relevant past experiences.

The interviews were conducted during months 20-24 of a three-year doctoral training programme in Clinical Psychology. This includes practical experience working with adults, children, older adults and people with learning disabilities. In the final year of the course, the researcher elected a nine-month placement in psychodynamic work with individuals and groups, followed by a placement focusing on multi-cultural systems work for the final three months of the course. This latter choice in particular reflects the view of the researcher that socio-political and cultural contexts are often overlooked within the discipline of clinical psychology, which, in putting a strong emphasis on the scientist-practitioner model, arguably encourages an overly "medicalised" and individualistic outlook. This position has developed on the basis of prior aspects of the researcher's experience, as outlined below.

The researcher has travelled extensively in developing countries, and has a BSc in Social Anthropology, both of which gave an insight into the relative nature of world-views. She has also worked within a multi-lingual, multi-national context for an organisation in Belgium, where understanding differing cultural perspectives and beliefs was again crucial. In gaining a Diploma in Person-Centred Counselling, an emphasis was placed on reflexive practice, acknowledging biases, and listening to clients without making prior assumptions or adopting an expert stance. This was equally the case while working in a rape-crisis centre in an area of Houston, Texas, with low socio-economic status and a strong ethnic mix.

Of greatest direct relevance to the present study however, is the fact that the researcher completed a MSc in Social and Organisational Psychology in 1995, for which she wrote her thesis on cult membership. In general, the course stressed the effects of the "social within the individual", social constructivist perspectives, systems approaches within psychology, and the importance of contextualising experience. More specifically, the thesis topic means that the researcher had prior knowledge of the literature and theories relating to cult membership. The reflexive process was therefore made central to the present study as a means of documenting possible a priori assumptions, and exemplified by the reflexive journal kept by the researcher to record her feelings and perceptions following each interview.

The issues surrounding cult membership are especially sensitive, value laden, and controversial. This makes it all the more important for the researcher to be conscious of her own values, in

order to pre-empt and minimise any risk of these influencing participants or biasing data collection. By the same token, it is fair to say that an awareness of the importance of remaining grounded in the data, in tandem with the inherent rigorous nature of grounded theory methodology, serves as a good guard against bias in itself.

In summary, the researcher feels that the background experiences outlined above have given her not only a thorough knowledge of both social and individual perspectives within psychology, but also an awareness as to how each could influence the final analysis of data. Moreover, familiarity with the range of literature within what is the relatively polarised sphere of the "pro-" and "anti-cult" perspectives, has reinforced the researcher's awareness of how strong allegiances to either camp could lead to biases. Although this polarisation is arguably unhelpful, the researcher is of the opinion that both perspectives have their merits - as born out by, and firmly grounded in, the data collected within the present study - and has thus consciously endeavoured to maintain an open mind towards both.

3. THE PARTICIPANTS

(i)   General selection issues

"Theoretical" rather than statistical sampling was used to select participants (cf. Pope and Mays, 1995). The former entails a deliberate choice of participants, while the latter seeks to recruit a representative sample of the total population. This deliberate theoretical sampling allowed the researcher to develop the theory based on the concepts emerging (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), simultaneously collecting, coding and analysing the data, seeking participants in subsequent interviews that could build on the data already collected and thereby densify the categories (Glaser, 1978).

It was decided to draw participants from a variety of cults. This was based partly on research suggesting a marked similarity in the processes that occur within cults and their effects on members (e.g. Martin, 1997), but also to allow possible variations between different cults to be explored (e.g. Singer, 1995). Another factor influencing this decision was that the participant pool was not large enough to select informants from a single cult. Further decisions about selection were made after the first three interviews, on the basis of revisiting memos and referring to notes made in the reflective journal (*see section 6 (ii)*). At this point the number of participants accessed meant that there were sufficient participants to limit the study to bible-

based cults, as the most common, but by no means only, "type" of cult, but to include several different groups of this kind.

Participants were accessed via several organisations. These included Catalyst (a London-based information and counselling service for ex-members of cultic groups), the Cult Information Centre, the Dago Gloria Outreach Centre (a research centre for world religions), the FSG (Family Support Network), FAIR (Family Action Information and Resource), and at a conference organised by INFORM (an information and research centre for new religious movements based at the London School of Economics). Some of these organisations distributed letters inviting participants to take part in this study (*see Appendix D*).

The use of a number of agencies was to preclude any possible sampling bias as the result of recruiting from a single source, given that different organisations tend to address different aspects of cultic involvement [1], and moreover often have their particular affiliations within the pro- and anti-cult polarisation. These may in turn influence the attitudes and outlook of ex-cult members who come through their doors.

(ii)   Specific criteria

Original inclusion criteria included membership of a cult for a minimum of two years, however the sample obtained allowed for this to be extended to three years. Participants with a lengthy involvement in their respective group were preferred, as it was felt that they would be more likely to have been fully socialised into their respective groups, and therefore have more in depth experience of what it was like to be a cult member and indeed a richer account of possible after-effects having left. The mean duration of involvement for the 10 participants was 14½ years. An equal number of male and female interviewees were intentionally sought and found (*see Table 1*), in order to control for possible gender-related differences.

Similarly, the initial intention was to only include those who had left their groups voluntarily, however the interview process revealed that this issue was not as clear cut as originally thought, and this criterion was waived accordingly. Nevertheless, none of the former members interviewed had been forcibly removed or had undergone deprogramming. There was no criterion governing the minimum or maximum period of time since a participant had left their group. This was deemed unnecessary in light of the considerable length of each informant's involvement, and the fact that they were therefore likely to have significant breadth and depth of memorable experiences. It would also have overly limited the choice of participants. By the

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[1]   e.g. from an academic and educational perspective, as opposed to having a supportive and therapeutic focus

same token, neither a positive or negative attitude towards their experience, nor psychological input before or after their cult involvement, served as criteria as these factors were of interest per se within each individual's account. It was anticipated that any explicit mention of such issues could provide added insight into the extent to which this influenced their recollections and current feelings about their experiences.

Again, having joined a group in adulthood was also intended as a universal prerequisite. On these grounds, the researcher was not originally going to include interview 4 in the final analysis, after it emerged during the interview that she had in fact been born into the group. However, the richness of her account, and, more importantly, the fact that the categories extrapolated from it using the grounded theory approach were similar to those of the other participants, all of whom had entered their respective groups voluntarily in adulthood, led the researcher to reverse this decision. Indeed it was realised that this "out-lyer" to the sample could in fact reinforce the validity of the study's wider findings.

In summary, the study employed rather broad criteria. This is however consistent with the exploratory nature of the enquiry and also the fact that grounded theory methodology generally seeks a broad range of "instances" in order to capture the diversity of themes within the subject area. Moreover it was never the researcher's aim to find a group representative of the population at large, but rather to present a group and identify their common characteristics so as to delimit the constituency to which any findings might be applicable.

(iii)   Profile of the participants

This study examined the accounts of cult membership by 10 former members, five male, and five female, whose age ranged from early 20s to late 50s. The 10 volunteers were accessed via the various means outlined in *Section 3(i)*. The profiles in *Table 1* are deliberately vague, due to the need to preserve the confidentiality of interviewees, as highlighted in the section on ethics.

Table 1: Participant details

Interview Order	Sex	Age	Cultic Group	Time In Cult (Years)	Reason For Leaving
1	F	40s	Small bible-based group [2]	8	Group disbanded after splitting into two camps resulting from a leadership dispute
2	M	50s	Jesus Army	24	Long process culminating in refusal of the group to acknowledge sexual abuse committed against his daughter, which gave rise to a court case & the subsequent conviction of the perpetrator
3	M	40s	Church of Christ	8	Expelled after disagreement with leaders
4	F	20s	Children of God	16	Left when mother did
5	F	40s	Small bible-based group [3]	9	Felt unable to handle demands made by group; felt "damned" anyway & attempted suicide
6	M	20s	Church of Christ	3	Ran away when demands became too great; intended to return until discussing alleged untruths and illegal operations with another ex-member
7	F	50s	Jesus Army	22	Husband decided to leave after nervous breakdown due to the conflict caused by alleged illegal group operations
8	M	50s	Unification Church	19	Reflecting on the group's way of life after his wife fell ill. This involved the lack of concern shown for her, culminating in the advice that he should leave her.
9	F	50s	Children of God	21	Long process, including conflicts re. alleged experience of own physical abuse and conflict regarding how her children were subjected to sexual abuse
10	M	50s	Unification Church	17	Incremental doubts

4.   THE INTERVIEW

(i)   Style of the interviewer & design of the interview schedule

In designing and conducting the interviews, the researcher was influenced by Spradley's (1979) concept of the "ethnographic interview". Spradley highlights several important features of an ethnographic interview that encourage rapport between interviewer and informant to give rich, insightful data: explaining the purpose of the interview, explaining the purpose of the project, and phrasing questions in a certain way. The overall key is "*to think of ethnographic interviews as a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements*

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[2]   See note 3 below
[3]   Name of group withheld at the request of interviewee 5. It was therefore decided to do the same for interviewee 1 on the grounds of equity and confidentiality.

to assist informants to respond. Exclusive use of these new ethnographic elements, or introducing them too quickly, will make interviews like a formal interrogation" (p. 58).

Spradley's concept of "grand tour" and "mini tour" question formats were used in particular. Grand tour questions are general, e.g. *"Do you feel that the group influenced the way you felt and acted?"*, and asked from a standpoint of ignorance of what things were like for the informant. Meanwhile, mini-tour questions ask the participant to describe some smaller unit, such as, *"Could you give me a specific example of an experience that illustrates that?"*. The aim was therefore to allow respondents to move from general descriptions to giving more specific examples. "What" rather than "why" questions were preferred (c.f. Silverman, 1993), as the answers are often easier to provide and as it was anticipated that respondents might not always be aware of the reasons underlying their actions.

In designing and redrafting the interview schedule, the primary emphasis was on devising questions that were clear, non-leading and pertinent to the topic of investigation. Prior to starting the study, it was pointed out during supervision that client-centred techniques such as paraphrasing and summarising could lead to the premature closure of conversations and should be used very carefully. This is because informants might indicate agreement in order to please the interviewer when their intended meaning was different. The importance of picking up on the exact words of the interviewee wherever possible if paraphrasing was used was therefore acknowledged from the outset; hence for example the specific code relating to the particular metaphors used by interviewees. This was in addition to the perceived benefits of asking for clarification.

(ii)   The interview schedule

The original interview schedule comprised six questions with prompts, covering the main areas of interest arising from the literature on cult research (*Appendix E*). Specific aspects of this were revised following the first pilot study (*see Section (iii)a* below), however the overall structure and main area of experience covered by the questions were not changed (*see Appendix F*).

The final interview format allowed for approximately 15 minutes per question, and followed a logical order in terms of progressing through the participant's experience of cult membership. This progression was designed to elicit feelings and memories in the following sequence:
- relevant to entering the cult
- while in the cult

- reflecting how the group influenced the way the participant felt and behaved
- relevant to leaving
- immediately after leaving
- ways in which the participant consider themselves to have changed since

At each stage, participants were requested to discuss a significant experience in particular detail. This strategy was adopted to help focus the research, and with the belief that tying data to particular experiences would not only make it more tangible but also steer the participants away from unsubstantiated generalities. Most of the questions were also open-ended with a view to stimulating reflection and encouraging participants to provide descriptive material. There was also added value in this approach; for example it was anticipated that the open-ended nature of question 1 [4] might help reveal whether the participant had any pre-existing psychological problems prior to cult membership.

There were exceptions to the open-ended nature of the questions however. Question 3 [5] was presented as a closed question to avoid any presumption that the participant was definitely influenced by the group. Question 6 [6] was particularly focused in order to avoid over-generalisation. Similarly the prompt was termed as a closed question to facilitate greater definition of how the participant now regards their experience.

The researcher memorised the interview schedule so as not to disrupt the natural flow of the interview by having to refer to notes or papers during the session. Indeed participants were encouraged to direct the conversation to areas of concern to them, and the format was thus used more as a simple framework to help establish the interview's general direction. As a result, the order of questions did digress on occasion from that set out in the interview schedule, however all questions were addressed by each informant.

(iii)   Pilot Interviews

Two pilot interviews were conducted to test the success of the interview format, the comprehensibility of the interview protocol, and the style of the interviewer. It is important to outline these in detail as they proved influential for the design and conduct of the main study. The interview schedule for the first of these pilots is found in *Appendix E.*

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[4]   "Could you tell me what led to you joining the movement?"
[5]   "Do you feel the group influenced the way you felt and acted?"
[6]   "Thinking of yourself now and yourself in the movement - what would you say was the biggest single difference?"

a)   Pilot interview 1

The participant had spent 7 months in the Unification Church [7] 11 years previously. She was especially interesting as a pilot interviewee, having herself conducted doctoral research using grounded theory, and now uses and supervises qualitative research techniques/projects in her current academic position. She was also an existing friend of the researcher. The interview was conducted in a formal manner, and no discussion of the study or its methodology was held before or during the interview other than that required for ethical purposes. The interview took place in the participant's home, lasted for 1½ hours, and was audio-recorded.

The interview produced rich descriptions that were clearly relevant to the aims of the research study, and thus validated the broad proposed approach and methodology, and the use of grounded theory in particular. Furthermore, although one cannot legitimately draw too many conclusions without analysing the data, there were particularly rich references to "seeking identity", "switching opinions and identity to fit that of other cult members ", and the power of group dynamics in general (e.g. fear of being viewed as different from other group members). These appeared to corroborate the anticipated relevance of social psychological theory.

The interviewee raised several issues herself about the interview format. She was surprised by the questions referring to a specific event, particularly in relation to joining and leaving the movement, and asked for clarification in both cases. During post-interview feedback (c.f. Smith, 1994), she explained having found these questions very difficult to answer in so far as they were not conducive to providing an answer that put her experiences into their proper context. She also underlined her perception of her experience of membership, and her reasons for having joined and left the Unification Church, as <u>processes</u> extended over time, as opposed to isolated incidents. She thus spotlighted the danger that focusing on specific events might distort the meaning, depth, and overall account of her experience.

After the rationale for the emphasis on specific events had been explained to her, she suggested that the focus could be better achieved instead by asking for an example of a specific experience as a follow-up question to a more generalised invitation to recount what happened. In other words, she suggested asking the participant to focus once the context had been established. The researcher agreed, and replaced the term "event" with "experience" in the revised interview structure, so as to encourage participants to give answers that focused on or reflected experiences of feelings or states. It was also decided that further follow-up questions and prompts would be useful in their own right in providing added detail and avoiding over-generalisation.

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[7]   a.k.a. "the Moonies"

Other than asking the direct questions outlined in the interview schedule, the only remarks made by the researcher were either to express interest or seek clarification. After the interview, the participant expressed that she was pleased and reassured by the way the she had been prompted by the researcher to correct anything that she felt was being inadvertently misrepresented during reflecting back and summarising. She also said that this had helped her to stay focused. Other positive feedback included the value of the last question, focusing on the present, ("Thinking of yourself now and yourself in the movement - what would you say was the biggest single difference?"), in so far as this had stimulated a period of debriefing, which then continued during the time allocated anyway for debriefing after the interview. The pilot also helped to develop ideas about other prompts. Thus *"How do you feel those around you were influenced by this experience"* elicited an interesting response about the group's teaching on suicide; this is in fact what had precipitated the participant's decision to leave the group but had left other group members apparently unmoved.

In summary, the rich data gathered assured the researcher that grounded theory would indeed be the optimal methodology for this study, and moreover that social psychological theories would be relevant to emergent themes from the data. This first pilot stage was thus very encouraging in terms of predicting the success of the proposed project and helping to refine the interview (*see Appendix F*).

b) Pilot interview 2

Having refined the interview schedule on the basis of the first pilot, a second pilot interview was conducted to test the value of the changes. The participant used for this pilot was accessed through Catalyst. She had been a member of the London Church of Christ for 7½ months around 3 years earlier, and had been a student at the time of her recruitment. The 1½ hour interview took place at the participant's own home in London. As she was previously unknown to the researcher, issues such as consent, confidentiality and the researcher's own safety [8] were addressed before commencing.

The revised schedule did indeed appear to avoid potential difficulties concerning the focus on significant events. As anticipated, putting a generalised question before homing in on a specific experience did provide context to the experience, and also seemed to flow more naturally. The general descriptions themselves appeared more detailed, making it easier for the interviewer to understand what part of the process the participant was referring to when the focus narrowed to a specific experience. This in turn made it easier to prompt the participant for the personal significance of the experience.

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[8]   i.e. informing a trusted friend as to destination and carrying a mobile phone

As anticipated, the use of the word "experience" similarly stimulated the participant to account for the feelings that were particularly relevant to what was being focused on. For example, when responding to question 3 [9], the participant related how she had felt very dependent upon the approval of other group members and was scared of "stepping out of line", tying this to the way she acted during one of their "public confession" sessions. Prompts such as "Could you tell me more about that" helped encourage even greater detail.

The non-directive approach to the interview again proved successful. This was corroborated by the participant after the interview, who said that she had felt comfortable with the researcher's manner. Moreover, the participant commented that she had disclosed a lot more than she expected to during the interview. She reflected further during debriefing that she had not found the interview style intrusive and that no unnecessary probes were used, which had helped her to open up and gave her time to develop her thoughts. Importantly, the participant also mentioned that she thought the questions were clear and conducive to giving a coherent account that enabled her to pinpoint the most significant aspects of her experience.

In summary, the second pilot appeared to confirm that the interview schedule had been improved and was appropriate for the study proper. As with the first pilot, grounded theory was shown to be an optimal methodology for analysing the thick descriptions gained. Again, unprompted descriptions of identity and group processes reaffirmed the potential relevance of social psychological theories to this area of study, although this could not be fully verified before subjecting the data to the rigorous methodological scrutiny required by grounded theory.

(iv)   The interview process in the main study

A 1½ to 1¾ hour interview was conducted with each participant on a day and at a time of their choosing. Nine interviews were conducted at the participant's home, and one was conducted at a University. Participants were scattered across the country, and it was necessary to travel substantial distances to conduct most of the interviews, all of which were audio-taped.

The approach was flexible in so far as the researcher endeavoured to allow each participant to influence the choice of issues discussed and the topical flow of the interview, given that the aim of the research was to discover the meaning participants have found for their own experiences. This required establishing a good rapport, remaining neutral, avoiding preconceptions, and not leading the participant.

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[9]   " Do you feel the group influenced the way you felt and acted?", followed up by " Can you give me an example of an experience that illustrates this?"

It proved helpful to explicitly state that the purpose of the interview was to find out what the experience meant to them, and that there were no right or wrong answers. Prompts were used on occasion, and questions were routinely followed up with requests for clarification where appropriate. The researcher was mindful during the interviews of the need to avoid leading or closed questions in order to encourage the interviewees to explore their own perspectives rather than being overly influenced by the interview process, e.g. *"I don't want to misrepresent you so please correct me if I am, but are you saying ... or do you mean something else"*. This non-directive style, whereby the interviewee was prompted for greater detail on points that he or she him-/herself had highlighted, seemed to work very well, as it did not appear to unduly influence the content of the answers, but did serve to put the interviewees more at their ease. To conclude, the participant was asked *"Is there anything that we have not covered that you think is important?"*. This was to invite any further information that could enrich the account, but, by the same token, allow interviewees to fill in any gaps not covered by the questions and thus feel that they had been able to properly "have their say", i.e. give a full account of the experience and what it meant to them.

The final question - *"What do you think about new religious movements now"* - was dropped in the final five interviews and participants were asked instead *"What do you feel mental health professionals should know about how this experience has affected you?"* This change was made after three of the first five interviewees mentioned that they had felt misunderstood by mental health professionals without any prompt from the researcher, and further exploration of this issue was deemed worthwhile, i.e. in order to inform and help improve clinical treatment of former cult members in the future. The first five interviews produced rich data regarding the effect of group membership on the individual's identity, and it was thus felt that a deeper understanding of this would be beneficial to the analysis. Prompts such as *"What do you feel actually happened to your identity?"* and *"What role do you feel your common beliefs as a group played in that?"* were used, but only when descriptions of the effects on individual identity were made naturally and explicitly by participants themselves.

(v) Feedback sessions

Following the coding and initial analysis of the data, the researcher returned to the participants in order to get their feedback on initial analysis and ideas regarding theoretical links. A follow up questionnaire was constructed for these purposes (*see Appendix G*). These feedback sessions proved highly beneficial to the overall study and will be discussed in *Sections 5 (iii) & (iv)* and in greater detail in *Section 6(iii)*.

5. CODING & THEORY BUILDING

(i) Transcription

The audio-tapes were transcribed into a written record, *(see appendix H)* and the resulting transcripts were given a number from 1 to 10 according to the order in which the interviews had taken place. This was done to ensure the anonymity of participants, and the names of individuals and places were changed or replaced with a letter.

Interviews number 1 and 10 were transcribed by the researcher herself to provide first hand experience of having done so and to see what, if any, influence the process of transcription might have on the analysis. A member of staff in the Leeds University School of Psychology transcribed the other interviews, having first signed a confidentiality form and been briefed on ethical issues. The researcher checked transcripts for accuracy by listening to the tape while following the text. Thereafter numbers were given to segments, paragraphs and lines of text as outlined in *Section (ii)* below.

The grounded theory analytic methodology chosen meant that the transcripts produced from the interviews were crucial, in that they served as the primary data for the analysis. The subsequent analytic process consisted of two overarching stages - open coding and theory building - as described in the *Sections (ii)* and *(iii)* below. It should be stressed from the outset that these stages were themselves characterised by constant reflection and revision, as demanded by the grounded theory approach, and were often conducted in tandem.

(ii) Open coding & the crystallisation of empirical categories

"Open coding" began as soon as the first interview had been transcribed and continued throughout the interview phase. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define open coding as the "process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising the data" (p.61). Thus the researcher approached each text with the question "what categories, concepts or labels do we need in order to account for the phenomena of importance in this paragraph?' (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1996), and went through each transcript on a line by line basis [10], writing in the margin the essence of what was being described, using the informant's own words as much as possible.

In practice, consecutive lines were frequently related to the same concept and therefore did not always merit further comment (unless they also touched on a different theme), so these were

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[10] as recommended by Strauss & Corbin (1990) for producing the most creative codes, especially at the outset of

grouped into "meaning units", defined as a number of words or sentences that describe the same phenomenon (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). The meaning units in the present study therefore vary in length, from just a few words [11] to whole sentences and paragraphs [12], depending on the constituent meaning. It should be noted however that the process of identifying or defining meaning units is in itself somewhat arbitrary in so far as it depends on the subjective interpretation and selection of the researcher, and is thus open to possible researcher bias.

After open coding interview 1, the researcher looked at all the summary descriptions in the margin to identify basic common themes. Where there were obvious similarities between individual concepts derived directly from the data, these were clustered together to form an "empirical category". The series of empirical categories were then written down on a separate sheet as the first step in defining the overall codes under which all the transcript excerpts would be eventually classified. The relevant quotes from the interviews were "copied and pasted" from the original transcript into these fledgling categories. It should be noted that on occasion the same quote was placed in more than one empirical category although this was avoided where possible.

During this process of organising the data, category names were continually revised to make them more relevant to the quotes they encompassed as the number of quotes allocated to each group increased. This involved the "method of constant comparison" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), whereby new units of analysis are compared with previous ones in order to determine whether they can be assigned to an existing grouping or if a new category is required. To illustrate, the following statement, *"we were nearest to God - we felt we were so special, so exclusive"*, taken from one interview was considered to be a meaning unit and originally given the code, "exclusivity". As other quotes were added such as, *"I believed we were God's elite, he had chosen us"*, this grouping became the empirical category, "God's chosen elite".

The same procedure was then carried out for interviews 2, 3 and 4. The next stage was to compare the resulting initial empirical categories and meaning units within them from all four in terms of overlaps and distinctions by repeatedly inquiring of the data "what does this represent?" Again, the names and emphases of particular categories were amended as a result, which helped to differentiate them from one another as well as enhancing their internal consistency. Thus "self-sacrifice" was originally divided into "voluntary" and "involuntary", while "group interests supersede individual wants" was also a separate code in its own right. Similarly, "chosen elite" was a separate category from "group as only means to salvation" in

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the analysis

[11] "fear of failing God"

[12] too lengthy to warrant quoting here

earlier versions of the coding schedule. In both cases, comparative analysis indicated that there were grounds to combine the codes due to thematic overlap, particularly in light of the fact that "category saturation" was achieved relatively early in the interview coding process i.e. by interview 4, as indicated by the saturation table (*see Tables, 2, 3 & 4 at the end of the Chapter*). Within the grounded theory literature, the term category saturation refers to the point at which adding new data produces no new categories.

Interviews 5 to 8 were then individually coded, followed by a similar comparative review. Finally interviews 9 and 10 were coded, after which a final review of all the empirical categories was performed, revisions made, and a description the category written down. Each interview was then revisited and particular bits of quoted text moved to a different category if it fitted better as a result of any revisions made. Any empirical categories containing information from a single individual or interview were discarded at this point, given the emphasis on common feelings, experiences or outlooks, and the assumption that such individualised categories would therefore be of minimal analytic utility.

The researcher also wrote memos while coding each of the transcripts, as an integral and useful part of the process of constant reflection and revision. These covered a wide spectrum of issues from observations about particular codes or anomalies, to more lateral thoughts about emerging theoretical links. The role of memos will be discussed further below (*see Section (v)*).

In summary, open coding proceeded with the researcher approaching each interview as a discrete item of data. Units of analysis varied in length and were dependent on meaning, while code names were revised as new quotes/meaning units were added to existing categories. Once the process had been completed, each transcribed interview had its own different set of structured categories. Adopting what Stiles (1993) referred to as "permeability", i.e. how the theory is changed by the data, helped in terms of remaining open to new interpretations and understanding of the data, and adherence to reflexive validity. It is hoped that this will be shown through the presentation of the analysis.

(iii)   Conceptual categories

Having delineated the empirical categories, the next stage was to cluster these together to create conceptual categories and so develop a higher order of meaning to facilitate the theory-building process. In building conceptual categories of its own, this thesis used Strauss & Corbin's definition of "*a classification of concepts. This classification is discovered when concepts are compared one against the other and appear to pertain to similar phenomena*" (1990, p.61). In

the current study, "identity switch" is a good example of a conceptual category, in so far as the empirical codes clustered within it – "denigration of critical thinking", "dependence & sense of powerlessness over own fate", "self-sacrifice; group interests supersede individual wants", and "change in beliefs, behaviour & identity" - are clearly inter-related under the broader sub-heading. Again, the process involves making comparisons and asking questions of the data, but this time using the empirical categories.

The process of creating the conceptual categories was initially effected by writing down the names of all the categories on cards and spreading them out randomly. The researcher then arranged the cards in groups that seemed to be linked, for example by a common concept (e.g. relationship to the outside world). The process was repeated several times, with several days interval between each exercise, which proved helpful in facilitating flexibility and a fresh approach each time. The resulting conceptual categories were then also reviewed in terms of their individual coherence, as well as overlap with other conceptual categories, and individual empirical categories also re-examined to see if they might fit better elsewhere. Finally, the individual meaning units within each coded interview were also revisited in order to check that they too still fitted.

The researcher's memos and in-depth knowledge of the data were particularly helpful in this process. Elements of the "axial coding" process described by Elliott (1996) were used to think about the phenomena in terms of "domains". This involved the researcher, already immersed in the data, making conceptual links between empirical categories, by studying the content of each and asking "what is the context in which this phenomenon is occurring?", "what is the nature of this phenomenon?" and "what are the consequences of this phenomenon?" This allowed the data to be grouped together and organised in ways that made conceptual and theoretical sense. For example, empirical categories relating to the group's and/or members' relationship with the outside world were divided between the higher order categories "us & them: group's self-definition in contradistinction to the outside world", "influence/control over interactions with the outside world" and "reinforcement of us & them". This differentiation in turn facilitated later modelling, given the complexity of the experiences and processes occurring according to participant accounts. *The final coding schedules are included at the end of the chapter, along with the saturation tables and a code-count overview.*

The emergent conceptual categories were then examined with a view to revealing a core category, defined as *"the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated"* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.116). Although several central inter-linking categories were identified, including "influence/control over beliefs" and "switch of identity and

heightened conformity", it did not prove possible to spotlight any one core category capable of covering the whole gamut of joining, being a member and leaving. Moreover it was not felt appropriate to "impose" a core category on the data that did not naturally present itself (Elliott, 1996), not least as this would have run against the whole grain of the grounded theory approach. Nevertheless, on the basis of feedback sessions with interviewees it became apparent that the conceptual category "God as Audience" was the background against which the participants' experiences made sense and which integrated the processes identified in the analysis in the most meaningful way. This will be explained further in *Chapter Three*.

(iv) **Theory building and modelling**

The essence of theory building is to reintegrate the categories into which the data has been fractured in a way that offers an understanding of the material at an analytic level. Having defined conceptual categories, the researcher went on to look at the links between them and test hypotheses by asking questions such as "was A linked directly to C, or did subjects have to pass through B to get to C?".

In order to try and answer such questions, the researcher again returned to the empirical categories as well as to what was known about the participants themselves, including their individual differences. The researcher used a manual "cut & paste" for this stage of the research process. The existing category data was printed out and the various groups of quotes were cut out on a category-by-category basis. The researcher then worked closely with the data, by continually dividing, re-grouping and re-dividing empirical and conceptual categories, and sorting pieces of paper into different envelopes according to similarity in meaning. The open-coding phase of the research had initially created around 250 empirical categories, however this number was eventually reduced to 79 *(see end of Chapter)*. This was achieved by further clustering together related themes, in order to make the extremely large data set more manageable from an analytical viewpoint.

A proposed interpretation of the data was developed in terms of two diagrams relating to the process of joining and the experience of membership of a cult (*see Models 1 & 2 in Chapter 3*). These endeavour to illustrate the progressive evolution of participants' experience as well as the inter-relationship between categories, as this was felt to most accurately depict what they had reported and how they felt. Data concerning leaving the cult was also developed but did not readily lend itself to diagrammatic representation. Nevertheless, as leaving also transpired to be a process rather than an event, key elements such as "inability to live up to groups standards" and progressive doubts and questioning the group", are contained within the membership model

(*see Model 2 in Chapter 3*). Further hypothetical questions and proposed relationships were then explored with the interview participants themselves during the feedback sessions (*see Section 7(iii)*) and the data and models refined and developed accordingly.

The final membership model evolved out of seven prototype versions, although some empirical categories, for example "inner conflict" and "denigration of critical thinking", were retained throughout all stages of the analytic procedure. Other early empirical categories, for example "group self-protective behaviour", later became conceptual categories as they were judged to subsume a cluster of more detailed and specific empirical categories. Choices were also made as to how the data could be best represented in order to capture a sufficient level of complexity. By way of example, this can be seen in the conceptual category "us and them: the cult's self-definition in contradistinction to the outside world". Although the empirical codes that make up this conceptual category could be considered to overlap, the original open coding stage of data analysis revealed some subtle differences that arguably enrich insight into the data by illustrating how the "us and them" distinction is encouraged within the cultic environment. Furthermore, collapsing categories such as "polarised world-view" and "elitism" would arguably have taken away from the model (*see Chapter 3*), as the concepts were distinct within participant data. A choice was therefore made to code the data within one category or the other and thus to avoid overlap. This proved possible because the data fitted to one of these categories more easily that the other, even if at times it could have fitted into both.

Another overlap occurred between the two empirical categories within the "high group standards and progressive doubts" conceptual category [13] and, the categories "inability to meet group standards" and "questioning or challenging the group" within the in the group and the categories "thinking for self and questioning the group" and "group reaction to inability to meet group standards and/or leaving" included in the leaving categories. It was however again decided that combining these categories and placing them in either the membership model or the leaving data would have detracted from the final explanatory potential of which ever one no longer contained these empirical categories. Thus, it was again deemed desirable not to combine these categories and again code the data in the most appropriate category, even if at times it could have been coded in both.

(v) Memos

Memos play a key role in developing theory and can cover anything, including hunches, comments on new samples to be checked out, explanations of modifications to categories,

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[13] "inability to meet group standards" and "questioning or challenging the group"

emerging theoretical reflections and links to the literature (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996). Strauss & Corbin (1990) also commented on their essential value for creative thinking, making linkages, and theoretical density. The aim is to capture the underlying reasoning while data is being coded and definitions produced (Pidgeon, Turner & Bockley, 1991). They thus serve as "snapshots" of the thinking of the researcher during the different stages of the development of the theory.

Within this study, memos were used extensively throughout the process to keep the researcher abreast of the complexities of the analysis and variations within individual accounts. 482 memos were produced in total. Initially they were simply operational and largely just notes about codes, which acted as reminders of events. They also served as a record of how concepts were combined to produce empirical categories; e.g. *"Merged self-sacrifice and group over individual into an overall category of because it seemed more useful to consider these together, as data from one category was also falling into another during coding, suggesting they were very similar"*.

As the research progressed, memos recorded emerging links concerning the relationships between codes (*see Appendix I*). A particular type of memo produced in the course of the analysis were individual summaries of the major themes and relationships between them in each participant's narrative. The aim of this was to develop a better understanding of the participants as individuals, and to preserve the coherence of their accounts. It was felt that this would counterbalance the initial stage of coding which is essentially a fracturing process. The initial intention was to include these summaries in this methodology chapter, however this idea was subsequently rejected on the grounds of ethical considerations, as again, this could have made participants more identifiable.

6. THE REFLEXIVE PROCESS

(i) Reflexivity

The researcher's prior knowledge of relevant literature and theoretical schemes (*see Section 2*) undoubtedly came into play during the constant comparative analysis, and indeed before. Given that the interpretation process within a grounded theory study of this kind is inherently active, the reflexive process was an important means of quality control, in order to guard against a priori assumptions and bias on the part of the researcher.

Schwandt (1997) defines reflexivity as having two aspects. The first is a recognition of the fact that the inquirer is part of the setting, context, and social phenomenon being studied, for as Steier (1991) states, *"as researchers, we create worlds through the questions that we ask, coupled with what we and others regard as reasonable responses to our questions ... and construct that which we claim to find"* (p.6). In other words, de facto involvement with participants and active, integral involvement in the process being studied means that the researcher cannot help but have an influence. This is firstly by deciding what to research, and thereafter how to frame the research questions, what questions to ask during the interviews, how to probe the answers, and so forth.

In studying cults, the researcher drew on her own awareness and knowledge in a number of spheres. These included the unspoken rules governing interpersonal communication in general, as well as the role and influence of the interviewer in the interactive process, as, in social psychological terms, researchers arguably represent the "other", with all the implicit power relations this entails (c.f. Ashmore, 1989; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996). Social and experiential knowledge of the role of cults in society and previous experience of studying cults also came into play, and the importance of acknowledging this was an important part of the rationale for *Section 2* above. This responsibility to take active steps to minimise any undue level of influence and guard against bias via constant self-reflection and consideration is also Schwandt's second aspect of reflexivity. In addition to making a mental note to be reflexive about every decision, such measures also included recording analytic and methodological decisions in memos (*see Section 5(v)*), plus keeping a reflexive journal (*see section (ii) below*) (Mason, 1996).

The reflexive process thus attempts to bridge divides between actuality and its interpretation by filling in contextual factors that may influence and explain why the researcher arrives at certain decisions. However reflexivity is not just a pre-emptive or prohibitive measure. It can also serve to promote greater understanding of the data and of the self, within the wider teleological aim of improving the quality of the research (Gergen & Gergen, 1991).

(ii)   The reflexive journal

As Schwandt also states, "within a process of self reflection of one's biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences and so forth ... fieldworkers are often encouraged to record and explore these evolving dispositions in personal notes in their field journals" (1997, p.135). Henwood & Pidgeon (1992, 1996) for example also advocate the use of a journal to facilitate

and monitor creative thinking and reflexivity. Their ideas about the merits of exploring ambiguity and uncertainty and of keeping an open mind to new insights, while avoiding premature closure or fixing of theory, were also given serious attention.

Within the current study the researcher accordingly placed great emphasis on using a journal and writing memos to document the research process. The intricacies of the research process, and information about the researcher's behavioural style, experience, values and academic style were also recorded (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Actions and decisions made about participants and emerging categories, along with preconceptions and reactions to interviews and literature were also recorded. Some of the observations noted in the journal were transferred into memos if they were relevant to decisions made in the research process.

7. QUALITY CONTROL

(i) Introduction

Quality control is clearly important for any study, particularly if it involves the researcher drawing theoretical and/or practical conclusions about aspects of life or human behaviour that may have important implications not only for those studied and future research, but also for widespread future treatment of the target group.

Due to the nature of qualitative research and its particular range of epistemologies, an alternative means of evaluating studies has emerged that differs from traditional, quantitative notions of reliability and validity (Kirk & Millar, 1986; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This researcher takes the view that research is always interpretative, and that different perspectives may all reasonably account for the same phenomenon (Smith, 1996). Given this relativist position, quality control for qualitative studies then becomes largely based around the idea of trustworthiness (Stiles, 1993). Trustworthiness is a function of the degree of rigour applied by the researcher, as reflected in the clear articulation of method, the systematic nature of the analysis, and the audit trail and examples. Similarly Mason (1996) argues that as the aim of qualitative research is to produce a convincing account of the topic under investigation, then its usefulness should be evaluated in terms of its relevance over time and/or the robustness of findings.

Stiles (1993) draws a distinction between the trustworthiness of procedures, which he equates with reliability, and the trustworthiness of interpretations, that corresponds with validity. Procedural trustworthiness relates to the degree of attention to detail and systematic rigour of

the research and its documentation, from data collection through to theory building, that ensures that a fellow researcher could follow the same method and arrive at similar conclusions. It should be noted however, that grouping particular meaning units together under one label necessarily involves the researcher's subjective judgement. Therefore, it would be more accurate to see categories as being "constructed" through the process of the researcher's engagement with the data, rather than simply being "discovered" in the data which implies a passive role on the part of the researcher (c.f. Charmaz, 1983, 1990, 1995).

A number of efforts were made to enhance validity. These included regular supervision, during which ideas about labelling concepts and developing and linking categories were discussed. Supervisors provided feedback about the coherence and transparency of the proposed categories, and also contributed new ideas for developing categories and links. A research group was also set up, comprising four researchers using similar methodology plus members of academic staff with an interest in grounded theory. This forum was used to discuss methodology and differing interpretations of the literature on grounded theory, as well as being a platform for presenting extracts of data and the accompanying analysis or interpretation, i.e. "peer debriefing" (Stiles, 1993).

(ii)   Validation of category titles

Objective validation is an important quality control mechanism to help enhance the consistency, clarity and comprehensibility of the data. Two different raters were thus used to test the validity of the empirical categories produced by open coding, the "building blocks" of the theoretical models developed. The two raters were selected on the basis of their intelligence and objectivity. The first was an academic experienced in using grounded theory, the second a non-psychology graduate. Neither was familiar with the data or the literature on cults. This guarded against "contamination" by the literature, and it was also hoped that they would pick out any language that was hard to understand from a layman's point of view.

The raters were given a list of all the conceptual and empirical categories, with their definitions. Index cards with the title of the empirical category concealed were picked at random from each conceptual category. This random selection from conceptual categories ensured that an even spread of empirical categories was chosen. The raters were given a list of all the titles of the empirical categories that had been placed in that conceptual category. For example, within the conceptual category "influence over relationships inside group", there are three empirical categories: "influence over parenting", "influence over marital and sexual relationships", and "influence over other relationships". The raters were given an index card containing a quote

from one of these three empirical categories and were asked to match it up with the correct title. There was general agreement between the researcher and the raters with regard to most of the conceptual and empirical categories. However on three occasions, one rater disagreed with the coding because she attributed a different meaning to the name of the category. Thus a quote from "influence/control over peer relationships inside group" was thought to belong to the category "influence/control over sexual/marital relationships inside group". These discrepancies were examined, and the reasons were generally found to relate to the author's greater knowledge about the context in which the quotes were made. Two category titles were refined as a consequence, in an effort to make them more transparent and comprehensible to anyone not immersed in the data.

Similarly, there was some initial confusion about the conceptual category "influence/control over interactions with the outside world" and the empirical category "isolation and severance of ties with outside world". It was therefore necessary to distinguish the former conceptual category as a means of influence/control by the group and the latter as an effect on the individuals within it. A decision was also made to collapse the empirical categories "distrust of society" and "isolation and severance of ties with the outside world" into a single category "distrust of society: isolation and severance of ties with the outside world", which one rater felt helped to clarify the distinction between the two. A second reliability check was conducted after the coding had been tightened, using the same raters and procedure. On this occasion, no disagreement occurred.

(iii) Participant feedback

Miles & Huberman (1994) recommend obtaining feedback directly from participants themselves. This was useful in its own right with regard to checking and honing the accuracy of the emerging theory and models, but also in terms of research ethics and ownership, i.e. giving participants the opportunity to comment and consider what the researcher had extrapolated from their experiences and how these were being presented. In some ways, participant feedback can thus be viewed as the most important part of the verification and validation process.

A short follow-up questionnaire was therefore compiled (*see Appendix G*) for the purpose of testing the preliminary findings and models with the participants, and 'in order to obtain their ideas and comments. Explanations of proposed theoretical links made to the literature within social psychology were also fed back to participants. This was deemed necessary since an analysis of the data had led the researcher to consider a hitherto under-researched angle focusing on the role of social identity within cults, and it was therefore important to verify that this

accurately reflected the participants' own experiences.

As participants were spread across the country, one of the feedback sessions was done over the telephone. In this instance, the models, codes and categories, along with the researcher's proposed theoretical links and related explanations, had been posted to the participant one week before the telephone conversation. Not only did this constitute a check for researcher bias, but it also provided practical feedback to participants. This had particular added value in that participants commented that it was reassuring to find that others had been similarly affected by their experiences of cult membership. This reaction was spontaneously expressed by nine of the ten participants, which strongly suggests that it served as a normalising experience.

Participants were also advised that they might feel tempted to agree with the researcher, given the close nature of the relationship having shared intimate details of their lives, and were therefore expressly invited to be openly critical about any aspect of the findings. This was reinforced at several points during the meeting, and an attempt was made to create a relaxed and "friendly" atmosphere where participants felt more able to speak their minds. In practice, participants tended to be relatively at ease anyway, as they were already familiar with the researcher.

Seven out of the ten participants were thoroughly content with the analysis. However three suggested that further references should be made in the discussion section to the use of influence and control techniques within cults, which the researcher had previously chosen to omit due to space constraints that preclude detailed analysis of all the findings. One participant asked to be sent a copy of a journal article referred to, so he could better understand the reference to a switch rather than a loss of identity during cult membership. Having read the article, he subsequently telephoned to say that it had provided him with a richer understanding of his experience. Moreover, he confirmed that he did indeed consider it more accurate to think of a switch rather than a total loss of identity.

Discussions with participants about the proposed models of cult membership were very useful, and the original models were accordingly amended to more accurately reflect the processes underlying the categories and codes established. This was achieved without sacrificing anything in terms of properly reflecting the complexity of the processes and experiences described. One particular amendment involved the category "God as Audience", after participants reported that this was linked more closely to some categories than the second model suggested, and was moreover implicit within them. This then became a backdrop to the model as a whole, as explained in *Section 3(ii) within Chapter 3*, that analyses the results. Similarly, the final model cut down the number of arrows linking the various codes and categories

together, as participants felt that the circular nature of the model in itself reflected the fact that everything is inter-linked, and that a "simplified" version of the model was easier to follow.

Participants were subsequently sent a final version of the revised models, and unanimously agreed that it was clearer when the researcher contacted them by telephone as had been promised during the feedback visit. All participants are now content that the analysis reflects their experience, and were grateful for the level of feedback given.

Finally, the results and preliminary analysis was presented in written form to the "Family Support Group". This is a support mechanism mainly comprising close relatives of cult members, although several former cult members also belong to it. Again, the feedback received was extremely positive. There were no disagreements with the findings or their interpretation, and most felt that it had helped them understand why their own family member may have chosen this life-style. Two former cult members within the group confirmed that they themselves had suffered a profound bereavement reaction as a result of leaving their respective cults and the various losses this had entailed.

OVERVIEW OF CODES

A. THEMES SPECIFIC TO ENTRY (15 codes)

1. TIME OF LIFE & PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES
(a) Gap in life / time of transition - uncertainty & searching
(b) Family or social background & context
(c) Loneliness, depression, & urge to belong

2. COMMON RELEVANT PERSONALITY FACTORS
(a) Naivety / gullibility
(b) Shyness, sensitivity, lack of self-confidence
(c) Idealism / searching nature

3. PRE-EXISTING FAITH
(a) Existing spiritual beliefs or Christian faith
(b) Dissatisfaction with mainstream church

4. THE APPEAL OF THE GROUP
(a) Idealism / radicalism
(b) Offer of purpose, certainty & guaranteed salvation
(c) Genuineness of members – offer of friendship

5. NATURE OF RECRUITMENT
(a) Manner of encountering group
(b) Active recruitment tactics by group
(c) Targeting vulnerabilities
(d) Incremental attachment

B. EXPERIENCES OF MEMBERSHIP (42 codes)

6. US & THEM: GROUP SELF-DEFINITION IN CONTRADISTINCTION TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD
(a) Polarised world view – everything is black or white
(b) Group as God's chosen elite
(c) The Messianic mission & evangelising or fundraising

7. THE GROUP & ITS LEADER(SHIP)
(a) Leader has divine authority
(b) Subordination to leader &/or hierarchical structure
(c) Own particular norms & high standards
(d) Demand of conformity

8. INFLUENCE/CONTROL OVER INTERACTIONS WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD
(a) Influence over family relationships outside group
(b) Influence over other social interactions outside group

(c)   Influence over info. &/or access to info.

9.   INFLUENCE/CONTROL OVER EVERYDAY LIFE
(a)   Influence over time, activities & living arrangements
(b)   Influence over language & appearance
(c)   Influence over money & other material assets

10.   INFLUENCE/CONTROL OVER RELATIONSHIPS INSIDE GROUP
(a)   Influence over parenting
(b)   Influence over marital relations & sexual relationships
(c)   Influence over other relationships

11.   INFLUENCE/CONTROL OVER BELIEFS & INTERPRETATION
- Group's particular rationale, spiritual beliefs & interpretation of Christianity

12.   MEANS OF INFLUENCE & GROUP SELF-PROTECTIVE BEHAVIOUR
(a)   Fear or threat of punishment by God, i.e. divine retribution
(b)   Fear or threat of punishment by leader or group
(c)   Punishment, humiliation by leader &/or group
(d)   Use of confession - emphasising sin & wickedness of the individual
(e)   Use of secrecy &/or deception

13.   NEGATIVE OUTCOMES
(a)   Abuse – physical/sexual
(b)   Abuse – mental/spiritual
(c)   Emotional – depression, fatigue, breakdown
(d)   Emotional - guilt & shame
(e)   Emotional – jealousy & anger
(f)   Distress & inner conflict

14.   REINFORCEMENT OF US & THEM
(a)   Distrust of society: isolation & severance of ties with outside world
(b)   Group as God
(c)   Group as family

15.   SWITCH OF IDENTITY & HEIGHTENED CONFORMITY
(a)   Denigration of critical thinking
(b)   Dependence & sense of powerlessness over own fate
(c)   Self-sacrifice; group interests supersede individual wants
(d)   Change in beliefs, behaviour & identity

16.   REWARDS
(a)   Relief from inner conflict & sense of purpose/belonging
(b)   "Good times" & positive experiences
(c)   Reinforcement by group

17.   MISCELLANEOUS GROUP CHARACTERISTICS
(a)   Stratification & competition amongst group members
(b)   Evolution of group over time

18. HIGH GROUP STANDARDS AND INABILITY TO MEET THEM
(a) Inability to meet group standards & leaving
(b) Questioning or challenging group, leader, or norms

C. AFTER EXITING: "THEM" ARE NOW "US" (24 codes)

19. PROCESS OF LEAVING
(a) Thinking for self & questioning of group
(b) Group reaction to inability to meet group standards & leaving
(c) Involuntary exit & reasons why would not have left otherwise
(d) Role and support of "trusted" others & of objective information about group

20. EMOTIONAL FALLOUT
(a) General difficulty coping
(b) Grief & regret about general losses
(c) Loneliness, & regret about specific losses
(d) Frustration, anger & desire for retribution
(e) Feeling of unreality or disorientation - depression & suicidal tendencies
(f) Self-recrimination, guilt & shame

21. NEGATIVE EFFECT ON IDENTITY
(a) Loss of meaning or purpose in life - sense of helplessness & uncertainty about future
(b) Arrested psychological development & difficulties in decision-making
(c) Practical difficulties adjusting & social disorientation
(d) Effect on relationships & lack of trust
(e) Ongoing hold of group, patterns of behaviour, & triggers back to group

22. EFFECTS ON FAITH
(a) Revised attitude to faith, religion & religious groups
(b) Ongoing fear of divine retribution

23. COMING TO TERMS WITH THE EXPERIENCE
(a) Recognition of having been used, deceived & manipulated
(b) Self-vindication, self-forgiveness & rationalisation of experience
(c) Importance of being understood & fear of being misunderstood or rejected
(d) The role of (mental) health professionals
(e) Moving forward & regaining individual identity
(f) Desire to use experience & acknowledgement of gains

25. MISCELLANEOUS
(a) Use of metaphors

Participant identifying number & page number of contributory quotation

Conceptual & Empirical Categories

PRIOR TO ENTRY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. TIME OF LIFE										
(a) Gap in life (18)	5 3, 7, 8, 9, 15,	1 3	1 2	0	2 4, 6	1 1	1 2	3 1, 3, 6	4 2, 2, 3, 3	0
(b) Family etc. context (33)	7 2, 3, 3, 4, 4, 5, 6	2 3,3	2 1, 4	7 1, 2, 2, 2, 4, 5, 6	8 3, 4, 6, 12, 12, 12, 13, 14	1 4	1 1	7 1, 2, 2, 3, 3, 3, 7	4 4, 5, 6, 7	0 5,5
(c) Loneliness etc. (11)	4 4,5,7,8	1 1	0	0	1 16	3 1, 2, 3	0	2 1, 4	0	0
2. PERSONALITY FACTORS										
(a) Naivety/gullibility (28)	3 7, 8, 9	4 2, 2, 3, 4	2 3, 5	2 1, 2	10 2, 3, 3, 5, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12	0	0	2 1, 5	2 2, 5	3 3, 5, 8
(b) Shyness, sensitivity, Lack of self confidence (14)	5 6, 7, 7, 9, 9	0	0	1 2	1 5	1 2	2 5, 15	2 2, 6	0	2 4, 10
(c) Idealism/searching nature (34)	2 1, 7	5 1, 1, 2, 2, 3	5 1, 1, 1, 3, 4	2 2, 4	3 6, 7, 8	2 4,5	2 1, 2	1 4	4 4, 5, 7, 8	8 3, 4, 5, 5, 6, 6, 7, 8
3. PRE-EXISTING FAITH										
(a) Existing beliefs or faith (27)	8 1, 2, 2, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7	2 2, 2	3 1, 1, 4	2 2, 4	4 4, 6, 7, 8	1 1	1 1	1 7	4 1, 2, 3, 3	1 6
(b) Dissatisfaction with church (13)	0	1 1	1 2	1 4	2 3, 4	1 1	1 1	1 7	5 1, 1, 4, 5, 7	0
4. APPEAL OF THE GROUP										
(a) Idealism &/or radicalism (18)	1 10	0	2 3, 2	2 2, 3	0	1 3	3 1, 2, 8	2 7, 7	3 4, 5, 6	4 6, 7, 8, 9
(b) Purpose, certainty,	1	1	4	1	5	0	0	3	2	4

salvation (21)	10	2	1, 2, 3, 4	4	6, 8, 10, 12, 15			3, 7, 8	7,7	8, 9, 10, 11
(c) Friendship & community (25)	1 12	3 2, 2, 3	2 2, 3	2 2, 4	3 3, 4, 5	1 3	3 1, 2, 3	5 3, 3, 5, 6, 6	1 6	4 5, 6, 8, 9

5. RECRUITMENT										
(a) Manner of encounter (10)	0	0	1 1	1 1	4 8, 9, 9, 10	0	0	1 4	2 3, 19	1 7
(b) Recruitment tactics (21)	1 10	0	1 2	4 2, 4, 5, 5	2 5, 7	1 3	· 1 1	5 2, 5, 5, 5, 5	3 3, 5, 6	3 3, 7, 9
(c) Targeting vulnerabilities (31)	3 6, 10, 12	1 4	4 1, 1, 3, 4	1 2	3 1, 10, 12	2 4, 7	1 1	3 4, 7, 24	4 3, 5, 5, 6	9 4, 5, 5, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12
(d) Incremental attachment (6)	0	2 1, 2	0	0 3	0	0 6,6	2 1, 1	0	0	0

Participant identifying number & page number of contributory quotation

Conceptual & Empirical
Categories

EXPERIENCE of MEMBERSHIP	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6. US & THEM										
(a) Polarised world view (19)	1 15	5 7, 9, 10, 13, 17	1 7	1 34	2 10, 11	2 12,12	2 7, 10	1 12	2 14, 16	2 15, 18
(b) Group as God's elite (37)	2 12, 14	1 10	9 2, 2, 7, 9, 9, 12, 13, 15, 16	4 9, 13, 32, 32	2 11, 13	3 5, 11, 13	2 10, 11	4 6, 8, 8, 12	2 14, 14	7 10, 12, 15, 16, 16, 17, 19
(c) The Messianic mission (46)	2 13, 15	1 12	4 5, 9, 10, 13	4 13, 15, 17, 47	1 16	7 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 13, 20	4 10, 18, 22, 23	9 9, 10, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18	4 14, 15, 20, 23	10 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 15, 15, 16, 16, 17
7. GROUP & LEADER(SHIP)										
(a) Leader has divine authority (39)	4 14, 15, 21, 38	1 4, 11	5 9, 9, 10, 11, 11	5 3, 9, 10, 39, 46	2 11, 15	3 16, 19, 19	4 15, 16, 18, 26	4 12, 13, 13, 15	4 8, 13, 19, 21	7 13, 15, 15, 16, 18, 19, 19
(b) Subordination to leader (54)	5 12, 18, 19, 19, 22	2 3, 4	2 6, 11	11 7, 7, 8, 9, 9, 10, 43, 43, 44, 45, 46	5 8, 9, 10, 11, 16	3 16, 18, 21	1 21	5 8, 9, 9, 10, 24	10 9, 10, 12, 13, 17, 19, 21, 23, 24, 28	10 14, 15, 17, 17, 20, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24
(c) Own norms & standards (37)	5 10, 12, 14, 20, 21	3 6, 7, 10	2 5, 9	4 7, 9, 9, 44	1 16	7 17, 18, 18, 19, 20, 20, 21	3 3, 10, 15	1 14	8 10, 12, 15, 16, 17, 22, 25, 28	3 17, 22, 26
(d) Demand of conformity (41)	5 12, 13, 15, 16, 17	5 5, 6, 10, 11, 12	6 11, 11, 11, 11, 11, 12	6 17, 18, 18, 19, 34, 35	3 9, 10, 13	2 18, 19	6 8, 9, 11, 14, 15, 20	1 10	6 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22	1 27

8. OUTSIDE WORLD										
(a) Family relationships (19)	2 12, 15	3 7, 8, 9	0	2 33, 34	1 22	0	2 10, 18	2 10, 18	3 17, 18, 18	4 10, 12, 20, 24
(b) Other social interactions (12)	4 15, 20, 21, 22	0	1 25	1 21	0	1 21	1 19	0	2 15, 21	2 15, 21
(c) Access to info. (12)	1 22	2 8, 22	2 9, 9	4 8, 42, 44, 47	1 18	0	0	0	0	2 15, 16

9. EVERYDAY LIFE										
(a) Time, activities etc. (57)	6 14, 15, 18, 21, 23, 28	3 9, 12, 26	1 11	8 8, 18, 19, 23, 24, 24, 25, 25	2 17, 18	5 9, 11, 13, 16, 16	3 4, 9, 15	9 9, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 16, 18	11 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 21	9 13, 14, 14, 15, 15, 16, 17, 20, 29
(b) Language & appearance (17)	3 12, 15, 18	3 8, 9, 10	3 4, 11, 11	4 7, 9, 31, 32	0	2 13, 13	0	0	1 13	1 14
(c) Money & material assets (10)	1 15	0 13, 14	0	0	1 20	1 16	0 14	0	2 12, 15	0 18

10. INSIDE GROUP										
(a) Parenting (31)	0	4 7, 8, 12, 13	0	5 10, 19, 20, 20, 41	3 20, 21, 23	0	10 5, 5, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 11, 11, 14	0	9 12, 15, 20, 23, 24, 26, 28, 29. 30	0
(b) Marital/sexual relations (39)	3 18, 20, 22	0	3 13, 9, 25	5 7, 15, 16, 21, 36	3 19, ,22, 24	0	1 25	5 10, 11, 16, 19, 20	10 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 25, 25, 26, 27	9 15, 17, 18, 19, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23
(c) Other relationships (16)	2 18, 19	0	1 14	2 8, 21	1 18	1 17	1 8	4 12, 15, 18, 19	3 15, 25, 26	1 15

11. CONTROL OF BELIEFS

(a) Group's particular beliefs (137)	**8** 15, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22, 30, 32	**3** 6, 11, 18	**16** 6, 6, 7, 8, 9, 9, 9, 10, 11, 11, 11, 11, 11, 12, 12, 13,	**20** 7, 11, 15, 19, 20, 25, 33, 34, 35, 35, 36, 44, 45, 46, 46, 46, 47, 47, 48, 48	**14** 5, 10, 11, 21, 22, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 30, 36, 38, 41	**14** 8, 11, 12, 12, 13, 14, 15, 15, 15, 18, 20, 21, 24, 27	**11** 5, 6, 6, 9, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 13, 18	**11** 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 13, 15, 15, 15, 16	**16** 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26	**24** 10, 12, 12, 15, 15, 16, 16, 19, 20, 20, 21, 21, 22, 22, 22, 22, 23, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29,

12. SELF-PROTECTION

(a) Fear of divine retribution (30)	**8** 12, 14, 15 20, 21, 22, 30, 32	**2** 7, 11	**2** 11, 11	**1** 46	**1** 10	**2** 18, 20	**6** 6, 6, 6, 10, 18, 29	**5** 15, 15, 15, 16, 17	**1** 10	**5** 16, 23, 25, 26, 26
(b) Fear of punishment (18)	**4** 15, 16, 20, 21	**1** 20	**0**	**3** 9, 10, 12	**1** 14	**1** 12	**0**	**1** 19	**4** 8, 8, 9, 12	**3** 21, 23, 26
(c) Punishment, humiliation (25)	**10** 8, 9, 9, 14, 16, 17, 20, 20, 23, 28	**0**	**2** 11, 12	**4** 9, 9, 20, 42	**1** 18	**3** 18, 20, 21	**1** 5	**1** 14	**1** 12	**2** 21,22
(d) Use of confession	**5** 10, 12, 15, 18, 20	**1** 6	**0**	**0**	**2** 15, 18	**1** 15	**2** 20, 20	**1** 15	**0**	**6** 16, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29
(e) Use of secrecy/deception (29)	**3** 11, 20, 25	**1** 21	**6** 4, 5, 6, 11, 14, 17	**3** 19, 20, 43	**0**	**1** 18	**3** 14, 22, 28	**5** 10, 10, 11, 12, 14	**5** 10, 12, 14, 15, 16	**2** 10, 12

13. NEGATIVE OUTCOMES

(a) Abuse – physical/sexual	**5** 13, 13, 16, 17, 18	**1** 19	**0**	**13** 14, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 41, 41, 41, 42, 45, 46, 47	**0**	**0**	**1** 17	**0**	**3** 23, 24, 24	**0**
(b) Abuse – mental/spiritual (11)	**4** 10, 12, 15, 18	**0**	**1** 23	**1** 21	**2** 15, 20	**1** 25	**0**	**1** 15	**0**	**1** 15
(c) Depression/fatigue/ breakdown (11)	**2** 25, 26	**3** 18, 18, 19	**0**	**0**	**2** 14, 15	**0**	**2** 6, 6	**0**	**1** 12	**1** 17

	Col 1	Col 2	Col 3	Col 4	Col 5	Col 6	Col 7	Col 8	Col 9	Col 10
(d) Guilt & shame (25)	2 23, 26	1 22	1 15	1 20	2 18, 20	11 5, 7, 7, 8, 8, 10, 10, 12, 19, 20, 21	0	1 15	1 22	5 16, 18, 19, 21, 26
(e) Jealousy & anger (5)	0	1 23	0	2 16, 16	0	0	1 8	0	0	1 19
(f) Distress & inner conflict (49)	1 15	8 7, 8, 8, 11, 14, 15, 18, 19	2 7, 13	0	11 10, 15, 15, 16, 18, 20, 30, 32, 32, 33, 33	5 10, 12, 12, 20, 21	8 4, 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13, 28	4 15, 16, 17, 19	11 8, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 13, 14, 15, 16	3 15, 19, 25

14. REINFORCE US & THEM

	Col 1	Col 2	Col 3	Col 4	Col 5	Col 6	Col 7	Col 8	Col 9	Col 10
(a) Isolation from outside world (42)	4 9, 10, 15, 17	9 5, 6, 6, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	2 9, 14	5 19, 21, 33, 33, 35	3 5, 10, 22	1 13	2 21, 24	5 8, 8, 10, 11, 15	6 10, 15, 16, 22, 23, 26	5 15, 16, 22, 25, 26
(b) Group as God (9)	1 15	1 12	1 6	0	1 10	1 10	3 9, 27, 28	0	0	1 14
(c) Group as family (21)	0	0	4 14, 16, 16, 17	2 6, 8	3 12, 15, 30	2 27, 29	0	1 9	3 16, 17, 24	6 15, 16, 18, 20, 21, 25

15. IDENTITY SWITCH

	Col 1	Col 2	Col 3	Col 4	Col 5	Col 6	Col 7	Col 8	Col 9	Col 10
(a) Denigration of critical thinking (69)	6 15, 16, 18, 22, 26	7 14, 14, 15, 16,	1 16	7 3, 6, 12, 19, 34, 34, 35	9 5, 6, 7, 8, , 9, 14, 15, 20, 22	4 12, 16, 20, 21	6 8, 9, 10, 14 15, 28	7 8, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16, 27	15 10, 12, 12, 14, 15, 15, 16, 18, 20, 20, 21, 21, 22, 24, 26,	7 12, 14, 15, 21, 22, 23, 24
(b) Dependence/powerlessness (23)	0	0	1 11	3 7, 13, 23	7 15, 18, 20, 20, 21, 22, 30	0	1 10	4 11, 12, 13, 15	2 10, 12	5 18, 22, 23, 24, 25
(c) Self-sacrifice/group interests (58)	4 15, 16, 20, 24	6 8, 8, 10, 12, 15, 20	5 5, 6, 9, 12, 14	6 7, 11, 11, 12, 12, 13	3 10, 12, 15	3 7, 8, 12	7 2, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 23	10 8, 9, 10, 10, 12, 12, 13, 14, 15, 15	8 12, 13, 14, 15, 15, 16, 20, 21	6 12, 16, 17, 19, 25, 28

(d) Change in identity/ behaviour (81)	**10** 10, 12, 12, 16, 18, 20, 22, 23, 26, 29	**5** 8, 10, 12, 14, 15	**5** 8, 9, 10, 11, 24	**5** 10, 10, 10, 12, 34	**7** 10, 15, 16, 20, 24, 26, 30	**17** 4, 6, 10, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 16, 17, 18, 18, 19, 21, 21, 26, 34	**3** 8, 10, 20	**14** 8, 10, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 15, 15, 15, 19, 20, 22, 27	**7** 9, 12, 15, 16,	**8** 16, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31

16. REWARDS										
(a) Relief from conflict (23)	**1** 18	**0**	**5** 2, 2, 3, 4, 7	**2** 11, 12	**3** 10, 12, 15	**2** 4, 5	**1** 5	**2** 8, 12	**3** 15, 20, 21	**4** 8, 12, 13, 15
(b) "Good times" (16)	**1** 7	**0**	**1** 5	**5** 11, 11, 12, 16, 35	**0**	**0**	**6** 2, 3, 10, 12, 12, 16	**1** 12	**1** 16	**1** 10
(c) Reinforcement by group (17)	**1** 20	**0**	**3** 3, 12, 13	**1** 35	**0**	**3** 6, 15, 16	**1** 1	**2** 8, 12	**1** 15	**5** 13, 16, 19, 20, 24

17. MISCELLANEOUS										
(a) Stratification & competition (7)	**1** 8	**0**	**0**	**2** 7, 38	**1** 12	**0**	**1** 5	**2** 16, 16	**0**	**0**
(b) Evolution of group over time (14)	**5** 10, 12, 13, 23, 25	**2** 7, 12	**0**	**2** 2, 4	**1** 15	**0**	**3** 27, 28, 28	**0**	**1** 17	**0**

18. GROUP STANDARDS & DOUBTS										
(a) Inability to meet group standards (32)	**3** 8, 12, 14	**2** 19, 21	**13** 14, 15, 15, 15, 18, 18, 18, 20, 20, 20, 21, 22, 22	**0**	**3** 15, 18, 19	**0**	**5** 7, 7, 15, 16, 17	**0**	**4** 29, 30, 30, 31	**2** 24, 25,
(b) Questioning or challenging the group (34)	**3** 14, 16, 20,	**2** 3, 9,	**3** 14, 14, 16	**1** 3	**4** 16, 18, 19, 20	**3** 22, 24, 24	**1** 8	**7** 11, 14, 16, 16, 16, 16, 18	**6** 20, 21, 22, 23, 23, 24,	**4** 28, 29, 30, 30,

Participant identifying number & page number of contributory quotation

Conceptual & Empirical
Categories

"THEM" ARE NOW "US"	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
19. PROCESS OF LEAVING										
(a) Questioning/challenging (36)	3 29, 31, 33	5 19, 20, 21, 21, 33	2 19, 19	2 45, 46	6 27, 28, 30, 32, 32, 34	3 24, 25	5 15, 16, 17, 19, 24	2 18, 22	5 26, 27, 28, 29, 30	3 30, 30, 31
(b) Group reaction: rejection (20)	2 15, 16	2 23, 23	2 19, 24	1 47	1 21	2 12, 14	3 17, 21, 24	2 21, 22	1 34	4 29, 30, 31, 39
(c) Involuntary exit (16)	8 28, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 33, 34	1 18	2 14, 14	3 22, 30, 31	0	0	1 16	0	1 25	0
(d) Role of "trusted" others (29)	3 30, 32, 34	0	7 15, 15, 17, 18, 19, 19, 20	1 26	5 29, 30, 34, 34, 36	2 22, 22	1 21	1 17	4 32, 33, 35, 36	5 31, 32, 33, 33, 34
20. EMOTIONAL FALLOUT										
(a) General difficulty coping (20)	0	5 24, 25, 28, 30, 31	3 18, 19, 20	3 26, 28, 31	1 26	1 26	0	1 20	2 18, 20	4 35, 37, 39, 40
(b) Grief/regret re. general losses (35)	2 24, 25	7 22, 24, 25, 27, 32, 34, 35	1 17	4 12, 12, 13, 20	1 31	0 26, 27	3 17, 20, 23	2 20, 21	5 32, 33, 26, 40, 41	8 30, 35, 36, 37, 38, 45, 46, 46
(c) Loneliness/specific losses (2)	1 27	1 32	6 20, 20, 20, 20, 21, 22	4 12, 40, 41, 48	2 21, 22	2 27, 28	2 20, 21	3 19, 21, 22	1 41	0 37, 41

(d) Frustration & anger (24)	4 15, 24, 28, 30	7 24, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32	2 6, 25	1 31	4 10, 17, 20, 22	0	0	2 11, 19	1 37	3 34, 36, 39
(e) Unreality/depression (37)	7 27, 24, 29, 33, 34, 39	1 34	3 18, 18, 19	3 25, 26, 42	0	3 15, 17, 29	1 19	8 18, 20, 20, 20, 21, 21, 22, 25	2 35, 36	9 28, 34, 35, 36, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41
(f) Self-recrimination (40)	3 30, 37, 38	1 32	4 6, 13, 14, 20	3 26, 29, 30	7 4, 7, 18, 19, 20, 22, 30	2 27, 28	4 9, 9, 9, 10	3 13, 20, 21	5 38, 38, 39	8 18, 24, 28, 34, 36, 37, 38, 40

21. EFFECT ON IDENTITY

(a) Loss of meaning or purpose (30)	1 35	7 27, 28, 28, 29, 29, 31, 33	2 18, 20	3 12, 25, 26	1 29	3 26, 27, 29	5 12, 21, 21, 25, 29	2 21, 23	2 33, 36	4 34, 35, 37, 38
(b) Arrested psych. development (26)	3 26, 32, 36	3 18, 25, 31	1 19	4 13, 14, 23, 23	4 28, 29, 32, 34	5 26, 27, 28, 29, 29	1 29	1 20	0	4 36, 38, 38, 40
(c) Practical difficulties (15)	0	3 22, 24, 28	2 8, 9	3 13, 13, 27	0	0	2 12, 19	3 20, 21, 26	0	2 35, 36
(d) Effect on relationships (19)	3 36, 36, 37	3 30, 30, 31	1 18	2 36, 42	2 31, 33	4 27, 28, 29, 30	0	2 20, 21	0	2 37, 38
(e) Ongoing hold of group (36)	9 25, 30, 32, 34, 38, 39, 40	6 24, 25, 27, 28, 30, 31	2 18, 25	7 39, 40, 40, 41, 41, 41, 43	3 33, 36, 37	2 25, 29	0	1 21	4 36, 36, 38, 41	2 37, 38

22. EFFECTS ON FAITH

(a) Revised attitude to religion (54)	11 12, 14, 26, 30, 40, 42, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47	7 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 34, 35	6 23, 23, 26, 27, 27, 27	3 13, 14, 38	5 10, 30, 33, 35, 38	4 30, 30, 31, 32	9 19, 20, 20, 22, 22, 26, 27, 29, 29	2 21, 24	4 37, 38, 39, 40	3 41, 41, 42
(b) Ongoing fear of divine retribution (13)	1 18	0	0	1 38	3 27, 31, 34	2 25, 27	0	2 20, 26	0	4 32, 33, 37, 38

23. COMING TO TERMS										
(a) Recognition of deception etc. (56)	**7** 15, 19, 20, 36, 38, 40, 43	**5** 26, 28, 29, 30, 31	**8** 4, 5, 9, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22	**5** 12, 14, 36, 46, 48	**4** 12, 15, 24, 29	**0**	**7** 7, 7, 10, 10, 12, 14, 16	**9** 7, 9, 11, 18, 20, 20, 21, 22, 25	**8** 15, 30, 30, 31, 32, 36, 37, 39	**3** 10, 43, 44
(b) Self-vindication /rationalisation (43)	**10** 15, 16, 26, 29, 32, 35, 36, 39, 42, 44	**3** 15, 19, 32	**5** 15, 16, 17, 24, 27	**2** 28, 29	**7** 10, 14, 15, 38, 39, 40, 42	**0**	**2** 15, 23	**3** 20, 21, 27	**4** 20, 35, 36, 41	**7** 5, 8, 15, 29, 43, 44, 45
(c) Importance of being understood (29)	**8** 36, 37, 38, 39, 43, 44, 45, 47	**1** 30	**2** 18, 21	**0**	**4** 15, 18, 24, 30	**3** 29, 30, 31	**1** 25	**0**	**1** 34	**10** 35, 39, 40, 41, 43, 44, 44, 45, 46, 46
(d) Role of health professionals (28)	**5** 43, 47, 48, 49, 60	**0**	**1** 20	**1** 42	**5** 39, 40, 40, 40, 41	**5** 33, 33, 34, 34, 34	**1** 27	**3** 22, 25, 26	**1** 34	**6** 39, 40, 41, 44, 45, 46
(e) Regain individual identity (69)	**16** 28, 29, 32, 31, 33, 34, 35, 35, 37, 37, 37, 40, 41, 42, 42, 43	**4** 29, 30, 31	**10** 22, 22, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 26, 27, 28	**2** 37, 38	**5** 26, 27, 30, 36, 37	**4** 28, 29, 30, 32	**11** 16, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 24, 25, 26, 26, 28	**5** 20, 22, 23, 23, 24	**6** 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40	**6** 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 45
(f) Desire to use experience (19)	**4** 32, 35, 38, 44	**0**	**6** 18, 18, 18, 23, 23, 28	**3** 28, 34, 35	**1** 36	**2** 30, 32	**1** 12	**0**	**0**	**2** 30, 46

25. MISCELLANEOUS										
(a) Use of metaphors (42)	**5** 16, 27, 30, 32, 34	**0**	**8** 8, 9, 11, 19, 19, 20, 23, 25	**7** 6, 10, 13, 16, 34, 35, 43	**6** 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34	**0**	**5** 10, 12, 13, 14, 26	**2** 27, 27	**4** 12, 14, 20, 21	**5** 12, 14, 15, 45, 46

CODECOUNT OVERVIEW

PRIOR TO ENTRY — TOTAL 311

Category	No.of codes	No of participants	Mean	Saturation rank
1. TIME OF LIFE	62			19
(a) Gap in life	18	8	2	
(b) Family etc. context	33	10	3	
(c) Loneliness etc.	11	5	2	
2. PERSONALITY FACTORS	76			13
(a) Naivety/gullibility	28	8	4	
(b) Shyness, sensitivity etc.	14	7	2	
(c) Idealism/searching nature	34	10	3	
3. PRE-EXISTING FAITH	40			23
(a) Existing beliefs or faith	27	10	3	

PRIOR TO ENTRY (cont.)

Category	No.of codes	No of participants	Mean	Saturation rank
(b) Dissatisfaction with church		13	8	2	
4. APPEAL OF THE GROUP	64			18
(a) Idealism &/or radicalism	18	8	2	
(b) Purpose, certainty, salvation	21	8	3	
(c) Friendship & community	25	10	3	
5. RECRUITMENT	69			15
(a) Manner of encounter	10	6	2	
(b) Recruitment tactics	21	9	2	
(c) Targeting vulnerabilities	31	10	3	
(d) Incremental attachment	7	4	2	

EXPERIENCE OF MEMBERSHIP — TOTAL 1248

Category	No.of codes	No of participants	Mean	Saturation rank
6. US & THEM	102			9
(a) Polarised world view	19	10	2	
(b) Group as God's elite	37	10	4	
(c) The Messianic mission	46	10	5	
7. GROUP/LEADER(SHIP)	171			4
(a) Leader has divine authority	39	10	4	
(b) Subordination to leader	54	10	5	
(c) Own norms & standards	37	10	4	
(d) Demand of conformity	41	10	4	
8. OUTSIDE WORLD	43			21
(a) Family relationships	19	8	2	
(b) Other social interactions	12	7	2	
(c) Info. &/or access to info.	12	6	2	
9. EVERYDAY LIFE	84			12
(a) Time, activities etc.	57	10	6	
(b) Language & appearance	17	7	2	
(c) Money & material assets	10	7	1	
10. INSIDE GROUP	86			11
(a) Parenting	31	5	6	
(b) Marital/sexual relations	39	8	5	
(c) Other relationships	16	9	2	
11. CONTROL OF BELIEFS	137			5
(a) Group's particular beliefs	137	10	14	
12. SELF-PROTECTION	120			8
(a) Fear of divine retribution	30	10	3	
(b) Fear of punishment	18	8	2	
(c) Punishment, humiliation	25	9	3	

Category	No.of codes	No of participants	Mean	Saturation rank
(d) Use of confession		18	7	3	
(e) Use of secrecy/deception		29	9	3	
13. NEGATIVE OUTCOMES	125			7
(a) Abuse – physical/sexual	23	5	5	
(b) Abuse – mental/spiritual	11	7	2	
(c) Depression/breakdown	12	6	2	
(d) Guilt & shame	25	9	3	
(e) Jealousy & anger	5	4	1	
(f) Distress & inner conflict	49	9	5	
14. REINFORCE US & THEM	72			14
(a) Isolation from outside world	42	10	4	
(b) Group as God	9	7	1	
(c) Group as family	21	7	3	
15. IDENTITY SWITCH	231			2
(a) Denigration of critical thinking	69	10	7	
(b) Dependence/powerlessness)	23	7	3	
(c) Self-sacrifice/group interests	58	10	6	
(d) Change in identity/ behaviour	81	10	8	
16. REWARDS	56			20
(a) Relief from conflict	23	9	3	
(b) "Good times"	16	7	2	
(c) Reinforcement by group	17	8	2	
17. MISCELLANEOUS	21			24
(a) Stratification & competition	7	5	1	
(b) Evolution of group over time	14	6	2	
18. HIGH GROUP STANDARDS	66			17
(a) Inability to meet standards	32	7	5	
(b) Questioning or challenging	34	10	3	

THEM ARE NOW US

Category	No.of codes	No of participants	Mean	Sat. rank
19. PROCESS OF LEAVING	**101**			**10**
(a) Thinking for self/questioning group	36	10	4	
(b) Group reaction	20	10	2	
(c) Involuntary exit	16	6	3	
(d) Role of "trusted" others	29	9	3	
20. EMOTIONAL FALLOUT	**220**			**3**
(a) General difficulty coping	20	8	3	
(b) Grief/regret re. general losses	35	10	4	
(c) Loneliness/specific losses	24	10	2	
(d) Frustration & anger	24	9	3	
(e) Unreality/depression	37	9	4	
(f) Self-recrimination	40	10	4	
21. EFFECT ON IDENTITY	**126**			**6**
(a) Loss of meaning or purpose	30	10	3	
(b) Arrested psych. development	26	9	3	
(c) Practical difficulties	15	7	2	
(d) Effect on relationships	19	8	2	
(e) Ongoing hold of group	36	9	4	
22. EFFECTS ON FAITH	**67**			**16**
(a) Revised attitude to religion	54	10	5	
(b) Ongoing fear of divine	13	6	2	
23. COMING TO TERMS	**311**			**1**
(a) Recognition of deception etc.	56	9	6	
(b) Self-vindication /rationalisation	43	9	5	
(c) Importance of being understood	29	8	4	
(d) Role of health professionals	28	9	3	
(e) Regain individual identity	69	10	7	
(f) Gains & desire to use experience	19	7	3	
24. MISCELLANEOUS	**42**			**22**
(a) Use of metaphors	42	8	5	

TOTAL   867

Mean overall empirical category saturation (i.e. quotes per empirical category)   **30**

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS

1. INTRODUCTION

(i) <u>General</u>

Strauss and Corbin (1990) recommend that the grounded theory analyst should aim to develop a core category, which they describe as the essence of the story to be told about the study and to which all other categories can be related. However it has also been argued that this can represent too great an imposition on the data (Elliott, 1996). Indeed no core category emerged in carrying out the present study. Rather, there crystallised a number of important inter-linked categories, all of which contributed to making sense of how ex-members of religious cults understood their experiences and of the contexts in which they had been embedded at the point of joining, during membership, and after leaving their respective movements. It should be noted that the categories developed were those which encapsulated, as far as possible, common experiences. Hence most of the categories pertain to all participants, although there are exceptions.

Although any write-up is necessarily linear in its presentation, the connections between categories presented are often multi-directional, and the overall matrix of linkages is complex. The intention is to convey some of this complexity both by describing the nature of the links between categories and via diagrammatic models developed in the course of analysis. Both main models are built directly from the conceptual and empirical categories. This is not to imply that these encapsulate definitive theories of the processes/experiences involved in the various stages of cult membership. Rather they represent the way that the researcher has constructed participants' accounts, with their direct assistance via feedback sessions, in a way that she feels best explains her understanding of their experiences.

ii) <u>Overview of the results chapter</u>

The results chapter comprises:

- ❑ A model relating to joining a cult, built from codes and categories derived from participant accounts. These results will be presented in less detail than other sections within the analysis section given the relatively small portion of the interview devoted to the circumstances of joining a cult.

- ❑ A model built from categories and codes derived from participant accounts representing processes and experiences within their respective movements. This will provide the main focus of the results and will therefore be presented in the greatest detail.

❑ Categories and codes derived from participant accounts of leaving their respective cults. It was judged that this data could not be usefully represented in diagrammatic form, and an overview of the effects, methods of adaptation, and participant reflections will be offered instead.

❑ Consideration of the metaphors used by various participants within their accounts, in order to provide further insight into the way that they constructed their experience.

2. THEMES SPECIFIC TO JOINING A CULTIC GROUP [1]

(i) Overview of the model & rationale for joining

There were three overarching categories relating to participants' circumstances prior to coming into contact with their respective group that they, with hindsight, all identified as playing a crucial role in them subsequently joining:
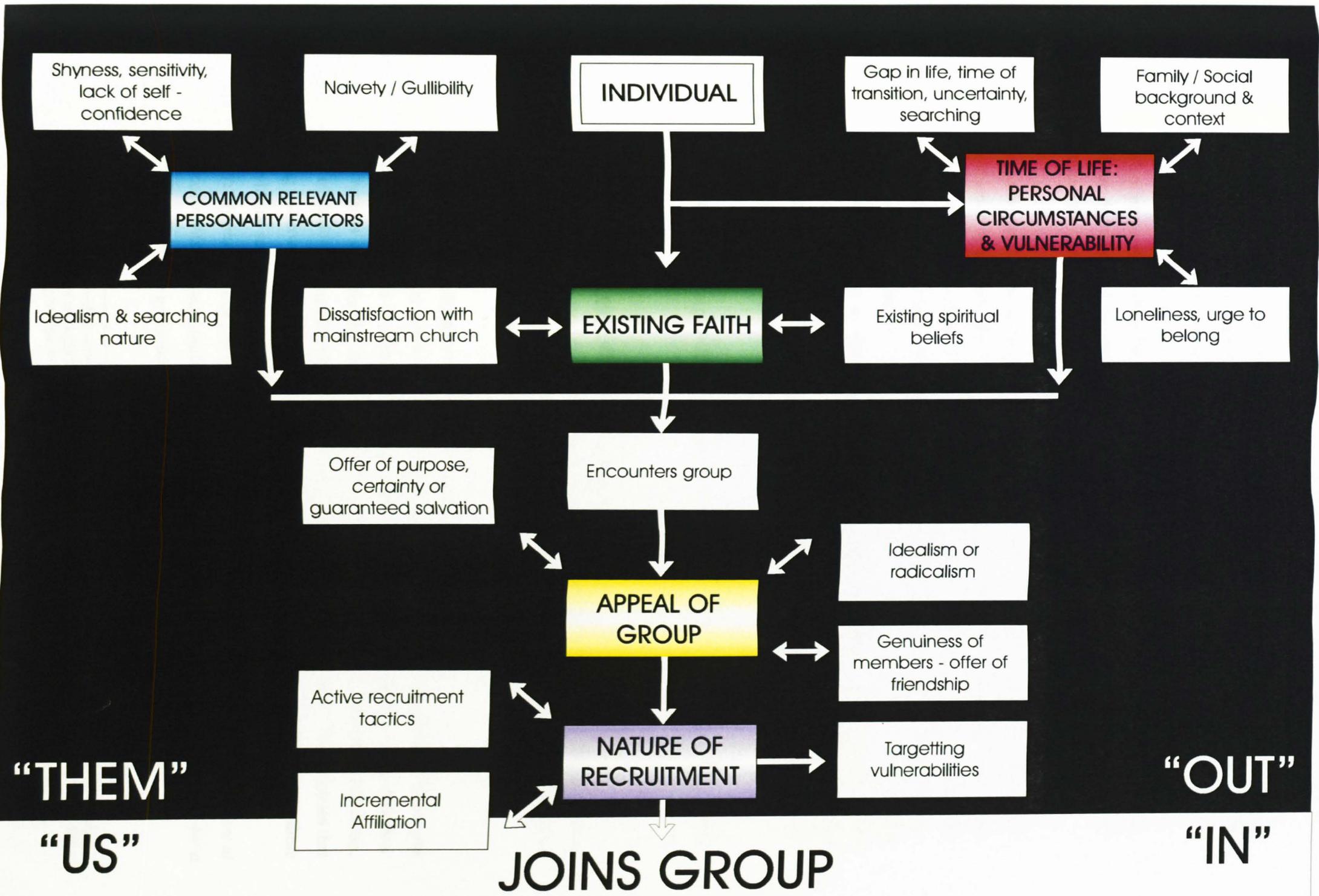
→ personal circumstances

→ personality factors

→ existing spiritual convictions

In terms of personal circumstances, most individuals described themselves as having been at a time of transition or personal crossroads, and were therefore experiencing uncertainties about their own identity or wider future that rendered them more than usually susceptible to the power of suggestion. Family and social background as well as current context, e.g. in terms of other relationships, were also key contributing factors. The net result was a commonly expressed desire to belong to some greater group or community, sometimes as the direct result of feeling lonely or isolated.

Underlying these time of life issues, a number of common personality factors were cited, including naivety, gullibility, shyness, sensitivity, and a lack of self-confidence. The most important factor mentioned however was an idealistic outlook, i.e. searching for a wider, greater good or ultimate truth and meaning.

The third category concerned some form of pre-existing spiritual or religious connections. For most participants this meant a specifically Christian faith. However they were also generally characterised by dissatisfaction with the mainstream church or conventional religious practices.

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[1] It is important to note that nine of the ten participants voluntarily joined their cult – the tenth had been born into hers. Nevertheless she provides an "ersatz" narrative of joining a cult in describing how her parents were independently recruited and later married whilst in the movement. She recounts their idealistic tendencies and similarly points to a time of transition in their lives as the crux to them having joined. She also reports how they had been actively recruited into the Children of God, e.g. via love-bombing.

Personal circumstances, personality factors, and existing religious convictions all help explain why groups appealed to participants when they encountered them. Interviewees tended to be attracted by the group's apparent spiritual ideals and radical or non-conformist approach to Christianity and mode of worship. Linked to this, definite answers to complex questions, a sense of purpose, and the offer of salvation all appealed, while some prospective members were particularly impressed by the apparent genuineness, warmth, and friendliness of the group members they came into contact with.

The participants came across cultic groups in a number of ways, whether by chance, after introduction by a family member, or due to the evangelical mission of existing group members [2]. However the appeal of the group was often no coincidence, in so far as many groups employed proactive recruitment tactics such as showering prospective recruits with attention, known as "love-bombing". Moreover, some groups appeared to be adept at homing in on individual aspirations or vulnerabilities, and used deception or emphasised warnings of the possible dire consequences of not joining the group, e.g. eternal damnation. Having come into contact with groups, some individuals became heavily involved fairly quickly, while others' attachment process took place incrementally.

The rest of this section provides a breakdown of the categories from which the model was built.

(ii) Time of life: circumstances & vulnerability

This conceptual category relates to descriptions of the circumstances that preceded joining a movement, and vulnerabilities stemming from the participants' time of life that contributed to them joining their movement. It consists of three empirical categories.

(a) Gap in life &/or time of transition – uncertainty & searching

The accounts of eight informants linked joining their movement to the fact that they had a gap in their lives or were at a time of transition, leaving them uncertain about their future direction. The reasons given for this included not being engaged in a meaningful personal relationship, job, educational or training programme, or other prominent life involvement. This suggests that being in-between important affiliations that anchor identity was another factor that made these individuals susceptible to cult recruitment. For example one participant explained:

Int 9: My husband was just about to finish his bible school, just about to finish, and we were at a cross-roads...we were looking for direction in our lives – looking for answers or at least for a way for our lives to go forward in a way that made sense to us.

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[2] NB. Clearly an individual must encounter the group before it can appeal to him/her, which is why the empirical category "manner of encountering group" appears where it does on the model. Nevertheless, this was included in the conceptual category "nature of recruitment" for the sake of expediency.

Data from several interviewees suggests that a lack of obvious direction, combined with an inquisitive nature, may put a particular premium on the search for higher truth and meaning. This may in turn make the apparent certainty of what a group has to offer even more attractive as a solution to practical and metaphysical "gaps", as reflected in the following quote:

Int 1: I was at a transition point in my life and didn't know which way to turn...I joined the cult at that point ... I think it left me open to somebody else interpreting what was the matter with me. Because I think that I didn't know, and I didn't know how to find out. And I assumed that somebody else would have to tell me. So I was looking for answers, searching for something to fill the gap in my life.

(b)   Family, social background & context

All participants contributed to this category, which contained descriptions of their family and social background. One made a direct link between childhood wants and joining the group:

Int 3: I lost my father at the age of twelve, I did not have a relationship with a father figure so I was always longing for a father image which is God, which would love us unconditionally and you'll be safe with him.

Four other participants mentioned unsettled family backgrounds, however none of them viewed this as the leading factor in their decision to join their group, despite the fact that three of them intimated that others such as health professionals had suggested this link to them. Three participants mentioned coming from privileged backgrounds, while three were not in their native country when they joined their group and linked this to vulnerability.

(c)   Loneliness/depression/urge to belong

An urge for friendship and the desire to belong to a community was cited by five participants. One interviewee described his circumstances at the time of joining as follows:

Int 6: Well I wanted a group of people where I belonged is what it boiled down to. I wanted to feel as though I belonged to a group, whereas before I'd got my group of friends and the people I shared you know, Halls and that. 'Cos now I didn't have that group round me, because we'd all been split up and sent off in different directions.

Three informants linked their urge to belong directly to a feeling of loneliness:

Int 1: I had this very powerful experience just beforehand of feeling that I wanted to belong to something...I felt empty and lonely....

Meanwhile, the accounts of two others highlight an explicit link between depression and vulnerability:

Int 8: I found it hard to find the right friends and I suffered with depression...I felt lonely and isolated.

(iii) Common relevant personality factors

This conceptual category concerns common personality factors mentioned by informants within the context of how they came to join their group. There are three empirical categories.

(a) Naivety/gullibility

All participants mentioned the relevance of their own naivety or gullibility to having joined their group. In fact one asserted this as a major factor:

Int 5: So perhaps you could say I was more gullible...It wasn't like I was a really screwed up person that I got involved and that's what people generally think - but it could happen to anyone who had susceptibility or was innocent to what was going on.

Several maintained that they might not have become involved had they been more worldly-wise and probing before joining. For example:

Int 2: and also of course not being very mature people in ourselves we - we were only in our - our twenties and ...we didn't know Christian doctrine and theology very well. I guess we tended to - to rush in to it really...Em - obviously I was quite blind really because if I'd have taken time, been a bit more of a mature person, I would have made investigations about the group...Course at that stage we didn't realise what we were getting in to.

Naivety/gullibility was linked by some participants to section vi(c), which describes the use of deception in the recruitment process.

(b) Shyness, sensitivity or lack of self confidence

Seven participants contributed to this category, with five describing themselves as both shy and sensitive. This category links to the desire for friendship and community, as well as to active recruitment tactics,, as shown by the following quote from a participant who was spending a year at an American University at the time:

Int 10: I suppose I was more shy than a lot of my American counterparts being the sensitive type as well – so I thought an organised event would be a good opportunity to meet people in an organised setting.

Moreover, sensitivity was linked to lack of self-confidence in two further accounts as a reason for finding the cult lifestyle attractive. This interviewee described how self-doubt made her susceptible when her prospective group said that she was possessed by demons but that they could save her:

Int 1: And I've always been fairly sensitive to atmospheres so I would pick the atmosphere up pretty quickly and almost certainly blame myself for it...I did not have a great self image or I was confused about how I appeared to others. And so to be told - to be given the impression that I carried this oppressive atmosphere around with me was very confusing for me and I decided I'm either demon possessed, I'm not a Christian, or I - I'm pretty fucked up (laughs freely).

(c)   Idealism/searching nature

This category was the most saturated of all those in the joining section. All participants contributed to it, and several cited idealistic tendencies as the main reason for their attraction to their group or susceptibility to its promises. Descriptions included wanting to make the world a better place but not knowing how to go about it. Interestingly, one reported how idealism not only accounted for having joined in the first place but also for staying:

Int 10: Oh it was my own enthusiasm and idealistic outlook that I reckon was the crux...I was full of energy and love if you like – lots to give and not enough places to put it maybe....I think as a person though I had deep feelings and depth of ideals if you see what I mean...It's also possible in fact probable that that's why I fell victim and stayed or joined when others didn't – they walked away more easily.

The theme is also reflected by another, who refutes the "common perception" of preceding personal problems as the impetus for having joined :

Int 9: You don't have to be dumb or sort of in a trauma or something or very lonely and this that and the other – People believe there must have been something badly wrong for you to join. No I wasn't lonely. We were actually very happy when we were ... They could take in anybody if they were idealistic or just searching for something.

(iv)   <u>Pre-existing faith</u>

This conceptual category relates to existing religious or spiritual beliefs prior to joining, and comprises two empirical categories.

(a)   Existing spiritual beliefs or Christian faith

All participants contributed to this category, which contains comments on how informants' existing faith influenced their decision to join their group. Six described themselves as Christians prior to joining, one was a Muslim, and the other two considered themselves to have some kind of faith or spiritual orientation. The centrality of an existing faith to joining is reflected in the following quote:

Int 1: I was a sort of radical, idealistic Christian - very, very devout. I think that's the wrong word actually. But I was very <u>very</u> sort of religious and into my prayers and this and that, and very enthusiastic about church and God and reading my bible and you know, and I did all these things freely erm - a bit over the top - but freely

Three others described a desire and idealistic yearning to devote themselves to God's work:

Int 9: About two years previously my husband and I had dramatic conversions from atheism to Christianity and 'cos we felt God had done so much for us we wanted to do something for people as well. Share our faith. And we went to a bible school... Yeah, well we had that plan any way to do something sort of beneficial to society some how or other from a Christian point of view, so it's gonna be like our life's work, we would change things for the better...

(b) Dissatisfaction with mainstream church

Eight contributed to this category, which was also linked by three of them to their idealistic tendencies and searching nature. These interviewees reported that the new religion appeared exciting, passionate, and caring, while traditional religion seemed apathetic or simply out of touch with contemporary society and modes of behaviour. This is exemplified in the following quote:

Int 9: we were very frustrated with mainstream churches - we wanted to do a kind of Christian work actually...And after we'd finished the studies we were frustrated with the churches at the time 'cos they didn't seem to be reaching people, just sort of sitting in pews ... the sort of churches that we'd met weren't really doing what Christ told us to do. We'd come across sort of lumps on a log type of church you know, where you sit on pews, half empty pews you know (laugh). You know the sort of stuff - stuff that turns people right off you know...And really it's very frustrating if you really are motivated, very frustrating.

(v)   The appeal of the group

This conceptual category refers to what aspects of the group appealed to the participants. It has three empirical categories.

(a)   Idealism/radicalism

Eight participants contributed to this category, which was linked by some to dissatisfaction with mainstream churches, as outlined above, as well as to iii(c), idealistic tendencies:

Int 2: our desire was to serve Jesus in a radical way 'cos we saw his cause to be radical and to be different – and that's what the fellowship offered...

For another individual the appeal was as much ideological as idealistic:

Int 7: But you know if you actually lived in community the money was pooled and everybody was equal. We could have the same meals. We could share the car. So I think that aspect really pulled me, and the lifestyle... The whole thing appealed to me. You know the big community houses, though it was quite humble, its decorations. I just kind of liked it.

(b)   Offers purpose, certainty & guaranteed salvation

Eight participants contributed to this category, drawn by the promise of salvation, the straightforward delineation of right and wrong, truth and falsehood etc., and the offer of certain answers to complex, seemingly insoluble questions or existential difficulties. Typical of responses was:

Int 3: I guess most young Christians are looking for definite answers, you know. And I think looking back certainty of salvation is what they spotted in my desire if you like to lead a happier life whatever.

Some informants were also particularly attracted by added sense of purpose:

Int 5: What is more – we had this aim to bring others to know God's glory – we had an awful lot of people to save from Satan...we had a lot of work to do...they could offer me salvation and a life with God if I joined them in their mission. I was told it was the only way I would be saved or the alternative is that I would belong to Satan and go to hell. God wanted me to do it. Click. That was it they had me.

(c) Genuineness of members – offer of friendship

All ten participants contributed to this category, reflecting the effectiveness of cult groups in making a positive impression on potential recruits, in terms of commitment, friendliness and sincerity. For example one participant stated that:

Int 2: the commitment of the people made an impression, and I thought well yeah I want to be like these people. People appeared to be very real and really into what they were doing... In fact in those days I think they probably - they were very genuine, most of them were very very genuine.

A couple of interviewees remarked that they wanted to share the same beliefs and lifestyle because group members appeared to possess special insights. Several also suggested that offering an environment where it was safe and indeed normal to have profound religious beliefs and discussions was in itself appealing.

(vi) Nature of recruitment

This conceptual category concerns the way that the informant joined their movement, and comprises four empirical categories.

(a) Manner of encountering group [3]

All but two participants met cult members in the course of an evangelical recruitment drive e.g.:

Int 3: I was just coming back from college, I was doing law studies, and outside Kilburn Park Station I was given the invitation... So they gave me this and said come along and have lots of fun tonight

Another former member told of how he was approached in a bus station:

Int 8: I was in the bus depot in San Francisco sitting in the cafeteria with my rucksack and a young couple asked if I minded if they sat at my table.

One member relayed how he was told that it was his "destiny" to encounter the group:

Int 10: I mean the members told me that it was fate that I encountered them - that I was in the right place at the right time. But looking back I was in the wrong place at the wrong time! ...there are huge losses just because of that twist of fate.

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[3] See note 2

Of the two individuals who were not approached by cult recruiters, one was introduced to her group by her mother, while the other was born into her group, as mentioned earlier. Three participants joined with partners.

(b) Active recruitment tactics by group

Nine participants provided quotes that contributed to this category. The data suggests that all the cults discussed put potential converts under considerable pressure to join, and in all cases employed "love-bombing", whereby the individual is showered with attention and affection. The effect of this is illustrated in the following quote:

Int 6: Basically I walked in to the service on that very first day and everybody there was my friend. You know you kind of walked in and everybody was so pleased to see you and giving you hugs and saying "Oh I'm so glad you came along". And that sort of thing. You kind of got that sense of belonging straight away you know

One interviewee reported how she believed that attention-giving was just one part of a wider ploy on behalf of the group to further its own interests:

Int 9: And they literally zeroed in on my husband and I - 'cos they were into recruiting and we didn't know that, we didn't know that's what they did... - there was tremendous attention... they found out very early on that his father was a wealthy influential man in X[4] - but looking back of course it's typical tactics because they think well we can use this man, send him over. They weren't like helping us to develop ourselves and to do our work for other people. They were just thinking well we can use this man because he's got the contacts.

(c) Targeting vulnerabilities

All ten participants contributed to this category, highlighting the pervasive nature of tactics employed by cultic groups to attract new recruits. Four recounted threats about the infernal consequences of not joining, while two described how the group had played upon feelings of guilt about past sins, as recounted here:

Int 6: And they actually used the bible as a way to bring you down so that you felt really depressed about your life and the simple life that you'd led. And then you know like sin and that and the facts of what pain Jesus went through on the cross for you and how you weren't worthy, and how sinful you were. So it was this really bringing you down so you were quite vulnerable, and feeling quite depressed. And then they offered you this lifeline.

Participant data also suggests that groups may not be totally honest about who they are or the precise nature of their beliefs or practices, including the level of dedication expected of members. Thus, three participants alluded to how they might not have joined if they had had a fuller picture, while one described how she feels that the group took advantage of her vulnerability:

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[4] name of country – withheld for the sake of preserving confidentiality

Int 1: So I actually went there saying help me what's the matter with me. And that is prime - prime target. We find out all there is to know about you and then we continue to manipulate you and use you. They had me in their hand. Which is what's happened at the very beginning once they've got that information from you, of who I was and what I was and then they used it.

Participants also described how converts may be drawn into a movement unaware of the way in which, in the groups studied, Christian doctrines were interpreted and enacted. Proselytisers may, for example, place great emphasis on love or the importance of serving God, without mentioning how this love is expressed, e.g. in sexual terms. Hence one participant for example believed that he was joining an intellectual discussion group:

Int 10: Yes, well joining was not everything that it appeared to be. By that I mean - I mean that the recruiters used disguise or rather they disguised their aim to recruit... you were not made aware of what their aim was – you were just approached by these amazingly friendly accommodating people and offered this chance to go away to a beautiful spot in the country to discuss intellectual topics and basically to socialise with what you were told would be likeminded people. I mean I was well and truly taken in and deceived as I sort of imagined that it would be a bit of a party and that I may meet some interesting people – especially women! But one thing for sure they didn't let us into the whole picture and recruitment was really drawn out in terms of the lectures and workshops and they - they used lots of methods of sucking you in and withheld the real reason why you were there.

(d)   Incremental attachment

Four participants mentioned that joining their movement had been an incremental process, whereby they had visited their respective movements several times before deciding to join full-time.

Int 2: And ER - the Jesus Army which we know as - was just known as the Jesus Fellowship were about twenty miles away from us. At that time they were only small but already getting a reputation. And we started visiting them and over a six-month period before we decided to join them. And we moved over from where we were living to be part of the community. Round about six months after we first went over there.

This code tied in with appeal of the group and recruitment tactics, in so far as participants described how groups tended to lavished attention on them during their intermittent visits and presented to them features about the group designed to appeal most.
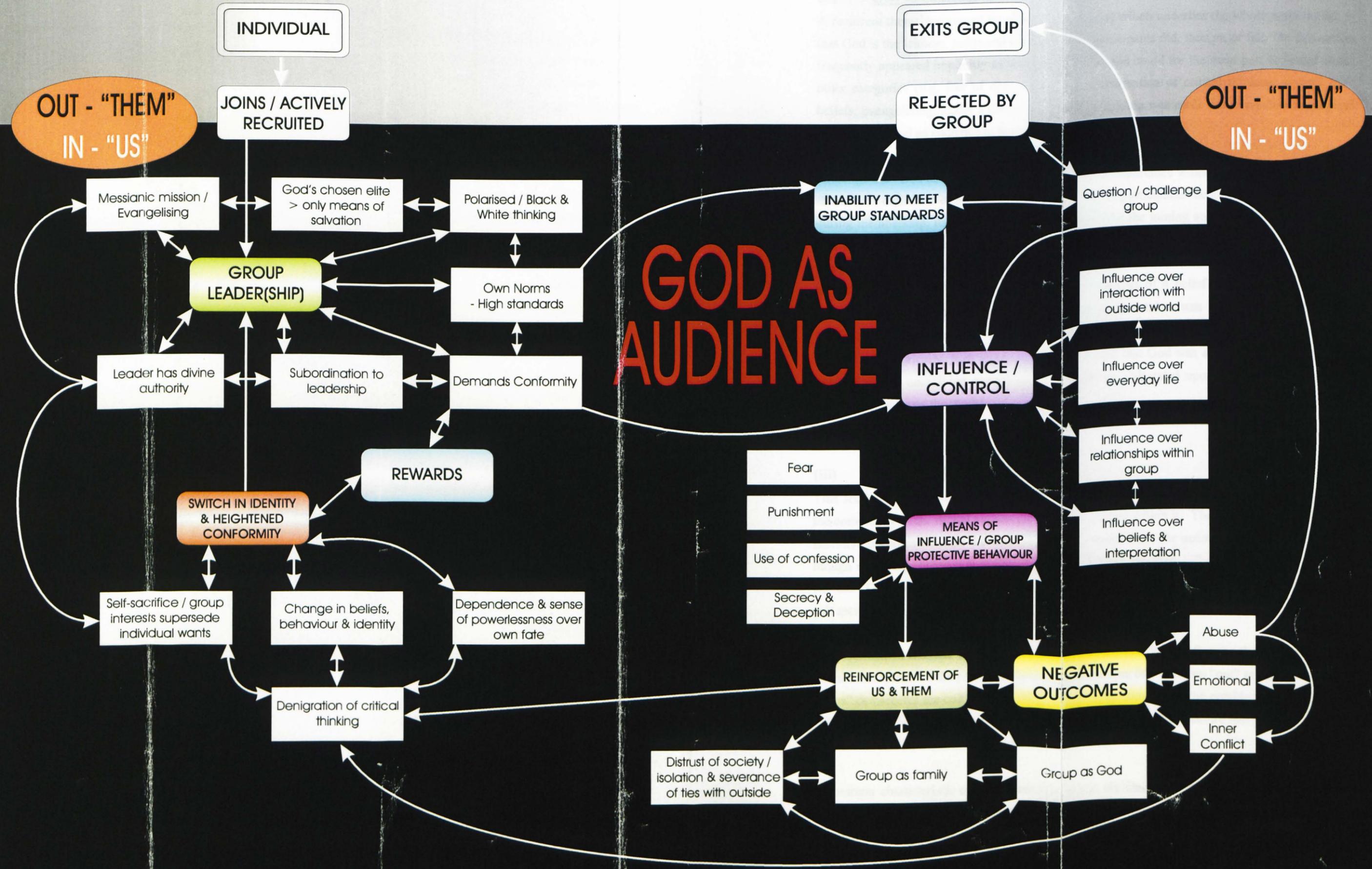
3) EXPERIENCES OF MEMBERSHIP

(i) Introduction to the main model

By its very nature, this model (*see Model 2*) represents a simplified version of individual accounts and the data as a whole. This was partly because individuals highlighted different aspects of their experience, perhaps as a result of the tenets and practices of the particular group to which they had belonged. For example, some participants emphasised sexual promiscuity (e.g. 4 & 9), while others stressed the importance of evangelising (no. 3), or the use of punishment (no. 1). The model was nevertheless built from empirical and conceptual categories and inter-connections derived directly from participant data. Indeed, the commonalties between the experiences of participants of different ages, genders and backgrounds, and in different movements, were very evident and a significant finding of this study. Certainly this data suggests that the way that participants reacted to, and were affected by, their experiences is related to the structure and demands of the cultic environment, the beliefs adopted by way of their association with it, and various means of active as well as passive influence exerted by the groups, and by nature of interacting as a group member.

As stated in the introduction, cult membership should not be considered in isolation from the context in which it occurs. More specifically, the experiences of individual participants can only be understood within the immediate context in which they were embedded, as underlined by the multiple interrelationships between the various categories emanating from their accounts. This model therefore attempts to represent this view and should be considered as a whole. In doing so it depicts a circular process, and shows the inter-relationship between all conceptual categories as well as many of the empirical categories contained within them. A number of smaller circular sub-processes are also evident. These are undoubtedly important in their own right, but should also be considered within the context of the overall cycle. These circular sub-processes are as follows:

→ the powerful nature of the group/leadership structure that demands conformity to its own peculiar norms, often on the basis of self-proclaimed divine authority

→ the differing spheres of influence

→ the various interlocking means by which this influence is exerted

→ the manner in which the "us and them mentality" is reinforced

→ the resultant switch from individual to group identity that leads back to the beginning of the overall cycle

→ the process by which an individual may progressively reject or be rejected by the group, and thus eventually leave

(ii) <u>God as audience</u>

A recurrent theme mentioned by all participants, and which underlies the whole main model, is that God is the witness, judge and jury to all that participants did, thought or felt. As this notion frequently appeared implicitly as well as explicitly, and could for the most part be coded under other categories (e.g. fear of divine retribution, denigration of critical thinking, control over beliefs, evangelising, leader's divine authority), a decision was made not to create a conceptual category for God as audience in its own right.

Although the "God as Audience" theme is of central importance within the data, and fits Strauss & Corbin's definition of a core category in relation to participants' accounts of their experience during membership, its centrality did not hold true for the joining and after leaving phases. It was accordingly decided not to isolate it as <u>the</u> core category. This was also because of other categories that are equally important for different reasons, such as "switch of identity and heightened conformity", which is arguably the outcome of a belief in God as audience and shows how the system perpetuates itself. The decision taken was instead to have "God as Audience" as the backdrop to the model of individuals' experiences. This reflects, literally as well as metaphorically, how group members believed that God was always in the background, overseeing and underlying everything. This will be elaborated upon further within the next section that outlines the model.

(iii) <u>Narrative of the model</u>

This section is included in order to provide a narrative overview and aid understanding, due to the complexity of the model and the processes contained within it. The present tense is used for narrative purposes because the entire model is collated from the accounts of participants, even though not every sentence is prefaced by "interviewees reported ..." or "the data suggests that ..." etc. This model does not however claim to provide and exclusive or definitive paradigm of cult membership, as it was derived from the experiences of the present participants.

As described in *Section 2* of this Chapter, an individual joins, often as the result of active recruitment tactics on the part of the group. The dividing line between "out" or "them" and "in" or "us" demarcates the cult's self-definition in contradistinction to the outside world. Polarised or black-and-white thinking tends to be a predominant and abiding feature that promotes an "us" and "them" duality from the very outset.

A common characteristic of bible-based groups is the claim to be God's chosen elite and, as such, the only means to true salvation. This tends to be linked to some form of messianic mission that involves evangelical outreach to gain more converts, as well as fundraising activities. This elitist slant is directly tied to a rigidly defined leadership structure that

propagates the group's own particular norms and (high) standards. Central to this is the role played by the leader, who is invested with a divine authority that can be used to justify almost anything. At the very least, group members are expected to obey the leader's wishes, submit to the leadership structure, and conform to the group's high standards, even though these may change arbitrarily.

The exertion of group influence, linked to a demand for conformity, is at the heart of the assimilation process and continues throughout membership. Four discernible spheres of influence were identified from the accounts of participants, and all relate to individual identity:

(i)   influence over interactions with the outside world, e.g. social interactions outside the group, external family relationships, and information or access to it

(ii)   influence over all facets of everyday life, e.g. time, sleep, diet, recreational activities, living arrangements, appearance, language, money and other material assets

(iii)   influence over personal relationships within the group itself, e.g. sexual activities, marital relations, parenting, and peer relationships

(iv)   influence over spiritual beliefs and their interpretation - this was central to the whole process, given that a pre-existing faith, coupled with the appeal of the group's particular religious convictions, tended to have played a lead role in the majority of participants having joined in the first place.

These spheres of influence are sustained via various modes of self-protective group behaviour. Primary among these is fear, instilled through punishment or the threat of punishment, be it divine or meted out by the leader and/or group. Punishment may take the form of physical beatings or be applied more subtly, e.g. by ostracising or humiliating group members. Directly linked to this is the practice of public confession, where the sins, wickedness, or weakness of the individual are emphasised, and even stricter adherence to group beliefs often proffered as the only antidote. Secrecy and deception, both within the group as well as in relation to the outside world, are similarly utilised to reinforce compliance.

These powerful mechanisms of influence may lead to profoundly negative outcomes for some group members. In its most extreme form, these reportedly include the sexual abuse of minors. Abuse may frequently be justified by the leader's divine authority and the group's elitist status, whereby its particular blend of beliefs and practices are regarded as above secular law. This may be compounded if a group is effectively cut off from society and therefore unable to be "policed" by mainstream mores or the justice system. Moreover, the abiding notion that God is the group's audience further undermines critical thinking. Perceived abuse may however equally cause individuals to question the group and ultimately leave.

Group demands may have negative emotional effects on individuals, such as depression, guilt, shame, jealousy or anger. Inner conflict arising from competing group demands and individual wants or instincts is common. The data suggests that this may be alleviated by personal realignment with the group's ideals, as the closer participants felt to their fellow members and group values, the greater the relief from their distress; while the converse is also true. This relief effect serves as the basis for reinforcing compliance with the group's norms, conformity being rewarded with acceptance by the group, and questioning punished by estrangement.

If individuals repeatedly fail to live up to the group's standards, or become unable to do so, through ill health for example, the group may reject them. By the same token, unattainably high or morally questionable group standards may cause some members to question or challenge their group, leader and/or norms, and eventually leave. However this tends to be only once they have been through the overall cycle depicted by the model and its constituent elements a number of times. Indeed failing to meet group standards in the first instance may provoke even greater efforts to exert group influence.

The progressive reinforcement of the "us" and "them" relationship with the outside world is another important element of group self-protective behaviour. This may be promoted by repeatedly voiced distrust of society at large and pressure to sever former ties, such as contact with family members. Indeed some individuals referred to the group as a new, "true" family into which they had been reborn. For some, the group also effectively became synonymous with God and his wishes, which again made it hard for any "true believer" to question its activities or norms.

These influences and processes have a profound cumulative effect on individual identity. The denigration of critical thinking, dependence upon the group and sense of powerlessness over individuals' own fate, may be involved in the overall process by which individual beliefs, behaviour, and, ultimately, identity shift to adopt those prevalent within the group. However, these beliefs and behaviour are willingly adopted since they are believed to be true. This is characterised by willing, or at least unquestioning, self-sacrifice, whereby group interests supersede individual wants. This is in turn rewarded and reinforced by the group through the alleviation of distress, providing a sense of purpose, and allowing the individual to enjoy the good times and benefits of group membership.

The rest of this section describes the different categories within the model representing the participants' experiences of group membership [5]. Due to the complexity of the data and space limitations, it is only possible to present some of the ways that the categories link directly and

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[5]   It should be noted that within the categories quotes are used where informants refer to abusive situations. These must beconsidered alleged if they are not backed by legal proof.

indirectly to each other. The principal focus is therefore on one of the central aims of the study, namely the effects of group membership on individual identity and the processes involved.

(iv) "Us & them": group self-definition in contradistinction to the outside world

This conceptual category concerns how participants described their movement's relationship to the outside world, and comprises three empirical categories. Informants noticeably used the plural "we" as opposed to "I" when describing their thoughts and feelings inside the cult, and referred to those in the outside world as "they". Thus there were repeated references to the way that the outside world was seen as separate and different from the social system inside the cult. Five participants independently used the phrase "us" and "them" when relaying their experience without any prompt from the interviewer, while all other participants made some clear reference to this relationship.

(a) Polarised world view – everything is black or white

All participants contributed to this category, with comments suggesting that the way they and fellow cult members referred to the outside world was characterised by polarised or black-and-white thinking. The accounts suggested that boundaries were thus sharply defined between "them" and "us", and absolutely "good" (the group/ideology) and absolutely "bad" (everything outside the group). This is illustrated by the following short statements:

Int 3: Of course, it's always black and white, there's no in between.

Int 9: us and them governed all of our thinking.

Polarised thinking is also reflected in the stereotyping of others outside the group so that they are in some way dehumanised. For example, both participants from the Unification church said they defined those non-members as "satanic", while another participant echoed this:

Int 1: There was this whole thing you know them and us. They don't know, they're of the devil.

The way that polarised thinking was encouraged within the cult becomes clearer when the circular nature of the model is considered, as every category relates back to it in some way. Thus, for example, links made within participant accounts suggested polarised thinking both encouraged and was encouraged by the cult's distrust of and isolation from mainstream society, the divine authority of the leader(ship), the demands of submission to the leadership structure, and conformity to group norms. Moreover, some informants claimed that the denigration of critical thinking, and the incentives attached to conformity, discouraged consideration of "grey areas". In fact, certainty was one of the factors that attracted members to the group in the first place as outlined in the joining data.

(b) The group as God's chosen elite & the only means to salvation

Within the "us and them" ethos, and linked to the framework of polarised thinking, all participants talked about the elitist nature of their group as the "true faith" specifically chosen to do God's will:

Int 9: And there's the élitist mentality.. I mean we were better than anybody else. You wouldn't - I wouldn't have dreamt of going in to a church for help, or a pastor or a priest or anybody 'cos how could they know, we knew better.

The notion of God as audience is implicit throughout this code, while the depth of the self-righteous belief is reflected in the specific references to the fact that their movement offered the only way to salvation to the exclusion of all other churches:

Int 6: Yeah but that was the ultimate, you know so long as you were a member of this church you would go to heaven because they were the one true group. There was nobody outside this you the Church of Christ that was going to go to heaven (ha ha). So if you were on their list and you were doing what they wanted you would go to heaven and that was the only way you know. All the other churches were not proper Christians.

This exclusivity appears to have been a powerful factor in assuring loyalty and making members feel special:

Int 10: I mean when we took on the church's ideals we thought of ourselves as being transformed, enlightened and empowered and we would reinforce this idea to each other – praising each other for our sacrifices and so forth - in fact we expected it from each other in a way as we were now above the world who of course was not enlightened by the church's philosophy.

Five individuals described how their group's elitist status meant that it was considered to be above secular law, as outlined here:

Int 3: And you were prepared to lie. Even to the extent law breaking, because the group's laws were more important than outside law.

Some participants also related the elitist nature of their group to the influence/manipulation of relationships in the outside world, for example the way they now regarded their parents.

(c) The Messianic mission, evangelising & fundraising

All participants referred to the fact that their group had an overriding mission to save the world. For most participants this higher ideal was used to justify the challenge of hard work and self-sacrifice:

Int 7: When I was in the group I felt that I must save as many people as possible because we were OK but they would go to hell otherwise.

However informants tended to differentiate two aspects of the mission: recruiting new members and fund-raising. Some suggested that the belief that their actions were sanctioned by God enabled the group leadership on occasion to justify less laudable practices:

Int 10: I mean obviously all the soliciting we did took some nerve - but even this was accounted for you see - as we were told that as fundraisers for the father, and therefore we had God's authority to go into places where we were unwelcome or forbidden. You see this was because the work of the church was too important to be stopped by petty rules. In fact this was really what justified a lot of our deceptions across the board. We used to say we were "soldiers for God".

Five interviewees linked pursuit of their Messianic Mission to the high standards required by their groups and their own salvation, for instance:

Int 6: you know you end up as I said like me, you end up pushing yourself to evangelise to people, although you're quaking in your boots, you know, you're quaking inside you know. You do it because you have - you know you have to, if you want to go to heaven you have to evangelise... And it was that constant it's not good enough, you have to strive more, you have to do more.

Indeed, participant accounts also linked evangelising and fundraising to "self-sacrifice/group needs over individual wants" and arguably abusive demands in the following example:

Int 8: I think an example of this was when she was ill with bronchitis and wanted to stay in bed. They suggested I take her out in a wheel chair to fundraise, as people would feel sorry for her and we would make more money.

The fact that divine sanctioning could be used to justify virtually any practice within the mission, however objectively unethical, and regardless of the individual consequences, is exemplified by:

Int 4: An early practise which first started in the seventies was flirty fishing, prostitution for Jesus. Women had to work in pubs and even escort agencies to bring money in for the family, spreading the gospel of Jesus to their clients. Spreading the gospel wasn't the only thing they were - were to spread (ha), venereal diseases of every kind... were also on the agenda

(v) The group & its leader(ship)

This conceptual category encompasses data relating to the structure and demands of the group and its leadership within four empirical categories illustrating different aspects of this.

(a) Leader has divine authority

This category was also implicit within some of the data coded under other categories. All ten participants explicitly mentioned that the leader claimed and was attributed with divine authority by group members, linking in to the underlying category "God as Audience":

Int 10: I mean we were taught that Rev. Moon was the Messiah, the Second Coming of Christ, the sinless son of God, the parent of mankind

Moreover, participants illustrated how being God's chosen representative and answerable to no-one else enabled the leader to dictate doctrines and prescribe lifestyle:

*Int 2: even if he changed what that took we had to alter what we did to do what he told us –
because he knew what God wanted.*

The leader also linked his divine status to the demand for unquestioning obedience:

*Int 4: If you disobey me God's prophet you're disobeying God, quote, that's the sort of things
he's always saying.*

This was clearly linked to influence over beliefs and interpretations within the group, but also to
fear of punishment and the denigration of critical thinking.

*Int 9: And sometimes it was so harsh and I'd think - I know even once or twice I'd make a
comment to my husband and say why is he horrible to them. He said be careful (laugh). But be
careful R (participant's name) don't touch God's anointed.*

(b)   Subordination to leader

All participants mentioned instances of subordination to the leadership structure within their
groups, which was linked in many accounts to the leadership having divine authority. Several
informants actually described the hierarchical structure that operated within their groups:

*Int 4: They ran the home and er ..they - it was a hierarchy system. They - they got together and
were tutored by a higher leader. That higher leader was amongst other higher leaders and they
all got together and were tutored by another high - so it was all - it's like a you know a pyramid
situation.*

These structures were largely vertical in nature, with a single leader as the supreme authority
who could delegate power and with it the demand of obedience:

*Int 6:.There was no - you couldn't be - you couldn't have your own ideas about the church or
about your goals or anything like that because they were passed down from the leadership to
your disciple and you had to do it.*

Subordination to team leaders on fundraising missions is described similarly:

*Int 10: the team must be totally obedient to the captain, or Satan may invade. So obedience is
the main rule and has to be upheld...do you see that?*

Four individuals also mentioned that women were below men in the hierarchical structure, and
were apparently happy to accept this, while another made a telling analogy concerning power
relations in general:

Int 9: you still were literally like small children under parental care.

This submission and obedience involved members feeling like children and also extended to
how they parented their own children in several instances. Three respondents also reported that
it was normal "inform" on other members who might be questioning the group's beliefs and
practices, which could result in the leader placing such individuals under covert surveillance or
resorting to open humiliation, as discussed later under the related "punishment" and "fear"
categories. Thus one participant who expressed a wish to leave her abusive husband was
brought sharply back in line:

Int 9: And he goes running tales, and so the leaders come down and tell me that I'm listening to the devil. That if I left him that I would be excommunicated from the group.

(c) Group norms & high standards

All participants again contributed to this category, with quotes concerning the norms and standards within their respective groups. This included descriptions given of the rules relevant to a particular group, for example linking in with influence over parenting:

Int 9: They have these very strict rules about never going out alone always somebody with you, this that and the other...was a new policy out in which full time children in full time homes couldn't visit their parents who were part time members for security reasons without a shepherd being present to monitor the conversation. Now that was a policy, not just a local guy saying don't do this or don't do that....

Examples of the norms described include the importance of music and an almost obsessive emphasis on sex. Seven informants commented that their groups demanded high standards from them, and there were often reminders within the groups of the importance of meeting these standards, for example:

Int 2: I'll never forget elders meetings we used to go to and N S (male's name) used to say at midnight now if any of your people at home do not hold these standards go and wake them up now and confront them...I suppose it meant to me that we had to - to reach his standards otherwise we would be unacceptable to God.

Mention was made by three participants of the way that their groups tended to have double standards. Thus members would on the one hand be encouraged or even compelled to be open and honest within the group and to confess all to the leader(ship), while at the same time instructed to actively deceive or manipulate non-members. Participants suggested that by nature of the "us and them" relationship to the outside world, its elitist nature, its mission and the divine nature of the leadership, the overriding philosophy was that the ends justify the means, a view that allowed the groups to establish their own brand of morality, outside normal social bounds. Participants also suggested that the fact that God was the audience put more pressure on members to live up to these standards, however clearly this was not always possible, hence linkages to inability to do so, as well as punishment.

(d) Demand of conformity

The informants all contributed to this empirical category, with the data suggesting that conformity from members was one of the main demands of the group. Participant accounts suggest that this resulted from, and encouraged subordination to, the leadership. It was therefore intrinsic to the circular nature of the model, since conformity both encouraged and was encouraged by the means of influence present within the group, which in turn undermined critical thinking.

One described the outcome being like cloning, while others described the effects of conformity in their movements as follows:

Int 6: ...because we were all striving towards the same goals and we all had the same - in the end - we all had the same outlook. So in that sort of scenario you do become the same don't you?

Int 1: You become the same as everyone else in the group – you are no longer an individual.

The participants described how there was no room in cult life for personal opinion and belief, whereas there was a duty to identify with the cult's position. Furthermore, several participants suggested that when an individual becomes a group member, they believe it is their duty to conform, although there is also evidence of group pressure to do so:

Int 10: The other thing that is important is that we could not escape from the church doctrine and there was constant incentives and constant pressure to conform. There really was...I mean every time I mentioned my desire to do something else there were expressions of great sadness about the idea.

In summary, the data suggests that the expectation of conformity from group members is central to cult life.

(vi) Influence and control over interactions with the outside world

This conceptual category relates to the influence exercised within the various movements over their members interactions with the outside world. Participant accounts suggested that this contact was either strongly discouraged or actively inhibited other than for evangelising or fundraising purposes.

(a) Influence over family relationships outside group

Eight informants reported that they were actively discouraged from having contact with their family or other people from their former life, unless they were considered a potential convert. Typical of this was:

Int 1: I was told you must not go and see your family. I think it was all part of that grooming process of well you don't need them. I even told my father on the phone he was going to hell.

A couple of participants also mentioned how, even when they were told that they were free to go home if they wished, psychological pressure to was brought to bear on them not to do so, e.g. they were being selfish and ignoring God's priorities. Apart from imposing feelings of guilt at letting down the group or God, another reason given for severing family ties was that parents might be planning a deprogramming attempt:

Int 10: We were told for example that Satan often used unbelieving parents or friends to draw us back into sin and life outside the church.

A further rationale offered was that the convert was entering a new spiritual plane which might be jeopardised by constantly looking back, or constrained by past ties and values. Some

participants found having their access to external family members provoked significant inner conflict:

Int 2: Erm - the other thing I found hard was the way in which we were told to frown upon relationships with our families. We were allowed to go and visit them, but if you went too often it was frowned upon. I found that extremely difficult as an only child. You know I went along with it you know...you were advised not to allow children - your children to have presents from their grandparents. And I remember once speaking to my mum and dad and saying to them now I didn't want them to buy the children presents, and that broke my heart.

It was also mentioned how these restrictions also tied in the "us and them" relationship to the outside world:

Int 4: But you know I used to get things and I once got a nightie from my mum once she'd left and she was now evil and a back slider because so no longer belonged – so we had to burn the nightie...

(b) Influence over other social interactions outside group

In some cases contact with outsiders was permitted but was still subject to influence, as expressed by this participant:

Int 3: You see if we decided to invite. We - my wife and I we decided to invite Simone (the researcher) for a Saturday evening dinner, in those days we have to have permission, we have to have a check up, we have to make sure Simone is okay, Simone is not a bad influence, Simone is - it's a huge process.

Quotes from seven informants suggested more restrictive practices:

Int 5: I would never have met a partner outside the organisation as we simply were not permitted to mix with those outside – they could pollute us

For some, contact with outsiders was only deemed acceptable if this was for group purposes:

Int 9:: You couldn't talk to systemites - that was the people of the world, you know the real world. You couldn't talk to them 'cos they are under the enemy, the devil you know (laugh). Unless of course you are getting funds or converting them.

Moreover, another individual recalled how she had left her job when she joined her group since her boss was an outsider and therefore a threat to the group, again linking to "distrust of society" and "severing ties with outside world":

Int 1: I had worked for erm a solicitor and on the - on R's (male's name) er instructions had left him - and left him in the lurch as well 'cos there was just the two of us in the firm so it was - This A (male's name) the solicitor I worked for was a threat to them and erm I really hurt A doing that. And as well being snooty – I told him he would go to hell.

(c) Influence over info./access to info.

Six participants recalled how their movement had restricted their access to information, whether this took the form of incoming and outgoing correspondence, telephone calls, radio or television

use, and unauthorised reading matter:

Int 3:In fact it was a sin to watch the six o clock news. Why is it sin? It's because er .. at six o clock you're sitting down watching the news and their lost world out there. You are being ungodly because if you are really sacrificial, you deny yourself the love of the news...And it is sin 'cos it opens your eyes on a lot of critics to us. So you don't love God if you watch the news.

One informant commented that by controlling the information members received the group influenced their ability to think for themselves:

Int 10: The way I see it now is that any information was monitored which was effective – very, very effective - in disconnecting us from our normal frame of reference that would normally have allowed us to look at the experience more critically...

Furthermore, four participants linked influence over information in their group to their ignorance of mainstream society when they left the group.

(vii) Influence over everyday life

Another means of influence within cult life cited by participants related to basic aspects of their everyday life. The data suggested that the lives of members were totally absorbed into the group's activities, while many decisions were made for them by others. There were three aspects to this.

(a) Influence over time & living arrangements

All former cult members contributed to this category. The most common descriptions concerned the scheduled nature of their former life-style, and that the cult demanded most of their time, leaving little space for personal reflection. There was a strong link within participant accounts between the demands made of a devotees time and the denigration of critical thinking:

Int 9: And I think this is very typical of cults, that they will bombard you so much you don't have time to take stock – they fill up every single moment – take over all of your time...the significance as far as I was concerned is that there was so much rush and so much pressure and so much business I didn't have time hardly to think, to sleep even or let alone pray and to find out really what God's will for our life was. See what I mean? No time to reflect...Scheduled from morning till night.

Similarly, another individual described her group as follows:

Int 4: I mean it's an institution isn't it 'cos every day is scheduled for you and you can only do things when it's time to do that certain thing.

Furthermore, participants mentioned how important basic life decisions were made for them by others, including where they lived, what they ate, and their employment. All former members mentioned that they lived communally, although this varied between simply living in a rented house with other members to living in a larger commune away from mainstream society. There was also a strong link to self-sacrifice and group over individual, in so far as there was a basic

expectation that an individual's needs were secondary to group interests. Four members mentioned how they were continually required to move during their membership, including to different countries. Although this was linked within the data to the groups' Messianic Mission, it was also felt that such moves prevented close bonds being established between group members that could possibly erode compliance with group norms and leadership. Two individuals described this in their groups as follows:

Int 4: So you know wherever you were, whatever home you were in - and we did get shuffled around a hell of a lot - I mean everybody - we didn't sort of stay in the - like in one commune for years and years. We were there a few months, a year at the most... So it was like you know all shuffled around from country to country, home to home...Most people moved around 'cos that is another way of controlling.

Int 8: However, when we were becoming more settled as a couple in one place and making friends with other couples as people do on the outside, we were moved to a new location, this happened every 2 – 3 years. We were moved six times.

A couple of informants recalled how the group had dictated what they ate as a form of influence:

Int 1: At that time, that kind of central time in there er over a number of years erm they - they determined what I ate, they told me I was fat and I had to go on a diet and I realised later of course that was a you know starvation. I was collapsing with hunger. They erm influenced how I used my time...You haven't the resources then to stand up for yourself. You're physically worn down.

Three other interviewees similarly described how they were physically exhausted by the demands of their lifestyle, and in two of these cases this was linked to the demands of fundraising. One informant linked this experience to questioning his group:

Int 10: In a way there was no time to question too much plus I was in a state of constant exhaustion. Maybe I became so tired I couldn't keep it up and that let my standards slip and maybe doubts just mounted until I could no longer ignore them.

(b)   Influence over language

Various quotes from seven informants related to the specific use of language in their cultic group, which served to reinforce a sense of elitism and to cut members off from non-members:

Int 2: The same expressions that people used you know. Very odd. That we all used the same words and expressions – I suppose it was a way of expressing and keeping us separate.

This also tied in with "polarisation", while a particular aspect of linguistic control related to the group becoming members' family:

Int 1: Erm - erm (pause) the them and us thing, er loaded language all the time, calling each other brother, you know, you read about it, International Church of Christ use very similar loaded language. Pseudo psychology and biblical loaded language so creating this world of

your own - we knew what we meant but others coming in would think gosh you know sort of so what's going on?

In a couple of cases informants mentioned that the group had insisted that they changed their names:

Int 9: *Especially if they say - they made us change our names too. There's another control factor. And I became R.... and my husband became J.... (laugh).*

Moreover four former members commented that their movement dictated aspects of their appearance as illustrated by these two individuals:

Int 1: *Er we even had to wear clothes er I mean it makes me laugh now but we had Dorothy Perkins clothes (laugh). It's because one of the women leaders liked Dorothy Perkins (laugh).*

Int 3: *And because the leader of the cult in London shaved his hair above his ear like K B (actor's name), each and every one of his disciples had to do it.*

(c) Influence over material assets

Seven informants contributed to this category, and reported how they were expected to give substantial financial support to the group. This included compulsory tithing, signing over property, and fund-raising for the group as part of their "ministry":

Int 5: *People give their possessions to the church – much more than they could afford it was just expected – you saw others do it– keeping money for yourself was selfish– I know it wasn't as bad as some cults that demand everything though.*

A related factor was how money was communal, and so having no financial means of their own also served as a form of influence:

Int 1: *We lived in common so all the money again, money went into this common purse so I had no money of my own.*

Int 9: *No money - So they've taken all control. No money unless you were a leader...You couldn't go to a doctor unless you know the leader said so 'cos you couldn't pay.*

(viii) Influence over relationships within the group

This conceptual category comprises the leadership/group's means of influence over the relationships inside the group. It is made up of three empirical categories.

(a) Influence over parenting

Five interviewees mentioned the influence that the group had on the way that adults parented their children. The accounts of three of these informants suggest that they believed so fervently that they were doing God's will that they were willing to sacrifice the immediate happiness of their children to this end, in the hope of ultimately creating a better world for their children. There was a marked gender difference, with four of the five contributors in this category being

women, perhaps indicative of the "traditional" gender values mentioned by a couple of participants as typical of their group:

Int 7: so I was coping like with the kids and things and missing lots of their needs. Just because we thought this - again this is the call of God, this is the right way you know.

Two participants similarly talked about how their children were constantly uprooted and moved around at the demand of the leadership and the effects this had upon their schooling. This category was directly related to "inner conflict", not least as the leadership within respective groups often had more authority over the welfare of children than the parents themselves:

Int 2: I also found it very difficult the way you had to bring up your children as well, you know, that was very difficult. You had to discipline your children and that included the rod you know. That was difficult. And it was difficult denying, 'cos you had to deny the normal things that children would enjoy. But the children had to be denied that. And I found that very difficult. I mean I did it but I found it very difficult... But it was always difficult because there was things in your heart you wanted to show, love and affection and do normal things with your family, and my children to do normal things with their grandparents. And yet you knew deep in your heart this was frowned upon by the fellowship 'cos it always caused this tremendous er .. if you like battle within you. It certainly did me any way.

This was corroborated from the child's perspective by the informant who was born into her group:

Int 4: If your parents are one thing and the leader sez another - the home shepherdess said another thing you would have to obey the shepherdess or the leader or the shepherd. You know your parents would be just as much rebuked as you would be.

This influence could extend to particularly extreme circumstances:

Int 9: I mean it totally actually goes against nature because we have children as most people would do but you are not the ultimate authority for your children. And that is totally against nature. Especially someone like me 'cos I'm a very - I'm a very maternal sort of mum I suspect with my kids. And some of them - some of them - some of those women would hand their children over to suffer all kinds of abuse. I'd never seen anything like it. And even me who's got - who was so strong that way, even then my kids have actually seen the leaders overrule us in front of them.

In a different variation, one informant also maintained that her group's beliefs prevented her from having children which she felt certain she would have done otherwise:

Int 5: It made me believe that if I did that I would be committing the most terrible sin against God and against my own salvation which basically meant that I ended up not having children.

By contrast, another individual asserted the opposite, namely that her group beliefs led her to having more children than she would ideally have wanted had she not belonged to the cult. Furthermore, four participants mentioned that parents and children were often separated, and described how responsibility for parenting was shared between group members, linking again to the category "group as family".

(b)   Influence over sexual and marital relationships

Eight participants contributed to this category, and data clearly suggests how influence over sexual and marital relationships took very different forms in different groups. This ranged from arranged marriages, mentioned by two participants:

Int 10: you will no doubt of heard of our mass weddings – it's probably what people know most about to do with the unification church – Moonie Mass Weddings. And well obviously I would not have ever contemplated anything like that if I hadn't been in the church – no way! Anyway I was matched and married in 1980 –But you see remember I was matched by Moon and therefore God had chosen who I was suited to...I don't suppose I ever fancied T(female's name) but it was our duty to be satisfied and if it was God's will - who was I to argue

... to a prohibition of sexual interaction:

Int 10: And of course we were constantly reminded that Satan was trying to destroy our faith and our spiritual life by giving us sexual thoughts – as sex is the original and greatest sin as it is claimed that man "fell" and became depraved through the illicit sexual relationship between Eve and Satan...I was just a young male with a healthy sexual appetite and here I was believing and consciously thinking that to think about sex was evil.

... to determining marital sexual relations by separating married couples as mentioned by three interviewees:

Int 9: That's the trouble because they can control individuals and not so easily couples - couples are very strong – so they had to find a way of controlling them

... to the opposite of prohibition, namely outright promiscuity:

Int 1: There was a lot of sexual interaction between different people. Married couples were separated.

Three accounts concentrated a significant amount of time on how the exchange of sexual partners was encouraged within their groups. The two former members of the Children of God contributed markedly more than others to this category, reflecting a particular emphasis on sex within their group, linked to the influence over beliefs and interpretations empirical code:

Int 4: Erm well I suppose the sexual connotations every - every day life you know. There wasn't a day that went by when we didn't hear the word sex, see sex or do sex. There just wasn't a day. It wasn't you know - so sex was a huge huge thing that stands out completely at all times. Sex sex sex sex. And you'll understand this if you see the materials we had to read every day and er the mo letters. Erm Berg wrote countless mo letters on the subject. He used like God doesn't see sex as dirty, men only feel the love of God, the woman unselfishly give them sex. The men will feel the love of God and the woman unselfishly when she gives them sex.

Another participant talked about how she complied with her group's sexual practices because she believed that this is what God wanted:

Int 9: But I never felt right about what's called screwing around. I didn't feel right about it. And I was so glad when I actually married because I was saved now. That's what I thought. I'm just the sort of person - I think I'm like most women actually, you know basically if you try

to cut off all the things of modern society basically we feel safe in a permanent relationship. And to me the idea - - the idea of being an adulteress was totally against my nature and against scripture. But when I was in the group I thought it was being sacrificial and doing my bit for all these poor - oh these poor deprived men (laugh). They told us that this was what God wanted — so that's what I must do.

(c) Influence over other relationships

Nine informants mentioned that they were only permitted to socialise with other members of their movement. For example, this was expressed directly by this interviewee:

Int 10: We were only really allowed to socialise with other group members – that was group policy if you like

This category was related to the empirical category "Group as family" in some participant accounts as influence over relationships appears to have heightened intra-group loyalties. A couple of interviewees referred to the fact that relationships with other group members were characterised by over-familiarity even when members did not know each other well. These points are illustrated by the following statement:

Int 4: So you know we never actually erm made long lasting friendships. We learnt - we learnt - we were taught to make friendships and relationships with everybody. God bless you you know, 'cos we're all one big family. And it didn't matter if you didn't know them from Adam you know, it was still you know big hugs and that.

Another informant had a different and positive view of group relationships:

Int 9: And actually over the years you actually got very fond of these guys because you lived together and they were like your brothers, you know what I mean?

However a common theme for group members after leaving was the pain of being rejected by former "friends", illustrating not only the influence over peer relationships, but also how supportive peer relationships inside the group were in fact contingent upon meeting group standards.

(ix) Influence over beliefs & interpretation

This category was heavily saturated by all participants, to the extent that it could be construed as one of the main categories, demonstrating the centrality of belief to all aspects of cult life. This all-pervasive aspect of influence permeated the majority of other categories within the model, but, rather than break it down arbitrarily, it was decided to treat it as one large empirical category in its own right, with the sub-heading: "Group's particular rationale, spiritual beliefs & interpretation of Christianity". Interviewees described how group ideas were internalised as "the truth" and in-coming information was interpreted in a way that fitted in with the belief system of the group. This included data pertaining to the way that experiences and events were interpreted to suit the leadership or group's needs, and links directly to group over individual:

Int 10: I mean I remember when a Japanese member in our centre got very ill with a virus that attacked his heart, and he was told that it was a satanic invasion and at first even denied medical treatment. You see I can't stress enough that anything that contradicted Moon's teachings was regarded as coming from Satan, and we were instructed not to give and take so to say - with these influences. I mean the influence process and the dynamics of the group as a whole needs to be considered. After all remember we lived within a closed belief system with no real input from outside since Satan controlled the outside world.

Some participants described how their movements gave theological reasons for keeping its members strictly separate from others. For example it may be given as a way of "dealing with evil". Seven informants described the way that scriptures were often taken out of context to back up leadership decisions or the group's rationale:

Int 1: Any other point of view was irrelevant. Mystical manipulation like A's (male's name) hand you know with arthritis means sin in the hands so you get beaten. Any stepping out of line was disobeying God you know, so they used the bible for this mystical manipulation. Mad ideas you know about God killing us, and you know Jesus died on the cross why is he going to start killing us?

Two participants recalled how their leaders explained an individual's hitherto unexplained experience, and have then taken the opportunity to interpret the experience in such a way that it would seem to confirm or prove the truth of the movement's doctrine, also linking into polarised perception:

Int 5: the way in which he and the elders of this church interpreted the J L (male's name) experience was probably what made it become extremely abusive and what ultimately turned it into a cult in terms of casting out demons and turning everything into this black and white mentality, twisting you know the complexities of psychological functioning in to well that's because Satan got you or you know (ha) that is because God has got you, you know (laugh).

Another important aspect of cult belief systems that comes out in the interviews is their comprehensive or total coverage of all aspects of daily existence. Furthermore, as God is viewed as the Audience within the group, and the leader may be considered divine, then group beliefs cannot be questioned, equally linking in to denigration of critical thinking and the other identity shift categories:

Int 10: There were reasons for everything for instance, and always good as opposed to the evil things to do. Basically the good thing to do was to accept the church's interpretation as being the only one truth and not to question that in any way. Also – there were rational reasons for everything or explanations attached to all faith and spirituality issues. We were told things like the Bible had prophesised that the Messiah had now arrived from the East "as the lightening comes out of the East and shines to the West," and he had paid indemnity for us and was now here to fulfil God's mission – which of course God had wanted to accomplish all along, but had been prevented from doing so by the failure of people to fulfil their responsibility. I mean it sounds ridiculous but in the context of the other stuff it somehow fitted in – they made it fit in –

at least then it fitted in! I mean, it doesn't sound so strange if you understand we had a certain way of thinking about things and of seeing the world - and we interpreted everything in these terms.

One of the two former Unification Church members gave an insight into just how comprehensive and sophisticated group belief structures can be:

Int 10: *Anyway the first part establishes the "scientific" intellectual foundation by quoting scientific principles of cause and effect for instance and at the same time it suggests the claim of absolute, unquestionable truth. Anyone who did not accept these principles was seen as non intellectual or simply as purposefully rejecting the truth. Umm... the second part was about the revelation received by Rev. Moon that man's original sin was the misuse of sexual love with the angel Lucifer. And the final part is about how man has to reverse his fall by going down the path of indemnity or compensation. So you can see how that works....I mean Moon has managed to found organisations such as the International Conference for the Unity of the Sciences, the Professor's World Peace Academy and the Woman's Federation for World Peace. I mean all these promote his views and by gaining prominent membership – this – this has helped to give validity and strength to his claims and the whole movement I suppose as being scientific and true which ultimately means that you can't question...I think I've made that fairly obvious but it is so big... you can not question. You see it is so easy to believe when everyone around you believes this and you have this idea that you can save the world...*

(x)   Means of influence & group self-protective behaviour

This conceptual category describes the means by which the leadership/ group influenced its members, which also tied directly to the way that the group protected itself.

(a)   Fear/threat of punishment by God - divine retribution

All participants contributed to this category suggesting that fear of divine retribution was common to all groups. A number of participants commented on how this served as a powerful deterrent to questioning their group for fear of the consequences of challenging God, the constant audience. Beliefs in the notion of a punishing God and associated fears about eternal damnation appear to have been actively propagated by groups, as reflected in the following comment:

Int 2: *the impression you got was God was a man, was an extremely hard task master. If you crossed him once you've had it sort of thing.*

Seven informants linked fear of divine retribution directly to thoughts of leaving their group, and the following comments also reveal how real and terrifying these fears evidently were :

Int 7: *And I remember lying on the floor such prostrate before God and praying God don't let us go, help us, don't let us go. 'Cos I was like frightened to death that we would just be lost and damned.*

Int 1: I believed that God would kill me. I actually believed that he would kill me. That is what we were told and we were told this would happen if we tried to leave or did not live up to the unrealistic standards.

(b)   Fear/threat of punishment by leader or group

Eight participants contributed to this category, which again links into a number of others, e.g. "subordination to leadership". For one interviewee, fear was actually the most memorable aspect of the time she had spent in the movement:

Int 9:   I think that the thing that was ... well pervading was actually fear. Fear of leaders...Yeah it was always there, it's always - you could switch off from it and like doing every day things, but as soon as you knew that a leader wanted to talk to you or was gonna come and visit you then there's immediately that fear. And that's totally irrational for grown - for adult people. Totally irrational. Why should you be afraid?.... Ridiculous, like a child having to see the headmistress at school because she'd done a naughty thing.

Interestingly, another interviewee also talked about fear using the same child analogy:

Int 1: And erm - and gradually - well first of all some people did get a spanking and this was very frightening. I guess it's channelling into the child in you - I don't know. You MUST NOT step out of line. They didn't say that, they just put it there and it was in our house.

(c)   Punishment by leader &/or group - physical or verbal

This category comprised quotes from nine former cult members, illustrating, amongst other things, that the fears recounted in the category above were often justified on the basis of their own experience of being punished. One group member explicitly talked of physical punishment:

Int 1: they beat me a number of times. Once forty times, forty lashes, with my top off over a table, publicly in front of all the whole household and told me I was hanging over hell.

However, the punishment meted out by the leader or group members appears for the most part to have been psychological or verbal, e.g. in terms of isolation, negative feedback, or the withdrawal of affection:

Int 1: And once you're bought into the atmosphere that's alive with all these signals you soon become under their control...A lot of rebuking, telling you off erm - quite a number of times erm being told off for having feelings, expressing feelings if they were self pity. Always self pity. Er never a genuine need to weep erm to a point where it - all my tears dried up. I just had to hold them right - completely in place, because I would be rebuked or else I would hide. In meetings I'd often hide behind the chair so no one could see my face. Er (pause) er they were pretty up front about what you couldn't do and what you could do.

The data suggests that the most common cause for punishment was non-conformist thinking or behaviour. Given that the group is the individual's primary or sole point of reference, not least given the reinforced isolation from the outside world, punishment within and by the group is a

very powerful means of bringing members back into line or reinforcing conformity. In some instances the process were fairly subtle, whereas in other cases reproaches were anything but:

Int 6: If you didn't conform and if you didn't obey then you were slammed down you know. I know people that were told off in front of the whole church you know of three hundred people, and you know again I don't know whether it is to embarrass them into conforming you know.

Int 9:: And sometimes he really used people, usually his own leaders, you know ones that he'd appointed as examples if they did something wrong, and he'd laugh at them and crucify them verbally. And sometimes it was so harsh.

Shaming for supposed spiritual shortcomings was also a commonly reported form of punishment:

Int 3: she told him brother I really feel you are sinful, where you don't love God, you are like a sinful dog. And he was like well what did I do? So she said look everybody did his hair except you. You really don't love God. You seem so arrogant, so proud, so independent. You see the cliché...Because we notice somebody did not do it voluntarily we will force him to do it.

Moreover, another interviewee explained how rebuke was simply an inevitability, and used as a tool to remind members of their own inferiority and imperfection:

Int 4: Erm but (sigh) for example if you had gone on your business for a year or so doing very very good, never getting into trouble, never having to have any mo letters or pray sessions with the leaders or just anything, it would be because you were proud - not proud - er hoity toity, goody goody, better than everybody else. So it doesn't matter you'd be told off for that. So there's ALWAYS something to tell you off about. See what I mean?

(d)   Use of confession - emphasising sin & wickedness of the individual

This category comprised of quotes from seven informants. Most recounted how confession sessions had a negative effect and exacerbated their vulnerability to group influence:

Int 5: It's actually very powerful to go through a public confession – it makes you very emotional and vulnerable and I certainly felt even more suggestible afterwards to whatever the church or those in authority there said was wrong with me and how I could improve myself enough to be worthy of being saved.

Two informants told of how it was insisted that members write down their previous sins as a symbolic rite of passage en route to their new life:

Int 10: I mean I remember having to make a list of all the sins I had committed prior to joining and then having to burn it in a ceremony, while repenting – which meant not only feeling but showing regret for them – you know displaying regret to others and telling them all about it. Also to pay for my sins I did four seven day water fasts and winters of cold showers!

However, one participant recounts how these confessions were subsequently used against her at a later date to bring her back into line with her group's teachings:

Int 1: One of the most powerful things for me was this confessing thing...which is what's happened at the very beginning once they've got that information from you, of who I was and what I was and then they used it against me later on.

(e) Use of secrecy and/or deception

Nine interviewees contributed to this category. Interviewees distinguished between two different types of deception and secrecy, namely that practised externally and that practised internally. Internal deception, such as concealment of the precise nature of group beliefs or practices, was reported as especially prevalent at the beginning of a member's association, i.e. before other methods of influence have been being brought to bear. Former members gave examples of the use of deception in their evangelising and fundraising activities, and often used quasi-religious justifications, such as "heavenly deception", to rationalise this:

Int 8: We sold flowers, chocolate bars, candles and trinkets. There was a big mark up on the prices – an item bought for 30 cents would be sold for $2, my helpers didn't know this. People would buy these items from us because they thought they were donating to a charitable cause – we told people we were sponsoring Christian youth programmes – a lie – we told them we operated drug rehabilitation houses, another lie, helping orphaned children, another lie.

A couple of interviewees talked about concealing details of their group membership from their families:

Int 10: I remember for instance when really soon after I joined my parents came... I was told not to see them at first but...But I was told that I must be – must be on my guard completely. Anyway - I did get to see them and of course they were extremely concerned but I tried to conceal the fact that I was staying with the Moonies.

One participant similarly described the elaborate ploys demanded by the group to "protect" itself from outside interference:

Int 4: Before we'd come back to the commune we'd have to change transport two or three times, we'd to ring the commune, check that it hadn't been raided before we came back. Only nationals of the country that we were in could answer the door. And answer the phone, even to the milkman. So that neighbours and people didn't think that we had so many people in the house... What - you know the - the - so inadvertently we have this guilty, paranoid outlook... We were taught how to talk to the police in case we get raided. How to lie, how to ...You know everything like that.

Equally another informant described how the sexual abuse of his daughter was concealed by group leaders from other members:

Int 2: I mean they're totally untrue. No one - I think there's many people in the fellowship that don't know the real reason we left and don't know what happened. It's all been covered up you know. They don't know the real facts about my daughter's case 'cos all that was you know obviously covered up from the people within the fellowship as well. So there's a real control of information. And that still goes on, no question about that.

(xi) <u>Negative outcomes</u>

This conceptual category deals with the negative ramifications for individuals as a result of their group involvement.

(a)   Abuse – physical/sexual

Five participants contributed to this category. One participant reported alleged incidents of physical abuse by the group leader and the fear this entailed:

Int 1: Er I think you know - so the key time really was all the physical abuse because some how the thought reform was really you know upheld by this fear in this whole thing.

Four participants described alleged incidents of sexual abuse. One of the two former Children of God members described how child abuse was considered acceptable within the group.

Int 9: It was illegal activities of paedophilia. But they said it was done in God's name and Christ Jesus.

The participant who had grown up in a cult explained how widespread sexual abuse had been in her own experience to the extent she regarded it as normal:

Int 4: I was sexually abused so many times I can't remember all of them - there's no one...I mean I can give you a whole string of memories about sex... and then I also remember it in pockets, all the sexual stuff, all the jealousy stuff ... It took me coming out before it all clicked that it was abuse 'cos in the group it was love – it was wrong not to express love as sex. And he was just slimy. But I didn't know all this at the time, I was sort of thinking no I just don't like it.

One participant linked this to subordination to leadership, control over parenting, and denigration of critical thinking:

Int 9: They were trying to - once the leaders were getting my twelve year old daughter into a lesbian relationship and - and I didn't agree with it at all. But I actually couldn't stop my daughter visiting them, because when my daughter visited, was literally invited to visit the leaders, she had to go...And some of those women would hand their children over to suffer all kinds of abuse. I'd never seen anything like it.

Three participants clearly linked sexual abuse to causing inner conflict and questioning the group. Moreover, one cited it as a principal reason for their decision to leave:

Int 7: when we heard about what had happened to I (female's name), sexual abuse we knew about, and this was like the final straw - we just knew it wasn't going to work any more.

(b)   Abuse – mental/spiritual

Seven participants contributed to this category directly, and although it was not heavily saturated, this theme was implicit within the way that other participants recounted their experience of membership. Informants related this to other categories such as "influence over beliefs and interpretations", and particularly to "inner conflict/distress", as expressed particularly vehemently by one interviewee:

Int 6: I felt as though I'd been mentally raped by the group. You know emotions are very strong things, and you can be just as much raped by emotion as you can physically – I certainly feel that now.

(c)   Emotional – depression, fatigue, breakdown

Six participants described becoming depressed, exhausted or "burnt out" during their membership:

Int 1: And these pictures - this sort of vortex going down. And it that's exactly how I felt. I - I jut felt like I'd been sucked right down into the bottom of a pit. And I just had no concept of how I would actually get out of that, climb out. But er I had nothing left... I was very very depressed and I - I was beyond suicide or anything. I didn't think I don't think. I had to just go on hold. I was desperate, in a desperate state. I mean if someone had found me and tried to sort of help me at that point I don't know what - what they could have done. I shouldn't imagine they would have got through to me.

Two participants similarly cited physical and emotional exhaustion as leading to breakdown and in one case severe ill health:

Int 2 the last year or two I was in the Jesus Army to quite a severe breakdown in my health. I do think I had some mini breakdowns a couple of times while I was in the fellowship as well. I know there were a couple of occasions where I just used to burst into tears and er .. I couldn't put my finger on it then but I know it was a result of all the things that I felt inside, the turmoil, and I just didn't have the guts to - to go you know...because it was basically I believe a psychological condition. I do believe that very clearly. I know I feel I had a breakdown which lasted for two years ... I just couldn't cope with any more. I just couldn't continue the battle.

The other participants also linked depression directly to constant inner conflict and the strain from continually subordinating their own instincts, needs, and views to those of the leadership or the group as a whole. This also tied into feelings of worthlessness arising from the inability to meet group standards:

Int 10: and used to get quite depressed at times – really quite depressed. And I remember thinking that if I couldn't do what God wanted me to do then what use am I to him...

(d)   Emotional - guilt & shame

Guilt and shame were very common emotions reported by nine informants:

Int 5: Actually guilt was a massive emotion that was felt ALL the time – if you felt anything differently from what the cult said you should.

It was in fact very clear that, in most cases, feelings of guilt or shame were actively induced by the group as a means to reinforce conformity, linked for example to repeated confessions:

Int 10 I remember having to confess that I had overslept ... and feeling tremendous guilt for having a weak spirit. There was a lot of guilt really. It was really common for people to be confessing how guilty they felt...

There was a clear linkage also to living up to group standards, which were often a "moving target" and tied into the repeated message of individual weakness and inadequacy:

Int 6: So again there's that guilt that you're not achieving what they want you to achieve even though they moved the goal posts. That's the main thing I can remember...But you still had the underlying guilt and feeling that you weren't quite reaching the standard set...But also if you didn't change you were told that you were hard of heart and you weren't listening to God, and your disciple only had your best interests at heart.

Goals included specific recruitment or fund-raising targets:

Int 10: I remember the guilt you felt if you didn't reach the target so there was a real personal incentive as well to at least do as well as you could do.

Strong explicit linkages with fear were also reported:

Int 6: I felt it was always the case of fearful of not doing what I was meant to do, you know like Christians were meant to do like preach, tithe, and that sort of thing, or asking questions about the group, which was strongly discouraged. So always this case of feeling fearful about what would happen to me. Feeling guilty that I wasn't doing what I was meant to be doing.

The category links to the experience of guilt and shame after exiting the group, where more instances were recalled than during descriptions of the group membership itself.

(e)   Emotional - jealousy/anger

Four interviewees recounted times when they had felt angry and/or jealous during their time as a group member. Three instances of jealousy related to sexual liaisons:

Int 4: My first feeling was disgust, having to watch somebody I really liked with this nasty old woman, aargh, I just think sick at the time but I didn't know that, I just thought the devil's attacking me and jealousy was a sin and all that.

The feelings of anger of the three participants who reported them were all related to their ultimate reasons for leaving their movement, and one described anger as effectively a symptom of inner conflict and related stress:

Int 2: And I think this made me a very intense person, very intense, there's no question about that. And I often used to get quite angry. Angry with my children, angry with my wife, angry with the people I had responsibility for.

(f)   Inner conflict/distress

The fact that nine participants contributed to this category suggests that inner conflict was a prevalent experience throughout membership. The only participant who did not report inner conflict was the one who had been born into the group, which is a significant finding in its own right. Words such as *"wrestling", "struggling", "turmoil" "fighting, inside myself"* abounded:

Int 2: I realise now with the - with hindsight – because it wasn't conscious then- that there wasn't a day went by when I didn't feel confrontation and argument within myself.

The primary overriding quoted cause of inner conflict was the seemingly irreconcilable clash between group demands and individual instincts or wants, exacerbated by the feeling of being constantly observed by God:

Int 7: But you see God was the one who was overseeing what we did so that was a real struggle within knowing that his will should always go first.

The very fact that such internal struggles appear to have been so frequently experienced reflects the comprehensive and unrelenting nature of demands made on members. This is equally born out by the range of scenarios in which competing internal emotions arose. This included interfering with work:

Int 5: But eighty percent of my brain was taken up with this internal wrestle of what the organisation wanted me to do and twenty percent was available for the work I was actually being paid to do.

... to parenting:

Int 7: There's often conflicts with individuals trying to meet the demands of the fellowship ... But then other issues like withdrawing children from out of school activities, sports days, Christmas, we'd keep children off the week before the other children broke up. Christmas time and no toys. Loads and loads of things. I was always in conflict.

... to evangelising:

Int 6: One our goals each day was we had a set number of people we had to reach out to you know, people you met in the street, your fellow students or whatever... And at the time I was very very shy and I found horrendously difficult to do that. It was a constant battle...Battling against myself and what they expected of me.

And in one case was cited as the reason for eventually being rejected and leaving:

Int 5: There was a part of myself that was never going to be totally sold out to it. So there was always the conflict...And that part fought and that part lost me friends...And that part finally was what made them close ranks on me.

(xii) <u>Reinforcement of us & them</u>

This conceptual category relates to ways in which the "us and them" relationship to the outside world was reinforced within the group, and comprises three empirical categories.

(a) Distrust of society: isolation & severance of ties with outside world

The participants all contributed to this category, which links in to the various means of influence described above. The theme of isolation and severing ties is clearly expressed by the following quotation:

Int 3: you spend a fairly substantial amount of time, effort, energy, and cut off from the rest of society, in fact cut off from my family, background, upbringing, you name it, all cut off.

Four interviewees directly link their group's stated distrust of society to the systematic reinforcement of progressive isolation from the outside world

Int 2: And sometimes I found this sort of separativeness, being separate from the world, as they call sort of general society as being, quite painful really ... - that was the current theme all the way through it, you know the isolation, the them and us, the distrust.

This extends not just to society at large but specifically also to other Christians in more than one instance:

Int 10: There are lots of memories that centre around the way we saw the world and interpreted it really...I think we were paranoid about everything in the outside world... I mean for instance normal Christians were portrayed as our older brothers but they were seen as persecuting their younger brothers because they did not understand our mission of course – so they weren't to be trusted. So there was always fear of some sort... After all, remember we lived within a closed belief system with no real input from outside since Satan controlled the outside world.

This isolation tactic is arguably one of a cult's most common mechanisms of influence, for if a group is geographically and socially isolated then it is difficult for group members themselves, let alone outsiders, to consider or question objectively the group's norms, standards and practices. Isolation may also increase dependence on the group, hand in hand with enhancing vulnerability to suggestion, influence, and in some cases manipulation:

Int 8: In the group we were isolated from the outside world and relied on the group for everything...

Fostering fears about society at large was also another insurance in addition to potential divine retribution against members leaving the group:

Int 4: The world was a scary place. People were sinners. Evil. And I'd no concept of the real world as I know it now.

(b)   Group as God

Seven participants described in varying ways how the group and its spiritual validity was so central to participants' thinking that it became synonymous with God, indeed:

Int 7: The church becomes more like God than God is...

Moreover the following quotation illustrates the degree to which one individual's perceptions and beliefs had become saturated by cult standards. This marked a pronounced change in religious convictions from the sincere idealism that contributed to many of those interviewed having joined in the first instance, in so far as group concerns have now superseded the interests not only of the individual but also of God himself:

Int 3: The group was number one before even god, because God comes second or third priority. The top priority is the movement because let's face it K M (name) started quite clearly, if you don't love Boston you don't love God. So Boston - which is the movement - is the symbol to love God. So God number two comes. First Boston.

Five informants linked this to how the group's "truth" was seen as the absolute truth, and therefore sacred beyond questioning, again linked to the fact that God was the audience but transmitted through the leader.

(c) Group as family

Seven interviewees made references to how the group became like their family, and the family metaphor was frequently employed. Indeed one participant pointed out that the Children of God are also known as "the family" anyway. The informants made references to the leader as father as well as to members calling each other bother or sister. One participant talked of how this took the place of his biological family, while another mentioned that it was not necessary to have formed close bonds to think of other group members as family:

Int 5: God bless you you know, 'cos we're all one big family. And it didn't matter if you didn't know them from Adam you know, it was still big hugs and that.

This notion was linked by some participants to influence over various types of relationships:

Int 4: because my parents weren't parents...My parents weren't - I mean my mother you know she was just as much a mother to children who were not her own - and just another mother - it was important that all the children felt that everybody - all the adults were their not parent exactly, but we had to always address somebody that was a female member auntie, auntie Rose, they were called anything - anybody always had to use the prefix auntie and uncle. Er David Berg the leader he was grandfather to the children and a dad to the adults. And Maria was mother, mother Maria.

(xiii) <u>Switch of identity & heightened conformity</u>

This conceptual category comprises empirical categories that relate to the way that group processes may lead to a switch in identity in group members and hence heightened conformity to group norms and practices. The high saturation density in three of the four empirical categories contained within it suggests that this is in fact the key category within the model in terms of providing the most integrated understanding of the result of the processes at work during group membership. The significance of this is therefore considered in some detail in the discussion section.

(a) Denigration of critical thinking

This empirical category was heavily saturated, and included quotes from all participants, indicating that denigration of critical thinking is a crucial common element within the reported experiences of cult membership, and links closely to all other main categories. The denigration of critical thinking was also a process:

Int 2: you do not have choices in the fellowship...Also people were not allowed to question things – the group's views were correct

... as well as an effect:

Int 9: No you don't question because there's something in built in you that they could use to make you obey...

There were clear linkages made by participants to influence over beliefs as both a symptom and a cause of denigration of critical reasoning, in so far as ascribing all outcomes to a supernatural cause rendered the individual powerless to question them, merely capable of trying to be more devout:

Int 4: you couldn't be seen to have the devil attacking you, 'cos that's what happened if you were unhappy, its the devil make you unhappy, not your circumstances or anything or like that, it was the devil. All sort of silly things like you blame the devil for everything, it was like rebuke the devil in Jesus' name you know. Erm if the car broke - if - they didn't have cars - but say something broke it was the devil. The bus didn't turn up on time it was the devil (ha ha).

Interviewees reported how dissent or questioning the group's teachings were discouraged, and criticism often regarded as rebellion, meaning there were also links to subordination to leadership and the demands of conformity:

Int 6: There was no - you couldn't be - you couldn't have your own ideas about the church or about your goals or anything like that because they were passed down from the leadership to your disciple and you had to do it. And if you didn't you weren't trusting God, you were questioning them. So if you're questioning them you're questioning God.

One of the primary means to achieving the end goal of a non-questioning member was the influence over time and living arrangements described above:

Int 8: I had no time to dwell on my own thoughts and I was never alone, I even slept surrounded by others.

(b)   Dependence & sense of powerlessness over own fate

This category comprises quotes from seven informants illustrating how they became socially and psychologically dependent on the group:

Int 5: I was dependent...Couldn't see my future, couldn't see where I was going (becomes upset at this point). I didn't know how to get out of it because there were parts of it that I still believed were true and I didn't know - I didn't have any way of re-interpreting it in to a truth that meant that I had a future.

Again, this was expressed by another informant in the following way:

Int 8: I become to depend on the group for everything, emotionally, spiritually, my food, clothes...I was very dependant on the Group, I needed them to tell me what to think and feel and do.

(c)   Self-sacrifice/group interests supersede individual wants

All participants contributed to this category, and the data suggests that this was an important aspect of interviewees' experiences within their movements. Several informants described how self-sacrifice involved conforming to group and leadership norms as part of their duty as God's chosen elite. By putting the group first, most informants made comments that suggested that they believed that they were serving God via actions for the greater good:

Int 8: Yes, I felt I was on a spiritual mission, nothing else mattered but that goal – I would be driven to any extremes to obtain Moons objectives...I felt I did not matter as an individual as I was part of a greater good.

However, with hindsight, informants bemoaned with retrospect to the effect on parenting and other relationships:

Int 7: You see when you're there and say taking children to meetings and putting them through things that you do - it was all for the church, the church, the church, the church first. And then the family and the children after. So everything was like the church first ... It had hooked me that much it was always the church first in everything I did.

Self-sacrifice/group interests supersede individual wants was also linked to the experience of inner conflict in many accounts:

Int 2: The trouble is though you do these things and because you - deep down inside you go along with it and you say yeah this is good and right 'cos you think you're doing God's will - the group stands for God and so it comes above what you would do as an individual

There were differing degrees of self-sacrifice expected, and many fairly abusive instances, from a group completely ignoring the death of one member's child and expecting her to continue group activities as normal, to another women in hospital being exhorted to evangelise her fellow patients:

Int 3: The woman is in her bed absolutely petrified of losing her child and all the emphasis is don't think about yourself, deny yourself, be sacrificial and evangelise the ward, which is in reality think of the cash flow, four persons a minute.

To being required to move country at short notice:

Int 9: If you - they wanted you to do something in Japan that would be it, you'd go... Just like that. You had no say over your own personal life.

(d) Change in beliefs, behaviour & identity

All interviewees contributed to this category, with comments suggesting that change in beliefs, behaviour, and identity were fundamental to their experience of cult membership. Indeed just as the conceptual category to which this belongs is perhaps the key within the whole model, this empirical category is perhaps the key within this conceptual category, in reflecting the cumulative effect of cult membership:

Int 1: It's changed all the direction in my life. People wouldn't know me and the way that my identity switched.

This switch involved more of a direct effort on behalf of some members than others. Thus two members describe how they strove self-consciously to adopt the group's mentality:

Int 5: What's more I believed what they told me and willingly adapted nearly every aspect of my life according to what they or we should I say believed to be true.

Int 6: I'd attempted to change so many things from them that I was no longer me. .. I was what they wanted me to be you know, ... I had become a different person I think you know, well I'd

become like other members of the cult you know (laugh) in a way. Because your whole life becomes the church and the group and what they want of you that you're constantly striving to be what they want you to be.

This identity shift could be reflected in very basic incremental changes of behaviour with nevertheless significant cumulative effects:

Int 6: I changed my sleeping patterns to fit in with getting up for prayer time. I stopped smoking. I stopped going to the pubs because they were seen as being dens of iniquity (laugh) you know. Never ever went to night-clubs which I used to ... You know so yes it's lots of little things rather than one big thing.. It's bits of life that changed and then eventually my whole life changed...

Another explained how he defined his identity through the group:

Int 3:, they most certainly influenced me to the point where I changed my personality, changed my behaviour, everything, you name it...They are the group – and the group had become me and my whole identity.

Participant accounts suggest that change in identity and subsequent conduct becomes a function of these newly acquired beliefs and attitudes:

Int 10: And we weren't all certifiable lunatics – believe me - but we believed in what we were doing. On the whole we were a bunch of very nice, very enthusiastic bright people who believed they were doing good, and it's as simple as that on a personal level...

(xiv) Rewards

This conceptual category relates to the rewards for the individual resulting from conforming to group norms and obedience to the leadership structure.

(a) Relief from inner conflict & sense of purpose/belonging

Quotes from nine participants made up this category, describing how they sought a means of minimising the considerable inner conflicts between their own instincts and group demands already highlighted above:

Int 5: So in the end you believed it anyway because it made you feel better if you did and people were supportive of you. Doing what you were told was true brought a strange comfort even if I was told I was full of evil demons and constantly made to confess my wrong doings to all and sundry.

However this relief was in itself often temporary in so far as it was linked to further pressures to conform or comply to group standards:

Int 5: But the church and obviously JL (name) said that he and the church's way represented God so it was up to me to adapt to the way that they would expect me to act. Only then did they give you any peace and you begin to feel better rather than constantly fighting inside.

The relief produced could be powerful, and the following quote shows links to the "group as God's elite" and "subordination to leadership":

Int 8: I felt one of the elite chosen to do Gods work. I felt privileged – spiritually above the norm. I wanted to feel the approval of my master and the leaders and would go to any lengths to obtain the feeling of worthiness. I could feel at times euphoric – in another world.

The data also suggests that a key solace from inner conflict or source of compensation for it was the apparent friendship and understanding of a community of like-minded believers, as reported as a key initial appeal by many interviewees:

Int 3: I think it was about the sense of belonging ... But sense of belonging naturally you feel more safe if you like, more at home, or more happier. You feel you belong to a group who make you feel good about yourself all the time.

Some informants recounted how the friendliness of the initial proselytisers dissipated over time, but that it was often loyalty to those relationships that nevertheless partially accounted for remaining in the group. Moreover, several of them commented that they believed in the mission of the group, so that the emphasis is equally on advancing the purpose of the group:

Int 10: – You are insignificant if you like but you can be significant by furthering the cause. Furthering the cause makes you feel worthwhile...

(b) Good times & positive experiences

Seven informants mentioned having had some good times or positive experiences during the time in their movement. These ranged from fun activities:

Int 3: But there was exclusive all ....the close bond, I didn't not know any other. So there was a lot of fun, a lot of activities, a lot of time that we enjoyed, again in the early period, six to eight - nine months.

... to uniquely close relationships perhaps unrepeatable outside such an environment:

Int 7: I felt like a genuine love there amongst the people, which again pulled me. And as we moved along in it we felt - I personally had some very deep relationships. I know some ways - if I say freaky deep I don't mean that in a wrong way. But you felt you touched something. You had heart and heart relationships with people that perhaps you'd never even felt with your family. It was something different, and something very deep.

(c) Reinforcement by group

Eight interviewees contributed to this category. Just as questioning, doubting, or criticising the group or its leaders tended to provoke a negative, even punitive, reaction as described above, the data also records that good behaviour and demonstrable compliance were often rewarded:

Int 10: I mean I remember the team captain telling me that I was God's child after I earned a reputation as a "determined brother" for my fundraising abilities and I remember how good this felt.

Int 10:Also a huge factor was that changing who you were and what you did brought benefits in terms of approval from other members.

An overt control element to the positive reinforcement was explicitly mentioned by more than one ex-member, and within an isolated or "sealed" group, this may be just as effective as negative reinforcement in influencing members:

Int 6: Well they exerted control by making you feel good about who you were, what you did, so you'd want to change.

This was also linked to the notion not just of individual dependence but also inter-dependence:

Int 10: We were acting for the greater good or at least for God's and Moon's greater good. I mean when we took on the church's ideals we thought of ourselves as being transformed, enlightened and empowered and we would reinforce this idea to each other – praising each other for our sacrifices and so forth - in fact we expected it from each other in a way as we were now above the world who of course was not enlightened by the church's philosophy.

(xv)   Miscellaneous group characteristics

(a)   Stratification & competition amongst group members

This category consisted of quotes from five interviewees concerning stratification between group members and how this could lead to competitive tendencies:

Int 1:   There were about five different households, but our household was regarded as the lowest of the low, the plebs.

The idea of stratification links with influence and control by imbuing a sense of inadequacy to encourage even greater devotion:

Int 8: If we did not do well in one location we would be given a lowlier rank, told to try harder

Although significant in terms of the number of participants that contribute to it, this empirical category was left out of the model, as it was not felt that it added enough to the understanding of the dynamics involved to warrant inclusion.

(b)   Evolution of group over time

Six participants mentioned how their group had evolved in some way during the period of their membership. In some instances this appears to have been an overall progressive transformation:

Int 1: Well it was - the thing is it went through a whole lot of different phases...And it - it sort of - it evolved from being something that had probably very large seeds of abuse within it, as you can see, someone saying they were a counsellor and they weren't, they had no right to say they were...From being very creative, very free, nice atmosphere, you know...

Meanwhile, for others, it was more a deliberate ploy of the leaders, who endeavoured to maintain subordination by continually introducing new rules:

Int 9: Though sometimes the boundaries were let go of over the years, and policies were changed constantly. But sometimes they had fairly loose ones. At one time no way would children go to school. But then there was no people in the group who could teach them properly at one time so, they said well let your kids go to primary school as least... but that was loosening the grip of the leaders. I mean that was because they were in contact with the world and so they drew the reins in again and said no we're planning our own schools.

One ex-member alluded to how the group had relaxed over time:

Int 2: We were not allowed to celebrate Christmas erm .. you have to realise that things do evolve in the fellowship ... It's not so strict now.

The opposite description was more common however. Thus two recounted that their group had been less controlled and controlling when they joined (not just a matter of perception due to initial ignorance), while four explicitly mentioned how their group environments had become more tightly controlled over time. Another interviewee narrated how the group had evolved to the point of its own extinction due to internal rivalry:

Int 7: Because it just seems to - it's like the fellowship turned on itself. Something that started off at least appearing to be so - to me – beautiful, what I first saw when I went there and the holiness and honesty and - it seems that it was slightly more like that, but over the years turned around on itself - this going off the way again...

(xvi)   High group standards & progressive doubts

This conceptual category relates to the inability of members to meet high group standards, and to progressive doubts about the group. The two empirical codes contained within it overlap with the first two codes in the "process of leaving" category, and in fact these four codes were originally contained in just two empirical categories. Separating them out into four was felt to provide a clearer insight into the complex process of cult disengagement from initial doubts to actually leaving, whether voluntarily or after expulsion.

(a)   Inability to meet group standards

Seven participants reported that they were unable to meet the standards of their group in some way. Of these, four explained how their group's standards were effectively a "moving target" and thus inherently unattainable:

Int 6: But I can still also remember the if I did do right and I was being praised was this feeling of being part of the group and finally feeling yes I've managed it. You know but there was - then whatever you achieved it was the goal posts were moved so you never quite achieved it you know.

Another participant described how exacting these standards and associated demands could be, by reporting the leadership's reaction to the critical illness of his wife, who was therefore unable to perform her cult-related duties:

Int 8:– they said maybe I would be better of without my wife.

Another participant expressed how her inability to meet the group's expectations gave rise to guilt and fear,:

Int 6: it was just constantly this fear of being either thrown out of the group, of feeling guilty that I wasn't doing enough, or that I wasn't reaching out to people on the streets enough, feeling guilty if I laid in or if I skipped a church meeting to do an essay, or something. It was constantly this battle between what they wanted and what I could achieve. I felt it was always the case of fearful of not doing what I was meant to do ... or asking questions about the group, which was strongly discouraged.

This guilt and fear appear to have been deliberately played on as a means to exacting greater devotion and commitment:

Int 6: Feeling guilty that I wasn't doing what I was meant to be doing. And this was encouraged by the way my disciple spoke to me, you now "You're doing this wrong, you're doing that wrong, you've got to change this, you've got to change that, fast to make yourself more humble to God", and that sort of thing.

(b) Questioning or challenging the group

All participants contributed to this category, and it relates closely to inner conflict, which was often the initial impetus for questioning or challenging their group. One former member describes how her intuitive sense of logic overrode group appeals to her faith:

Int 5: .. because they were still convinced that I had more demons in me. But I was (ha) I could just see that it was completely and totally illogical. I was like Alice in Wonderland you know (laugh). She'd go down the rabbit hole and everything was distorted.

She goes on to reveal not only the importance of questioning group beliefs in terms of her eventual decision to leave, but also what an extended process this turned out to be her case:

That was the start of serious questioning where I was no longer absolutely going along with them. But it took another six years because I - what I was wrestling with was I still believed in Jesus Christ, I'm still a Christian...

Further evidence of the linkages between incipient doubts and choosing to leave are presented in *Section 4(iii)a)* below.

4) AFTER EXITING: "THEM" ARE NOW "US"

(i) Introduction

Participant accounts suggest that exiting the various movements tended to involve a protracted psychological disengagement process, that began some time before physically leaving the group in question, and extended for some time thereafter. Just as the group was "us" and the rest of society "them", this disengagement model charts how this process was gradually reversed with the individual's progressive reintegration into mainstream society.

The process starts with seeds of doubt and questions about the group and its leadership. Participants report a variety of triggers, from sexual abuse, to the inability to meet group standards. However a key distinction can be drawn between those who left of their own accord and those who were rejected by the group or forced to leave when the group disbanded. Nevertheless, in all cases other than the latter, leavers were subjected to varying degrees of rejection that was the cause of some distress. The support of family, friends, external clergymen or networks providing "objective" information about the groups played a vital role for most participants in the process of letting go.

Former members experienced considerable emotional turmoil after leaving. This ranged from descriptions of general difficulty in coping, to grief reactions concerning general loss, to loneliness and regret regarding specific losses. Some informants similarly felt frustrated and angry towards their former group, and feelings of disorientation and unreality were common in the period following their exit from the group. There were also expressions of self-recrimination, guilt and shame regarding their experience and behaviour.

Effects upon identity were another common overriding theme. This included perceptions of a loss of meaning or purpose in life, and a belief that their psychological development had been arrested as a result of their cult affiliation, for example in terms of finding it difficult to make decisions for themselves. A number of practical everyday difficulties adjusting to social norms were also expressed, and there were repercussions in terms of negative effects on trust and relationships. Indeed many felt that the group still had some form of hold on them and would for some time to come.

Exiting led many participants to discuss their faith, which, for many, had been one of their primary reasons for having joined in the first place. Common reports were of suspicion of organised religion, or, at the very least revisions to certain aspects of their spiritual or religious convictions, although the majority retained their Christian faith. Several respondents have however experienced an ongoing fear of divine retribution, left over from that instilled during their group membership.

Individuals reported a number of things within what became the broad heading of "coming to terms with their experience". This included former members recognising how they may have

been deceived and manipulated. Most respondents also rationalised their ignorance of this at the time, and in fact their membership as a whole, with a noticeable change of language from "we" to "they" occurring in many of the accounts. This distancing process was linked to self-forgiveness. Most of the participants stressed the importance of being understood in the recovery process, and expressed fears about the prejudice or misunderstanding of others. Moreover, several reported negative encounters with mental health professionals who had focussed on individual factors relevant to their cult membership rather than also examining the context in which it occurred. There are particular lessons to be learned from these reports that will be discussed in *Chapter 4*.

Finally, participants talked of various means by which they were reasserting their identity as an individual, and how this differed from their experience of having a group identity. Several expressly mentioned a desire to use their experience to help others. Again there was a marked use of terms such as "I" and "me" and of views from their individual perspective.

The conceptual and empirical categories from participant data that make up this process are considered in more detail below. It is also worth reiterating that the experiences recounted were too diverse to represent coherently in a model, hence the absence of one unlike for joining and membership itself.

(ii)   Process of leaving

This conceptual category relates to the way that the participant left their movement, and the factors that contributed to this, since it was often a complex and drawn out process.

(a)   Thinking for self & questioning of group

All participants contributed to this category. As already discussed, this empirical category overlaps with the main model of cult membership, as leaving was generally part of a protracted process of questioning that began while the participant was still a group member. The process of thinking for themselves and questioning the group often continued for a considerable period after they left their group, which ties in with a number of other categories during the post-membership phase, e.g. under the "negative effects on identity" and "coming to terms with the experience" conceptual categories.

Two participants linked the process of questioning and challenging their group to eventually choosing to leave. In one case, a single incident finally precipitated this decision:

Int 8: I think the incident of my wife and the wheel chair was very significant because for the first time for years, I thought NO this is not right. I thought differently from the group I had made a choice for myself.

In the other, questioning the group had led to the individual being relegated to "half-way house" membership status. This in turn allowed her the time and space to reflect, which prompted her decision to leave:

Int 9: being a part time member you're a little freer ... which gave me time to think... And I was thinking this isn't - this isn't real. This isn't what I knew in the beginning as Christian life. That we should be sort of made part time members of very limited fellowship, it was the other way round, Christians are supposed to bring people in to fellowship not out, kick 'em out.

Another ex-member linked her exit from the group with mental exhaustion that meant she could no longer suppress growing doubts and questions:

Int 10: Maybe I became so tired I couldn't keep it up and that let my standards slip and maybe doubts just mounted until I could no longer ignore them.

(b) Group reaction to inability to meet group standards & leaving

Although group reactions to the onset of individual dissent was described during the main model, this category includes former members' descriptions of group reactions to them once it was clear they were leaving or after they had left.

The group reaction to individual questioning was described as unequivocally negative:

Int 5: And then towards the end when I was very seriously asking questions where they all suddenly closed ranks on me after telling me they were my family and telling me they loved me and telling me that everything they were doing was because I was the apple of God's eye and this shit, then they absolutely closed ranks on me without any explanation. They never apologised. (ha).

Three other individuals linked their inability to meet the group standards to ostracism and rejection by other group members:

Int 7: And people had gone a bit funny on us since K (husband's name) had been ill. And I noticed then that it's like K (husband's name) wasn't able to pull his weight really any more, but people weren't so kind, and people like weren't so interested. It was difficult to get an elder to come and pray for K (husband's name). And we were in desperate states really.

Meanwhile four participants mentioned the opposite phenomenon to being rejected, i.e. various attempts to persuade them to remain or rejoin their group:

Int 7: We actually packed all our things at one stage and we were going to run away. It sounds ridiculous doesn't it for a couple. I got my dad's car and hid it in London, and we were just gonna do a moonlight. It seemed the best way to do it. But somebody found out and then the leaders talked us out of it. If we'd have gone a little while earlier it would have happened.

The most common group treatment of members who had left was to simply sever all contact:

Int 9: I was also hurt because we wrote a letter to them. A nice letter saying that you know we were leaving because we couldn't really hold with some of the policies and didn't think it was right to stay. Do you think they even answered us after nearly twenty one years of total

sacrificial service. All our money. All our proceeds of the house. Everything. All our worldly goods. All our time, our children, everything. Not even a word..

(c) Involuntary exit

Six informants did not leave their group entirely of their own volition; three were rejected for threatening the status quo by challenging the group's norms and leadership:

Int 9: I would never ever leave 'cos I'd made the decision to join, see that's the thing. And I felt a very loyal sort of person by nature as well. And so I - then I thought - we came to England because I was rebelling against certain things - not against the basic teaching, not against the group as a whole, but against local sort of stuff -I didn't like the way they were doing things...So because we didn't comply with some of their local rules, superficial rules, they said that we had to be part time members.

Meanwhile one was expelled for becoming ill, i.e. failing to meet the group's high standards, one [6] left because her mother did, while the sixth only departed because the group ceased to exist after an internal schism. All of these participants considered to a greater or lesser degree that they would not have left otherwise:

Int 1: Right, the movement split up from inside ... So that's been a long hard road erm (pause) I never chose to make. I'd still - I'd have been in it I think. I - I just don't know how they could have got through the - that - that hold that this group had on me. I think the thing was that it was - we had dedicated ourselves to each other for eternity – the group became everything - and so there was some sense of security in that.

Other than faith, the reasons cited for why they might not have left of their own accord included the birth of another child, financial dependency, and guilt over their misdeeds as a group member.

(d) Role of "trusted" others

Nine interviewees mentioned the importance of the role played by others in the process of their leaving their movement and subsequent recovery. A specific aspect of this was the provision of objective information about the cult from a variety of sources, and two participants specifically mentioned reading literature on "mind control" within cults, which, amongst other things, helped them understand why they had been vulnerable to group processes. This links with the codes on self-vindication as well as anger:

Int 3: It's not that easy to let go of it, but I think after seeing a lot of unethical and immoral and well documented evidence of law breaking, ... that led me slowly to contemplate the thought that it may not be the movement of God... I had a chat with Dr B (surname) and he said a true religion would not make you feel guilty, I think this is true, there's nothing but guilt...I think it was the trigger, but there was a lot of factors followed because I had a guy called erm, C W (male's name), who was part of the reform, he provided me with some information and he told

me don't show it to anybody, just read it yourself. And this information was testimonies, correspondence of former evangelists, current leaders to the top leader of the movement, and almost ALL the doubt, ALL the critics, ALL the suffering that we were talking about, it was confirmed, but it was confirmed.

Linked to this was being given the "space" within which to consider information, in marked contrast to experiences and practises within the group itself:

Int 9: they were the example of how to treat someone who's come out of that kind of background, they're very, very wise. They've got me just finding stuff out for myself instead of loading more doctrine on me. They said search it out for yourself. We do believe this that and the other, but you check it out yourself, and come to your conclusions which was very very clever of them.

(iii)   Emotional fallout

This conceptual category concerns the emotional after-effects experienced by participants when they exited their movements. It comprises six empirical categories.

(a) General difficulty coping

Eight informants commented on general emotional difficulties after leaving, as typified by:

Int 3: Now to move on it was very very difficult - it was a huge turmoil, a huge mixed emotion between anger, sadness, upset. I used to work part time on my own, it was very very hard, very very difficult time. And still sometimes looking back I feel how on earth did I survive it because I know from a lot of people who go through this sometimes end up with a nervous breakdown, sometimes end up on medication, sometimes go (ha) - I shouldn't laugh - but they just scream their heads off in the street.

(b)   Grief and regret about general losses

The participants all expressed feelings of regret associated with general losses about the years they had "wasted" in the cult, often expressed as a form of grief reaction:

Int 9: I just cried and I cried and I cried. And these are the only tears for years, and I cried and I cried. .I felt a lot of grief and a huge sense of loss...I also needed to grieve for all those lost years and all the lost people, all the lost time, lost opportunities, lost life.

Int 3: It was pure grief and desolation – like divorce and death – losing those who mean everything to you only they are one and the same as you – you are the group because you are cloned – so you lose everything, including yourself...

(c)   Regret about specific losses, & loneliness

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[6]   the participant who was born into her group

Similarly, all former members regretted particular losses to the group, e.g. friends or even family left behind, and loneliness was a clear related theme:

Int 4: And it's also very like something's been pulled away from me...you know when I'm sitting here alone at night, I've got nobody. I've got no one. All on my own. The group unfortunately still includes my natural father, sisters and brothers and friends.

(d)   Frustration, anger & desire for retribution

This was again a common reaction, with contributions from nine participants, and linked to becoming aware of having been deceived etc., as exemplified by:

Int 2: But with me it was extreme anger and frustration. I was man of fifty who was ill, who wasn't working. I mean can you imagine how I felt? I was so angry. It was so wrong you know. I felt like screaming it from the rooftops, this is the truth, this is what really happened, this is what they've done to me inside. The feelings of worthlessness and uselessness you know and the feelings that I can't - well revenge is not quite the right word - but you know that sort of feeling really of the truth being... I mean those sort of feelings, emotions, were very strong in the early days, but even today as well.

(e)   Feeling of unreality or disorientation - depression & suicidal tendencies

Nine interviewees in all contributed to this category. Seven of these reported feelings of unreality or disorientation, e.g.:

Int 1: And I really thought I was going mad ... this feeling of being really weird and being as if you don't belong to the world and you - you know you're just not part of the human race or that you've had an experience that's so out of the ordinary that it separates you from the rest of society.

Depression was similarly mentioned by six and suicidal tendencies by two former members:

Int 6: And throughout that I just got progressively more depressed...I felt so down so in a pit...I no longer had anything to live for you know 'cos I was going down and going to hell.

(f)   Self-recrimination, guilt & shame

All interviewees reported such feelings. Some were ashamed and incredulous at their own stupidity with the benefit of current hindsight:

Int1: Tremendous shame. And a sense of stupidity. How could I have been so stupid to let them do that to me. How could I have let them do that to me. Beat me, treat me like a piece of shit, wipe out all you know, ruined the family, stopped me training

Others felt particularly guilty about the effects on their children of their own behaviour or lack of protection from group influence:

Int 9: I felt I really betrayed my kids...Even though they were born in the group I felt that I'd bought them up to deception and that they'd been hurt totally unnecessarily. Even though I wouldn't had most of them if I hadn't have been in the group. ...And tremendous guilt. 'Cos

you know even when you are a victim of something like that - you know something like that when you've actually agreed to it because that happened with the abuse, with the children.

A variation on this theme came from the participant who had been born into her movement, who spotlighted the difference between herself as a second generation member and her mother's guilt as a parent. She cites this as a reason why converts may tend to remain members while children born into such groups find it easier to leave:

Int 4: Second generation, third generation, we have no guilt attached...But our parents do. My mum does. And that's why a lot of them won't leave because the amount of guilt can kill you know, and this is why it's so difficult for my mum - and I'm not just talking about my mum I'm talking about all ex members you know like my mum's age, the first generation. ... A lot of you know my friends have left...And it's easier to leave without any guilt. Whereas they've got huge amounts of guilt to deal with... 'Cos they're the perpetrators.

Former members also expressed guilt for other aspects of their behaviour towards others, in particular the deception they themselves had perpetrated in the name of the group:

Int 10: I mean I still feel guilty for what I did – I mean I lied to people, manipulated them, tricked them, and got them to abandon their families, education and relationships to follow some false Messiah ... I still feel guilty sometimes as some of these people are still in the group and may be leading normal lives if it wasn't for me...never mind how their families feel.

(iv) Negative effect on identity

This conceptual category relates to the lingering negative effect of group membership and leaving on participants' identity, which for so long was defined by the cult.

(a) Loss of meaning or purpose in life

All ex-members contributed to this category, arguably highlighting the extent to which the group had pervaded ex-members lives so completely:

Int 2: my hopes and my dreams and my aspirations all crushed you know, I might as well have been dead...You know here I am at fifty trying to start a new life and I don't even know how to go about it you know...But I had an identity there, I thought I knew where I was going and everything and I was quite together. I mean I used to lead meetings, take meetings, all sorts. But now I'm still in a way quite lost. I go through the mundaneness of life ... but how things are going to develop for me in other areas I really - I really don't know... I don't know what the future has for me.

Some participants commented that without the certainty of the cult life-style or a spiritual mission to frame their actions, they felt devoid of purpose or worth. Similarly, several participants referred to the vacuum left after years of group regimes of work, worship, and community.

(b) **Arrested psychological development & difficulties with making decision**

Again, nine interviewees made comments subsumed within this category. Four referred to how prolonged group membership had stunted their psychological development, which had made the scale of adjustments necessary since leaving all the greater:

Int 1: I had no opportunity to grow, developmental issues were on hold. Nothing could develop so I've had to go through this intensive process erm - er of - of growing up, of resolving stuff that might have been resolved in my twenties, you know people who aren't growing can resolve childhood issues to some degree, but I've had to do that now, I've had the choice to and have chosen to do that as much as I can.

Seven also alluded to problems with making decisions for themselves, having spent so long in an environment where there was little personal choice as decisions of all kinds tended to be ordained by the group's leader(ship):

Int 2: I tell you that I'm terrified of making decisions and I mean the most simplest of things, I really mean that - or K (female's name) will tell you... And it seems so silly for anyone to - to erm .. because you're so used to saying to people should I do this, should I do that, other people advise you and tell you what to do – you do not have choices in the fellowship. I just can't make up my mind about anything. And I mean the most silliest of things. And to an outsider it sounds absolutely ludicrous but inside I feel really screwed up when I've to make a decision.

Another interviewee tied this in more directly to the denigration of critical thinking within the group:

Int 1: So there was this - and another thing is that making a decision is just impossible when you have not been allowed to think for yourself.

(c) **Practical difficulties adjusting & social disorientation**

This category was based on quotes from seven participants. Practical issues included where to live and how to learn a living, not least as four mentioned having handed over most of their previous material wealth to their group. Another used the example of not knowing how to write a cheque. Having to explain where they had spent the last x years was also a described as a considerable problem, e.g. in terms of job application forms or higher education:

Int 2: we had no money, and we had six plastic glasses and a bed or something. We were in a rented house which they'd lent us money for the first two months rent. And so we had to sort all that out you know. I mean there was all sorts of things. It was so difficult to start a bank account 'cos people wanted to know what you'd been doing the last twenty years...I didn't know anything about normal society. Just a sort of panic, financial panic. Like my rent was due. And because I didn't know the score, I'd not had my erm .. housing benefit through. And I mean there's loads of occasions like that where you felt financially in a terrible state, you just panicked you know. And so you know you just sort of freaked out.

Three of the six relayed how they were disoriented from even the most mundane aspects of the social mainstream and world events. One leaver remembered asking whether Elvis was still

singing, while another had never heard of Margaret Thatcher. Similarly the participant born into the group used the example of general ignorance in the eyes of her peers upon entering a mainstream school, e.g. not recognising a Bunsen burner.

(d) Effect on relationships - lack of trust

Eight interviewees described in differing ways how the aftermath of severing what had been a total allegiance to their group, combined with discovering aspects of deception and even abuse, had caused a profound sense of betrayal. This in turn engendered distrust that particularly affected their ability to form or sustain relationships:

Int 3: It did leave a huge scar, mental scar, never to trust anybody, and difficulties in building friendships, always, always to be on your guard whoever you're talking to, almost predestined conclusion whatever friendship you have it's down to failure.

Int 2: I'm quite happy to have acquaintances but I just don't feel I want to make the effort of making friendships. I find I don't trust people like I used to.

A compound effect of this was the inability of one person to trust even his own judgement:

Int 10: ... not only could I not trust others but I couldn't trust myself or any choices I may make in the future.

(e) The ongoing hold of the group

Nine interviewees directly referred to the group's ongoing influence on their lives, attitudes, and behaviour. This ranged from specific patterns of behaviour:

Int 7: but leading up to the operation we all fell back in to the same old pattern you know. G (female's name) started trying to discern demons in me even though she'd moved on and we'd moved away, the distress of the situation plummeted us back in to what we knew in a sense you know. We wanted God to take the cancer away (laugh). And if something was getting in the way then it was demons...

... and particular triggers:

Int 9: And even though a year after that I was in a meeting at the church and the pastor was the kindest man on the face of this planet, he said to me oh S (interviewee's name) have you got a minute after the meeting I want to have a word with you. OH. Trigger.

... to more general neurotic effects:

Int 9: It takes a while for things to drop off though. I was afraid of authorities for quite a bit...And I learned to drive and I was scared of policeman (laugh).

(v) <u>Effects on faith</u>

This conceptual category concerns the effects of leaving their movement upon the participants' faith, and is made up of two empirical categories.

(a) Revised attitude to faith, religion and religious groups

All ten informants made a range of reflections about the impact of their experience on their religious beliefs. Two had, for the most part, lost their faith. For example one said:

Int 6: I have no great respect for religion as a whole...I don't trust a lot of it. Whereas I used to be - I was Christian from the about the age of nine and it had always been a part of my life - then of course I got involved with the cult and if people can do that sort of thing in the name of religion, religion is no longer something I want to be involved with (laugh) you know.

The remaining eight had all retained their faith to a greater or lesser degree, although a common reaction was of heightened suspicion towards organised religion:

Int 10: Well - It's easy for me to be wildly suspicious of religion as a whole - if someone brings up the subject in conversation I find myself saying things like it's a form of traditional authority and getting all riled up about all the wars fought for destructive purposes and pointing out how weak we are as humans.

However one respondent differentiated more specifically between religious groups:

Int 9: Wary. Very very wary. 'Cos you see some are fairly innocuous you know. Like there's some Christians what they call sects like the Seventh Adventists who worship on a Saturday, big deal you know. Big deal. They're actually jolly nice people most of them (laugh) you know. ... Then there are these other like the Children of God, like the Moonies, like the Church of Christ or Apostles in the Church of Christ or whatever, Universal Church of Christ. ... They take over your identity and control you.

Ambivalence was also a common theme, which was specifically linked in one case to an uneasy attitude to other more mainstream Christians:

Int 1:...both of us have had to withdraw particularly from Christians ... I'm scared of them tapping into my old cult fears. Normal Christians don't have the same anxieties ... I've ended up in a very different faith I still believe in God but in - in some ways I'm trying not to throw out the baby with the bath water... But I think that a lot of the bath water has actually had to go, they can't - there's so much that's erm been so wrong and so abusive and we recently resigned from the evangelical alliance and said to them do they realise that members of their group are - of their alliance - are abusive and why don't they police the issues that come up.

Changed perceptions of God as no longer punitive or vengeful were also a common feature for those who had kept their faith:

Int 10: I prayed when Dad had a heart attack - but the God I prayed to was not the same as the God I prayed to in the Unification church it was to an open-minded God...

While, for another, a redefined relationship with God was symptomatic of their own rediscovered confidence and identity:

Int 9: as a Christian I am in control to say Lord I want you to guide my life today or I can actually say God I want to do my own thing. Now I don't want to say God I want to do my own thing but I am able to do it. And that is the difference.

(b)   Ongoing fear of divine retribution

Ongoing anxieties about divine retribution were mentioned by six informants, and consciously linked to beliefs inculcated in them by the group. These anxieties ranged from genuine fear and attendant distress to an acknowledgement of their own irrationality in still being afraid, having jettisoned this punitive aspect of their former belief system:

Int 1: And certainly some, you know, there's - there's been a tremendous fear of getting cancer, of dying. I've lived with a very powerful sense. Even going to America now this feeling, am I going to die or - you know this feeling of death all the time. That is cult induced because I've seen it in the other cult members. Yeah so leaving is very risky, them and us dying, you know God won't bless you, God will curse you, you're no longer really following the true path or whatever Christians call it.

(vi)   <u>Coming to terms with the experience</u>

This conceptual category comprises six empirical categories relating to the ways that participants came to terms with their experience after leaving their group. Several participants now talked in terms of the group being "them", reflecting how they now identified with the outside world (us) as opposed to the movement.

(a)   Recognition of having been used, deceived & manipulated

This category contained quotes from nine participants relating to their belief with current hindsight of having been deceived or manipulated while in their respective group:

Int 8: I came to realise I had been manipulated and controlled and the insincerity of my relationships with the Group. And the awful thing is in that sort of deception you don't know your free will has been taken... That is the scariest thing. You don't know until you've been set free.

Four participants particularly bemoaned the insincerity of what they had previously perceived as valuable friendships, which links to the category concerning rejection by the group of former members:

Int 9: Which just shows where all that love so called - oh love you honey they say, oh I really love you honey, but whack whack whack you know. But that's how it used to be all the time. They're really sort of super sugary sickly sweet words then underneath it you know real evil stuff underneath it if you do not do what you are told.

(b)   Self-vindication, self-forgiveness, and rationalisation of the experience

This incorporated quotes from nine participants relating to the different ways in which members began to overcome their guilt and come to terms with the darker side of their experiences, by accepting responsibility and forgiving themselves (and others):

Int: 8: Even though you are actually a victim there is still - you still actually have to accept some sort of responsibility. It sounds awful to say it doesn't it? But we have to go through that forgiveness process.

... by self-vindication:

Int 5: It wasn't like I was a really screwed up person that I got involved and that's what people generally think but it could happen to anyone who had susceptibility or was innocent to what was going on. It's all down to luck of who comes into contact with such a cult and how much they take on the beliefs there.

... by rationalisation:

Int 1: It's not - it's not - it isn't because my mother left me that I ended in this vortex of abuse. It's because they used thought reform on me and all of the issues lifting these points that are well documented all over the place.

(c) Importance of being understood & fear of being misunderstood or rejected

Eight interviewees contributed to this category relating to their strong feelings about the importance of being listened to and understood by others:

Int 9: It was so important for me to feel understood – that gave me space to grieve.

This desire for understanding across the range of their experience, not just how they came to join, is inextricably linked to the fear that others will not comprehend, backed up by bitter experience:

Int 10: I remember trying to talk to an old friend and him saying just what I feared – you know sort of disbelief over how I could have been taken in my such mad ramblings – That put me off talking to people for a good period of time and I felt ashamed then angry towards the church towards Moon –

However another participant asserted that it may not actually be possible for others to understand:

Int 1: And so in some way there's this - this sense that there isn't anyone who's going to understand you know. How can they understand? - except for other cult members who do understand.

There were also several instances of ex-members deliberately concealing their cult involvement, e.g. in the workplace, for this very reason, i.e. that others might treat them differently, for instance as foolish or mentally unstable. By the same token, at least two mentioned the positive support of other former cult members due to their shared experience and understanding.

(d) The role of health professionals

The particular potential role of mental health professionals was brought out very clearly and mentioned by nine participants, in terms of both positive and negative experience of professional support or counselling. Of the six who had received help, four were very critical of the way that the health professional had concentrated too heavily on their experiences in

childhood, without examining the effects of their interactions within the cult environment. They felt this gave a distorted view and put excessive blame on the individual, and maintained that anyone dealing in this area should, of necessity, look at contextual factors:

Int 1: It makes me angry that people focus on your childhood and ignore the effects that having been controlled over such a long period of time and having had a completely different identity may have. ... it is so damaging to approach people in a way that presumes that that the person can be understood from psychology in a developmental point of view. Because developmental psychology is not the answer to the issue. It isn't the issue. It isn't a developmental issue. Do you understand what I mean by that? Erm they're now saying oh well you know you had such a messed up childhood, of course it's your fault. That's what they end up saying, it's your fault. And that's a terrible burden to bear. Yes some of it was my fault. There are some decisions I made, but then there were a lot of decisions I made without knowing what the outcome would be. And not knowing that people are evil. I didn't know there were people that evil who looked nice... - the real point that I wanted to make is that erm that when dealing with a cult member they need to be seen in the framework of what the cult was about - of the understanding that's around. They have to be seen in that framework. Otherwise health professionals will not understand – it is wrong to look for answers in the person themselves.

There were similar criticisms about perceived imputations of pre-existing psychological difficulties, again without looking in depth at what people were subjected to or why:

Int 6: when I was undergoing therapy and everything it was a case of "Oh right dear", you know and the fact that I must have been a weak person in the beginning...You know I can remember being asked if I'd ever suffered from depression before. And how was I - you know was I bullied as a child (laugh) sort of thing, rather than focusing on the fact of the control aspect of it, you know that another group had manipulated me and it wasn't understood...You know it's very difficult for them to grasp the actual situation because they haven't been through it (ha)...It's from a personal experience point of view you can understand, and because it's so different to other mental health problems in a way, it's a different - it's a whole new ball game really. I mean you have to understand that side of it and what people can do and how they can manipulate and how it effects you as a person in order to be able to...

One participant in fact felt that her undiminished Christian faith would be more useful than seeking help from a mental health professional:

Int 9: It didn't all happen then. It happened a few weeks later when they prayed in the name of Jesus to cut off the evil hold on the mind. And it went, 'cos I felt it go (lha) literally you know, which is much easier than counselling. But then of course I was a Christian and I accepted it that way.

(e) Moving forward and regaining individual identity

This empirical category was contributed to by all participants, and was particularly saturated in some cases. All alluded to re-establishing a distinct individual identity separate from their

group, although the degree to which this had occurred varied between participants. One participant commented that he was very much still struggling to do this. All informants did however directly mention regaining their free will:

Int 7: It's like this thing of I'm free again, I'm free now. So now, and especially starting work, getting a wage (laugh), and all sorts of things, that it's like - it's a whole new world to me.

(f) Need to use the experience & acknowledgement of gains

This category was contributed to by seven interviewees. Five commented on a need or desire to use their experience having "wasted" so much time inside the group by way of helping to come to terms with what they had been through:

Int 1: And I'm trying - so I work in the hope that others will feel understood, because people DO NOT UNDERSTAND, and that I will continue to recover myself in the process. But it was quite an obsession to use the experience - not an obsession in the psychiatry sense but - do you understand?

Four of these specifically mentioned the wish to use their own experience to help other former cult members, while three are now, or are training to be, mental health professionals themselves. This was done not least due to their unique "inside understanding" of the issues and problems associated with leaving a cult after long-term membership:

Int 3: And I think my experience made me who I am and what I am today. And I'm utilising it in a way to rectifying the damage or a period of devastation. And that's why most of my work involves talking, doing counselling, is showing that there is life outside the group and that people can regain their old identity, number one. And without my personal experience I cannot talk to people or I cannot deal or help, what you call it, it's a living example that you can exist and life will never end when you leave the cult, that's one of the things that people feel, or they are suicidal, so there is no point of leaving. That you can exist and can leave. And it's not that easy, it's a huge process, but at the end of the day you can make it. So yes definitely the need to do - to use my experience is huge and I am proud that I have been instrumental or my experience have been instrumental in helping so many people to alleviate or reduce the amount of suffering. Just to see the smile on the face on the mother and the daughter, the son and the father, to see them reunited again together back to where we were, the good old days. Every family has a problem. Every family has difficulties. But is not the ultimate state where we end up cutting off somebody from society, they can't get back to it.

Meanwhile, three informants gave examples of how their cult membership had proved beneficial to them, for example in terms of social skills and a good work ethic:

Int 7: I can't say in a way the twenty years was wasted. I think ourselves and all the children too, they're quite well sussed about people, because we had all sorts of people come to the house, and they quickly learned to discern you know what a person is like by what they say. I think I kind of communicate quite well with people, and all sorts of people really. And I've still

got very much a heart for people. That hasn't gone at all. So I think all those things are positive things.

(vii) Use of metaphors

This category relates to the broad range of metaphors used by eight of the participants in describing their experiences. The significance of these metaphors will be examined in more detail in *Chapter 4*, however, for the purpose of describing the results, they can be classified under a number of headings:

(a) Otherworldly/dream-state (4 participants)

Two likened themselves to "aliens", which ties in with the concept of "us and them", although, interestingly, one described how they "*used to be a different species maybe an alien, who lived with other aliens in some different world*", while the other referred to themselves as an alien when they left the group. Two interviewees also likened leaving the group to "waking up" from hibernation or a dream state, while allusions to Alice in Wonderland and "*being in some sort of drugs experiment*" were also used to indicate a sense of profound unreality.

(b) Child-like (4 participants)

This was also a telling metaphor linked to stunted psycho-social development. It was particularly poignant in the case of the participant who had been born into the group who likened herself to a new- born infant when she left the group, with all the connotations of complete vulnerability and ignorance that entails: "*There I was an adult. In this world I was a baby. I was just a new-born baby*". Another compared himself to a toddler abandoned by his parents in the park, and used the similar metaphor of being naked in the freezing cold. Meanwhile, two others made analogies with being schoolchildren, one in the general sense of being dependent on the movements of parents, the other with regard to the strict discipline within the group being akin to a pupil – headmistress relationship.

(c) Institutionalised (5 participants)

This category of metaphors was heavily saturated. One participant directly compared her cult to an institution: "*It was an institution and we were institutionalised*". She described the experience of not knowing how to make her own choices whilst in her group as follows: "*You can't do it, like institutionalised people you know - in prison they probably can't you know, if they have been there for years that is*". Analogies of cult life looking back included as a cage, zoo, prison, and a black box, with the corollary of feelings of emancipation upon leaving. However some also described profound ongoing imprisonment even after exiting: "*The person appears to have been able to walk away from the cult, to get a job, get on with their life, but their brain is still in prison*". By contrast, the feeling of hopelessness, confusion and despair

was equally described in the opposite terms, i.e. as a vast wilderness: *"If I wasn't seeing black curtains in front of me I was seeing very very very barren land. Miles and miles and miles where nothing grew, could grow. It was an absolute nightmare, six years of trying to untangle it"*, while another described *"this sort of vortex going ... I just felt like I'd been sucked right down into the bottom of a pit. And I just had no concept of how I would actually get out of that, climb out"*.

(d) Going round and round (3 participants)

Two interviewees directly compared life in their community to going round and round. One described the feeling of being *"on a roundabout and I couldn't get off"*, while the other described herself like a piece of baggage being swept along on an airport luggage carousel. In a different vein, another participant described his former apocalyptic view of non-cult members as destined to turn round and round, roasting on a turning spit. Another former member used the metaphor of the mental abuse she suffered being like *"boiling a frog or a prawn or something you know, if the heat goes up and you don't know it's going up so you don't know it's happening"*.

(e) Automaton (4 participants)

There was a range of metaphors used under this broad category relating to how interviewees felt they were not in control of their own actions or fate. The images used included brainwashing, cloning, zombification and being *"like a little robotic computer. The information was fed in day after day after day so when any situation arose you had to deal with you wouldn't think, you'd just automatically compute all the information that's been told to you, put together an answer, and that would be it"*.

(f) Contamination (2 participants)

The two informants who contributed to this category related contamination to relations with outsiders. One talked of being polluted by outside contact, the other of being *"contaminated by this outside influence"*.

(g) Political analogies (4 participants)

A number of telling political parallels were made by the four interviewees who contributed to this category, particularly concerning group leadership. One likened the reinforcement of us and them by denigrating the outside world to *"how world leaders use their foreign policy to sway public opinion away from domestic issues"*, while another compared the whole group set-up to communism (although without explaining precisely what was meant by this) [7]. Another

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[7] reading between the lines, it seems fair to impute the intended meaning along the lines of an ideological system that was laudable in theory but abused in practice

likened the self-sacrifice and extreme zeal of the group's messianic mission to the Japanese Kamikaze pilots of World War II:

"The Kamakazi pilots in Japan were willing to die in suicide missions and there it was an honour to die. There seem to be lots of parallels...they did it as it was their mission and they believed in it – thought it was bigger than them I suppose – Like I did. Tribal wars in Africa where terrible atrocities are carried out and the Shiite Muslims in Afghanistan". This participant also went on to compare the total indoctrination within the group by the leader to Nazi Germany: *"On reflection now – I think what happened to me was and I suppose is very similar to what happened in Germany under the Nazi regime where most of the population were heavily influenced and enmeshed in the doctrine of Hitler. I almost find it reassuring I'm ashamed to say that they did things out of character because they believed it was for the good of Germany".*

The fourth contributor also used this theme in the powerful notion of a "spiritual holocaust". This reference not only implied a level of horror, but also touched on the idea of revisionist history and denial that the abuses ever took place: *"heard a lot in the thirties and the forties during the holocaust but I thought it all came from different culture, we always thought it is lies, deception, there's no such thing called holocaust. But I can see it and I can see a spiritual holocaust, absolutely, destroying people's life, people's personalities, behaviour, family relations, finances, marriages, you name it, it's totally destroyed in the name of spirituality".*

CHAPTER FOUR – DISCUSSION

1. INTRODUCTION

(i) The aims of the research

This study used grounded theory to investigate the experiences of former members of religious cults, an area where there was no record of previous grounded theory studies reported in the literature. Interviews were conducted with ten participants, transcribed, and then coded, before the researcher returned to the participants with a follow-up questionnaire to check the preliminary analysis and obtain feedback, in order to enhance the accuracy, reliability and credibility of the data collected. Close attention was paid to ethical considerations throughout.

Within this broad framework, the aims of the study were:

- To promote understanding of what the experiences of cult membership meant to those formerly involved themselves

- to examine the effects of cult membership upon individual identity

- to inform and enhance the future psychological treatment of former cult members

- to help bridge the divide between the psychological and sociological perspectives within the area of cult research by adopting a social psychological framework

(ii) Summary of findings

A general finding of the research was that the experience of, and issues related to, cult membership, joining, and leaving, are too complex to be described by a single model or theory. Against this backdrop, the following more specific findings can be reported:

1. The key factors suggested by participants for having joined were existing religious convictions and/or a searching, idealistic nature; when compounded by undergoing a time of general transition, this appeared to make interviewees particularly vulnerable to the active recruitment tactics employed by the groups in question.

2. Once inside the group, members found an elitist, highly polarised, and actively reinforced belief system. This was characterised by overlapping demands of obedience to a hierarchical leadership structure and conformity to high group standards. As a result, members adopted a particular world-view exclusive to their group.

3. A fundamental belief in the divine authority of the group/leader, and God as the ever-present audience, was found to be particularly important. A key element in this was that participants actively believed in their group's mission, not least as a means to personal salvation.

4. The prevailing environment was characterised by fear and inner conflict, in which "the group" exerted influence over virtually all aspects of individual existence.

5. The net effect was a switch from individual to group identity, precipitated by a denigration of critical thinking and the sublimation of individual wants to group needs.

6. Reasons for leaving were not straightforward, although the most common given were the inability to meet group standards and the consequences of this, as well as groups' alleged abusive practices.

7. A basic finding not widely reported in other studies was that not all members had left voluntarily [1]

8. After exiting, all ten participants had experienced some form of grief reaction, social and psychological disorientation, and identity loss, followed by a period of coming to terms with their experience and regaining individual identity.

9. Finally, interviewees reported significant shortcomings in the attitude, understanding and methods used by mental health professionals to try and help them. There were particular complaints about an excessive focus on individual historical factors at the expense of trying to understand the particular demands, beliefs, and context of the groups to which they had belonged.

(iii)   Overview of the discussion

The exploratory nature of the project has resulted in the emergence of many significant and important themes. Due to lack of space however, the discussion is restricted to focus primarily on the issues raised within group membership, rather by joining or leaving. The novel application of grounded theory methodology to cult research, and the data produced, also means that the discussion does not revolve exclusively around prior research. Instead, it uses previous research as a springboard to consider a new synthesis of established approaches within the spheres of social psychology and sociology that have not necessarily been applied to the study of cults before. This supports the original aims of the study as outlined above, although the number of theories considered does limit the extent to which they can be individually used to explore the data in detail. There is thus considerable room for further research, as suggested in *Chapter 5*.

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[1] Other studies have looked at cult members who have left involuntarily, however these have tended to focus on those who have been "snatched" or forcibly removed from the cult environment by family members or friends outside the cult for "deprogramming" (e.g. Enroth, 1977; Conway & Siegelman, 1995), rather than having been progressively ostracised or ejected by the cultic group itself

The discussion begins by examining the findings from the three phases of cult membership studied, in the light of the previous research outlined in the introduction. This leads on to a particular consideration of the mind control model and Lifton's eight identified characteristic methods of thought reform, as these have played a high profile role in much of the research and controversy surrounding cult membership up to now. The discussion then broadens to look at the results found within the context of classic social psychological conceptions of group influence, including the theories of conformity, obedience to authority, "groupthink", cognitive dissonance, and the notion of the cult as a social system.

Although the accounts of participants all reflect significant elements of these theories, it is argued that they do not in themselves provide an adequate explanation of the experiences and dynamics described. The following section accordingly considers how discourse analysis can provide insights that help explain how and why former members constructed their own experiences in the way that they did, and the metaphors they used in particular. This serves as a prelude to profiling a number of strands within the broad sphere of sociology that may add further insight into the data produced. These include the concept of the "total" institution, the role of the "other", the role of the audience, self-surveillance, and charismatic authority, all of which introduce and aid consideration of the identity issues at the heart of the analysis.

The main body of the discussion revolves around social identity theory, which, it is argued, provides the overarching framework within which the other theories profiled can be accommodated or synthesised, and the experiences of former group members best explained. This emphasises the importance of not divorcing these experiences from the context in which they evolved, and viewing ex-members as active participants in the dynamic processes conveyed. Reicher's (e.g. 1996) innovative refinement of social identity theory arising out of studies of crowd behaviour is examined in particular. This helps to explain the assertion that, although interviewees for the most part considered themselves to have lost their individual identity, what occurs is better explained in terms of a "switch", i.e. to adopt the prevalent identity within their salient group context. By the same token, this framework also helps to explain the fundamental elements of "us and them", the role of the leader, and the concept of "God as audience", as well as the means of influence evident within the groups, that in turn provide meaning to the experiences of former members.

Finally, it is proposed that bereavement theory can make a meaningful contribution to understanding the data relating to how individuals felt after they left their group (regardless of the circumstances), in so far as their recollections suggest that they suffered what is tantamount to a

grief reaction. This is important, not least in helping to inform the future clinical and therapeutic treatment of former cult members.

2. RELATIONSHIP OF FINDINGS TO EXISTING CULT RESEARCH

(i)   Introduction

As described above, the findings of this research have come from the qualitative analysis of data derived from ten former cult members. The limitations inherent in comparing the qualitative data of the present study with quantitative data of some previous studies, and the nature of the participants and the groups they had belonged to, must be born in mind when applying and comparing these findings with those of other related research. These factors notwithstanding, the analytical methodology applied was not only in-depth but also significantly more rigorous than that utilised in many of the previous studies reviewed. Thus, although the present findings cannot be considered universally applicable to the study of cults and individuals who become involved in them, it is felt that they nevertheless contribute significantly to the body of knowledge on cults. This is particularly the case given the novel theoretical links to various important strands of social psychology theory explored later in this chapter. The aim of this section is thus to examine the findings of this study in light of the research reviewed in *Chapter One*.

(ii)   Joining the movement [2]

The view that majority of cult members tend to come from middle or upper class families (e.g. Galanter, Rabkin & Deutsch, 1979) was born out by the testimonies of eight of the ten participants in the present study, although this was not a topic directly explored [3]. Similarly, the significance of being at a personal crossroads or time of transition, in terms of susceptibility to cult recruitment (Ash, 1985; Clark, 1979; Galanter, 1989; Langone, 1991, 1994), was confirmed by all ten participants.

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[2]   NB. It is important to reiterate that 1 of the 10 had been born into the group; nevertheless she gave a fairly detailed account of how her parents had come to join their group which is entirely consistent with the experiences recounted by the other 9, hence the references to "x out of 10 participants ..." rather than 9.

[3]   The nature of non-directive grounded theory methodology allowed interviewees to mention such factors, although they were not prompted to do so.

The interviews conducted provided some evidence to support the academic contention (and popularly held view) that cult members may have experienced troubled family backgrounds, while some had suffered from depression of sorts [4], although this was again not an area directly investigated in the interviews. Nevertheless, the data was ultimately inconclusive, and thus supports the assertion that preceding psychological problems are not <u>necessarily</u> a significant factor in cult recruitment (Aronoff et al, 2000), and that to focus on previous problems may be to perpetuate a "potentially damaging myth" (West & Martin, 1994) if this is to the exclusion of other avenues of enquiry. This finding is particularly important in light of participants' comments about the uninformed attitude of many of the health professionals they came into contact with after leaving, which will be discussed in *Chapter 5 Section (vii)*. Moreover, three participants specifically mentioned that life in general had been going well prior to them joining their group.

Similarly, there is some evidence within the time of transition and personality categories that cult membership may be linked to developmental or maturational challenges (cf. Singer & Lalich, 1995), but again this was by no means conclusive. However the data does not support the follow-up assertion by the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry (GAP, 1992) that remaining in a cult is symptomatic of pervasive problems and/or the attainment of personal influence. This is despite the fact that two of the ten did achieve leadership positions, and most had enjoyed some degree of personal influence by dint of the length of their membership. Moreover there were rewards, as reflected in the dedicated conceptual category, though these tended for the most part to be relief from negative emotions or practices rather than positive as such (i.e. negative reinforcement).

This finding that sustained cult membership is not a symptom of either personal problems and/or the attainment of personal influence is particularly significant given the mean 15-year membership of the ten former members interviewed. For their personal experiences reveal a number of very different factors that accounted for continuing membership, such as the application of systematic "control", and a change in fundamental beliefs and identity. Indeed, a common theme within their accounts was if anything the reverse, namely that inner conflicts arising from the stresses of membership tended to give rise to problems that eventually led to the exit of some of those involved. This included one of the two participants who had held a leadership position who left following a breakdown and subsequent related mental health difficulties.

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[4]   i.e. not necessarily clinically diagnosed or treated

Perhaps the clearest finding regarding this phase of membership was the importance of a searching and ideological disposition as a predicator of joining. However, other than this and the fact that the majority did appear to come from relatively privileged backgrounds, those interviewed were generally otherwise representative of the population at large, and a whole range of factors accounted for their cult involvement.

This study shares a shortcoming of many of those cited in so far as it relies on retrospective accounts of what had led to individuals joining, which in more than half the cases was over twenty years earlier. The suggestion outlined in the literature review, and in *Chapter 5*, for more contemporaneous research (despite the difficulties this presents in terms of getting current cult members to discuss why they joined) is to be reiterated accordingly.

(iii)   Experiences of membership

The largest section of the interviews was that dedicated to exploring participants' experiences during group membership, rather than of joining or after leaving, and this forms the primary focus of the discussion accordingly.

The two most densely saturated conceptual categories in the current study [5] both centre on identity issues, and the way in which former members define(d) themselves in relation to others certainly appears to be at the heart of the cult experience. However, one of the difficulties as well as the strengths of the present study is the proposition that members experienced a switch of identity while in their respective group, as this is not a finding reported elsewhere in the literature on religious cults.

The existing literature does contain theories concerning identity; for example West and Martin's (1994) notion of cult members adopting a "pseudo-identity" in response to prolonged environmental change and stress. This is viewed as essentially a dissociative coping mechanism superimposed on the underlying identity while in the stressful environment, and those interviewed in this study certainly reported significant elements of dissociative behaviour (c.f. DSM IV). Nevertheless, the idea of a switch in identity entails that individuals actually adopted cult norms, beliefs, practises etc. as their own, rather than these merely being passively superimposed upon existing personality. This appears to be born out by the considerable saturation of categories

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[5]   "coming to terms with the experience", in which "regaining individual identity" was the most saturated empirical category, and "switch of identity and heightened conformity" the most saturated conceptual category.

pertaining to identity in the section on experiences after leaving, with participants reporting having to largely redefine themselves rather than just "disentangle" their individual identity. Ultimately, understanding how much dissociation occurred within the cultic environment was beyond the bounds of the present study, given the complexity of this issue, however the idea of a switch in identity is addressed in more detail in *Section 7* below.

This study bears out Galanter's (1999) assertion that powerful group dynamics hold the key to maintaining cult affiliation. This is particularly true of the data within the conceptual categories "group self-definition in contradistinction to the outside world", "group/leadership demands and structure", "high group standards", "reinforcement of us and them" and "rewards". There is also evidence of a relief effect related to compliance, conformity to group standards, obedience to authoritative leadership, and restructured perceptions of their environment [6], tying in with related research by Galanter (1978, 1996) and others (e.g. Kilborne & Richardson, 1984; Wenegrat 1989). By the same token however, it was found that relief from inner conflict and distress was often temporary, and that the causes, rather than relief, were frequently directly attributable to group processes, standards and demands.

There was thus little evidence to support the idea of a cultic group as a therapeutic institution (Saliba, 1993), especially given the low level of pathology reported by participants prior to them joining their movement. Seven interviewees did report some positive experiences at the time, while three acknowledged some gains/ benefit in their later current lives, however these categories were not densely saturated [7]. Thus the majority of data from participants refutes the notion of cultic groups as therapeutic, and indeed suggests the opposite, i.e. that the groups described were frequently harmful, as reflected in widely reported regrets about ever having become involved, and the categories representing "negative outcomes". However this may also be directly linked to the nature of those interviewed for this study, and can only be properly tested by studies involving more participants who are at differing stages of cult involvement.

(iv)   Leaving the group

Asking former members to describe why they had left their group was an integral part of this study. However the findings do not tie in closely with the research of Wright (1983) in this area, who listed four key determinants with regard to members leaving such groups. There was thus no

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[6]   again, the relationship of these findings to existing theory is discussed in detail later in the *Section 4* below
[7]   they contained 16 and 19 meaning units respectively, compared to the overall mean of 30

overwhelming evidence that an *"interruption from the group's social isolation"* was a key cause of people leaving per se, with only one of the ten fitting into this category. This is not to state categorically that this may not be a vital factor for some former cult members, but may rather reflect the nature of the present participants, who had all been members for at least three years, most for considerably longer. What interviewees in the present study did highlight was the contribution of others, such as family, cult information groups and mainstream clergy, to the process of leaving and coming to terms with the experience once they were on the brink of at least contemplating leaving. Again *"disillusionment with the group's non-achievement or failed predictions"* was not a common feature. There was however some evidence of *"the role of unregulated personal intimacy"* in giving members an opportunity to rehearse or share doubts they might otherwise not have expressed. Nevertheless, one member's husband remained in the group when she left, whereas Wright's sample contained nobody who had left a spouse behind. Wright's one paradigm cause that was largely corroborated was *"disenchantment with the hypocrisy or immorality of the group's leaders"*, if one includes group practices and failure to address allegations of immorality, not least as two of the ten members in this study left as a result of sexual abuse perpetrated against their children (one alleged, one proven in court).

The most common reasons for having left given by those interviewed were progressive doubts and mounting inner conflict. These were linked to the group's high standards, individuals' failure to meet them, and the repercussions of this in terms of, for example, punishment and humiliation by the group or its leader. The other important fact to note is that not all ten left of their own accord, which is something Wright did not consider. Indeed, few other studies have reported members leaving against their wishes at the behest of the group, rather than due to outside intervention, let alone examined this. Partial rejection is not mentioned in the literature at all. By contrast, five participants in the current study maintained that they had left wholly or partially because of pressure from within the group itself. Of the ten interviewed, one left when the group disbanded, one was expelled outright, and three were partially rejected (e.g. relegated to part-time membership). This is therefore an area that warrants further research.

The present study does support the numerous prior studies reporting the psychological distress of former cult members (Clark, 1979; Conway & Siegelman, 1982; Galanter, 1983; Goldberg & Goldberg, 1982; Langone, 1993; West & Singer, 1980; Martin, Langone, Dole, & Wiltrout, 1992; Spero, 1982; Swartling & Swartling, 1992). This encompassed things such as personal disorientation, depression, and upset, however the most widely reported distress involved guilt and self-recrimination, particularly concerning the effects of their own "misguided choices" on others, e.g. their children. This extends to symptoms of dissociation (although this was

inconclusive and too complex to gauge amid the other elements considered in the present study), and cognitive deficiencies such as impaired decision-making, as well as social disorders relating to lack of trust and difficulties forming relationships. Although one participant mentioned post-traumatic stress disorder, most participants mentioned symptoms more in line with a grief/bereavement reaction upon leaving their group, as discussed below in *Section 8*. Thus the data as a whole fails to directly support Winocur et al's findings of a post-traumatic stress reaction, suggesting more that their experiences can be "normalised" as a predictable reaction to mutli-faceted losses, e.g. of friends, community, and family, particularly given that seven contributed to the "group as family" empirical category.

The present findings do support Aronoff et al's (2000) review of the research in which they suggest former cult members experience significant practical, social and psychological adjustment difficulties. Participants in the present study report problems ranging from general difficulties coping, to heightened distrust of others, to financial panic, to ignorance of important world events. Within the present study however, these were shown to lessen over a period of time as individuals began to come to terms with their experience and regain their sense of personal identity. A major part of coming to terms with their experience related to coming to terms with the various "losses" entailed. The nature of the present study meant that no conclusive data was produced concerning the influence of pre-cult experiences on post-cult distress.

3.   THE MIND CONTROL MODEL

The mind control debate is at the heart of much of the discussion about cults, and central to this debate is the work of Lifton (1961) and the eight characteristics of thought reform he defined: *"These criteria consist of eight psychological themes which are predominant within the social field of the thought reform milieu. Each has a totalist quality; each depends upon an equally absolute philosophical assumption; and each mobilises certain individual emotional tendencies, mostly of a polarising nature. Psychological theme, philosophical rationale, and polarised individual tendencies are interdependent; they require, rather than directly cause, each other. In combination they create an atmosphere which may temporarily energise or exhilarate, but at the same time poses the gravest of human threats"* (p.420).

There were numerous examples from all participants across all three stages of membership relating to all eight defining features. Moreover, three participants specifically mentioned that

they had read Lifton's work, and two of these commented that it had facilitated their understanding of their own experience. It was partly on this basis that the eight characteristics of thought reform are profiled below.

1) Milieu Control

Lifton argues that this is the most basic feature of thought reform, and describes the external control of all aspects of communication and the environment. This control then becomes internalised, i.e. individuals start to regulate themselves, for example not to question group norms. A number of key categories within the present study relate to this notion, such as the four describing influence, "group self-protective behaviour", and "denigration of critical thinking".

2) Mystical Manipulation

This refers to Lifton's description of how the "totalist milieu" maintains the sanctity and mystique concerning itself and its ideology. There is pervasive evidence of this within the present data within a number of conceptual categories, including "us and them" ("group as God's chosen elite" and "messianic mission"), "group and leadership" and "influence over beliefs". This also ties in directly with the concept of "God as audience" at the heart of the present accounts.

3) Loading the Language

Lifton described how language within the totalist environment is controlled and redefined, being characterised by "thought-terminating" clichés, repetitive all-encompassing jargon, and an emphasis on moral polarisation. This broad concept is again widely reflected in the report of participants, within categories such as "polarised world view", "influence over language and appearance", and "influence over beliefs and interpretations".

4) Doctrine over Person

This element of Lifton's model refers to the centrality of the group's self-defined doctrines and ideology, which always overrule and outweigh individual interests. There is ample evidence of this in the present study, within, for example, "own norms and high standards", "influence over beliefs and interpretations", "inner conflict" and "self-sacrifice/group wants over individual needs".

5) Dispensing of Existence

Within Lifton's theory, this refers to the absolute or totalist vision of truth, and with it the right to salvation. These ideas are widely reflected within all the "us and them" categories, as well as to "fear of divine retribution" and of the consequences of leaving the group.

6) The Demand for Purity

For Lifton, this means how the totalist environment categorises everything according to a series of simple dualities, and requires purity of members. The present data again clearly corroborates this, within the "polarised world-view", "group norms and standards", "conformity", "influence over beliefs and interpretations" and "group self-protective behaviour" categories.

7) Confession

Lifton connects this with the demand for purity above, maintaining that such confessional practices extend beyond ordinary religious, legal and therapeutic expressions of symbolic self-abnegation, and may be used to exploit rather than offer solace. The use of confession was described by seven participants within the dedicated category in the present study, and this also links to "subordination to leadership", "own norms and standards", and "conformity".

8) Sacred Science

This element of Lifton's model refers to the absolute veracity of the groups' doctrines as the moral vision for the ordering of human existence, whereby no questioning or criticism of the "sacred" beliefs or leaders are tolerated. This also is widely reported within the context of the current study within the "group/leadership" and "influence over beliefs and interpretations" conceptual categories, as well as linking in with "group as God", fear, punishment, the consequences of questioning, and, ultimately, the "God as audience" concept.

Clearly then the current study supports all the elements of mind control postulated by Lifton, and control, subordination and deception were central elements of the experiences of all former members interviewed for this study. Nevertheless, despite this prevalence of reported thought reform, the current study does not necessarily support the mind control model as a whole, or rather as a satisfactory explanation per se of why individuals join cults and remain as members. In this respect the study reinforces the contention that the process of recruitment and attachment is more complex and subtle than the mind control model suggests (e.g. Brown, 1993, Barker, 1989). Moreover the key concept of an identity shift propounded later in the discussion implies that cult members are not simply passive "victims" of coercive techniques [8], but rather active and willing converts drawn principally but not exclusively by firm spiritual or religious ideals and beliefs, and a proactive yearning to "make a difference". This echoes Barker's (1989) assertion that induction is the result of a complex process of psychological and religious engagement rather

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[8]   although all participants did portray themselves as having been victims; again this is discussed further below

than manipulation per se, not least shown in at least two reports of incremental joining rather than a "big bang" conversion.

A further strand in this argument could not however be tested, namely the view that high cult drop-out rates imply the ineffectiveness of "brainwashing" techniques, not least as, again, the accounts of participants indicate that their experiences were more complex than that. Finally, it is also important to reiterate that the researcher deliberately recruited individuals of three or more years standing (the mean length of membership was in fact 15 years), and who were therefore de facto unrepresentative of the entire range of people who have had "cult" experiences, many of whom are only involved for a matter of days, weeks or months.

4. SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES

As stated in the introduction, the use of grounded theory demands that the researcher approaches the process of data gathering and organising as free as possible from theoretical pre-conceptions. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify in advance possible theoretical linkages that may be relevant on the basis of past research. Having interviewed the participants and coded the data, it did indeed become clear that there were a number of important resonances with existing theories within the sphere of social psychology that could usefully inform the discussion. These theories go some way to explaining one of the central questions emerging from the accounts, namely, why, religious beliefs notwithstanding, did the individuals interviewed remain for so long in groups that reportedly subjected them to abusive practices in varying degrees.

(i) Conformity

The theme of conformity, as expounded by Ash (e.g. 1951), was directly mentioned by interviewees as relevant to their cultic environments. It was therefore identified as an empirical category in its own right as part of the demands of the group, but was also implicit throughout the data, for example in terms of punishment, ostracisation or rejection by group members or leaders for those who did not comply or failed to live up to group norms and standards. Failure or inability to conform similarly caused distress and inner conflict within individuals themselves, that in itself became an incentive to conform. By the same token, conformity was also positively reinforced by fellow group members, as reflected in the "rewards" conceptual category, while the consequences of conformity are explained as denigration of critical thinking, dependency and self-sacrifice to group imperatives, leading to a switch of identity. All of these in turn heighten the

individual's predilection towards conforming further, as he or she switches to believing and acting in a way that mirrors the behaviour of fellow members.

(ii) Obedience to authority – Milgram

Milgram's (1967, 1974) seminal studies into obedience reveal the tendency of individuals to comply with requests issued, and therefore implicitly legitimised, by an authority figure. It is argued that this is the result of systematic socialisation that instils the notion that such obedience represents correct conduct, as those in authority are assumed to possess high degrees of knowledge, integrity, and power. The resulting deference to authority figures may thus operate in an unwitting fashion as a "decision-making shortcut" (Ciandini, 1984).

As hypothesised in the introduction, Milgram's findings on obedience were supported by, and applicable to, the present data. Members submitted to the leadership as a matter of course, even when this went against their instinctive better judgement, on the basis that the leaders knew better than they did by definition. This was particularly the case given not only a deep-seated religious faith anyway, but also the belief imbued within groups that their leaders were invested with divine authority and that God was their ever-present audience. The net effect of this was certainty that leaders must know best, as to think otherwise would be to question God and indeed everything else they believed in. In addition, group norms, including a belief in the divine infallibility of the leader, were constantly reinforced by various means of influence and group self-protective behaviour, as already discussed, including isolation from frames of objective mainstream social reference.

(iii) Cognitive Dissonance

As also hypothesised in *Chapter One*, Festinger's findings regarding "cognitive dissonance theory" (Festinger 1964) help to explain aspects of the participant's experience, as there were instances of cognitive dissonance throughout the data. These appeared directly in the "relief from inner conflict" category, whereby inner conflict was at least temporarily resolved by conforming to the group's demands.

Festinger explains that, in order to influence or alter a human being, it is necessary to affect a person's behaviour, thought, or emotions, going on to state that *"If you change a person's behaviour, his thoughts and feelings will change to minimise the dissonance"* (Festinger 1964). This ties in directly with the findings in the mind control model outlined above, and both the

means (e.g. reflected in the various "influence" categories), as well as the ends (e.g. "denigration of critical thinking" and "change in beliefs, behaviour & identity"), are demonstrated under every conceptual category within "experiences of membership". Conway and Siegelman (1978, 1995) pioneered the addition of another component, namely the control of information, which they maintain has a profound influence in terms of behaviour modification, and label the result of this as "information disease". "Influence over information and access to information" also emerged as an empirical category within the present study.

This evidence of cognitive dissonance theory also ties in with the obedience to authority sub-section above. Thus the multi-tiered implicit "guarantees" that the leaders knew best are significantly more powerful than the socialised beliefs described by Milgram, and help to explain for example why parents allowed leaders to dictate how they parented their children.

(iv) Group Think

Janis's 1977 theory of "groupthink" is one of the most frequently applied psychological models in the study of group decision-making. It is founded on common attributes he found within highly cohesive groups: *"Each member wants the approval of all the others, and this produces a strong tendency toward uniformity. No one wants to raise controversial issues, question weak arguments, or puncture unrealistic hopes. They sustain an illusion of invulnerability, marked by excessive optimism. They rationalise away any warnings and decline to reconsider past policy commitments that have brought them to this predicament. They take their own group's morality for granted and do not look carefully at the ethical consequences of their decisions. They assume that their enemies are too evil to warrant negotiation efforts, and too stupid or weak to stop whatever plans the group may devise".* The result is that *"each person censors his or her own doubts instead of voicing them"* (Spencer, 1985: p. 171-2).

Certainly the various elements highlighted in this quotation chime with a number of the group attributes described by those interviewed in the present study. Moreover, the nature of cultic groups, as explored throughout this thesis, makes it reasonable to suggest that the homogenous, isolated, spiritually-motivated cults described are even more cohesive than the group of Presidential advisors examined by Janis, not least as members tend to live together round the clock. This is also particularly true given the data supporting conformity, obedience to authority, cognitive dissonance theory, and prevalent reported elements of the mind control.

The ex-members interviewed all tended to share important features, namely religious faith, an idealistic disposition, and a desire for community, clarity and certainty at a time of transition. The movements they joined characteristically encouraged uniformity in an active manner, and typically suppressed or even expelled dissenting members, while isolating them from possibly discordant external influences. Furthermore, particular group beliefs were justified by a hierarchical leadership invested with divine authority by a God constantly in audience. Moreover, the findings also suggest that a fundamental tenet of any such religious cult is a belief that not just their own fate, but also that of the entire human race, may ultimately depend on the cohesive front they can present to their "enemies".

As with the other theories profiled above, Janis's theory of groupthink is clearly relevant to the study of cultic groups. However the strength of its linkages with other theories highlighted is also a weakness, in so far as it does not offer, per se, a full explanation of the complex dynamics involved.
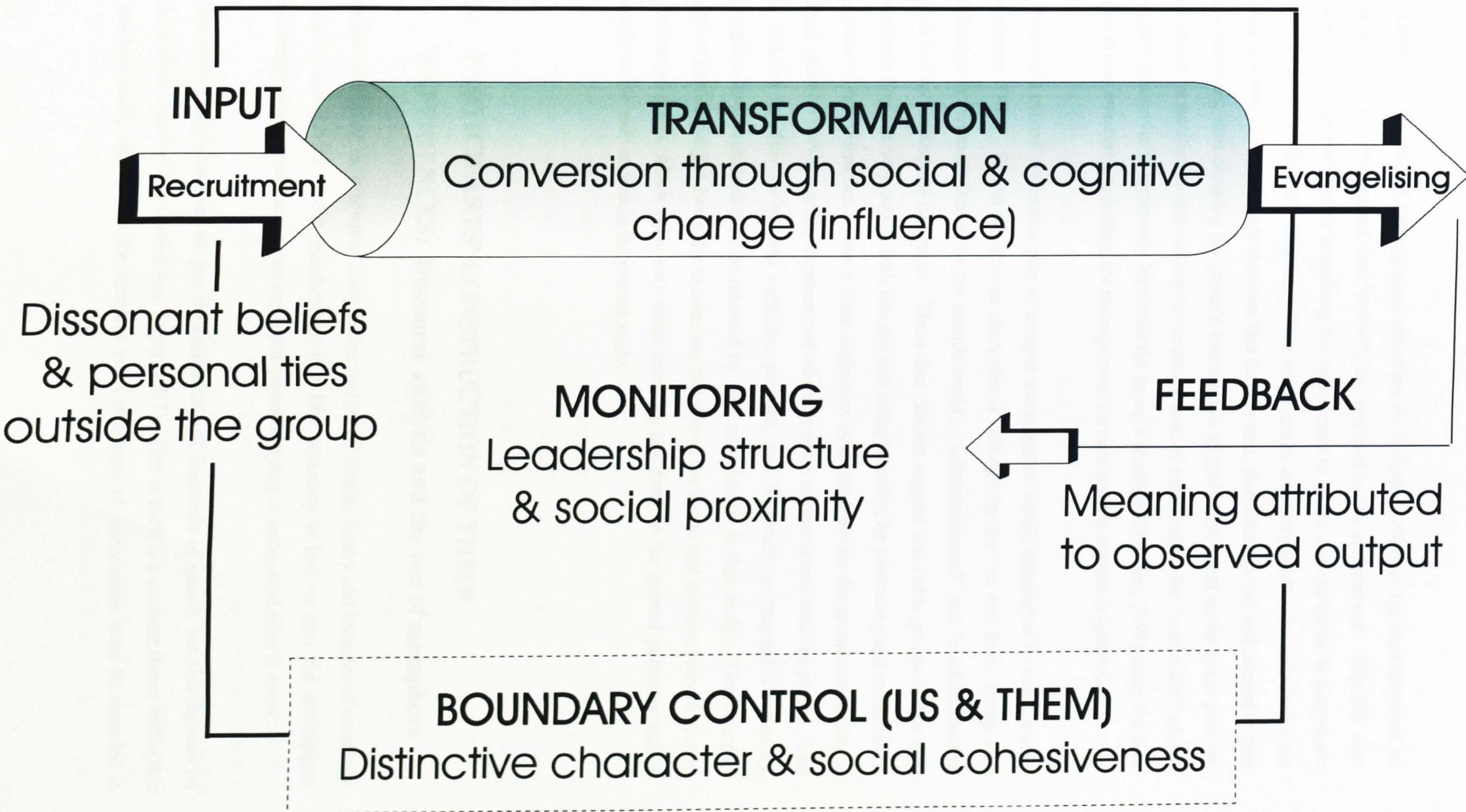
(v)   The cultic group as a social system

As hypothesised in the literature review, the findings of the present study confirm Galanter's (1999) suggestion that systems theory links in very closely with the other social psychological theories described above, and thus may provide further contextual insight into participants' experiences of cult membership as presented in *Model 2*. *Model 3* thus depicts the cult as a "system", based on Galanter's ideas, which are outlined below with reference to the findings of the present study [9].

Galanter suggested that the group operates as a close-knit social system to assure its stability, and this notion is abstractly reflected by the overall circular inter-relationship of the categories within the main model (see *Model 2*). In "open" systems this involves not only manipulating the activities, beliefs and outlook of its members, evidence of which has already been described above. The related process of regulating beliefs and activities by leaders or fellow members is known as "monitoring" (Miller 1975), which again was clearly mentioned by interviewees within empirical categories such as "subordination to leader(ship)", "conformity", and the conceptual categories relating to group influence.

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[9]   it may be helpful to view diagram 2 simultaneously while reading the following rationale

CULT AS A SYSTEM

INPUT

Recruitment

TRANSFORMATION
Conversion through social & cognitive change (influence)

Evangelising

Dissonant beliefs & personal ties outside the group

MONITORING
Leadership structure & social proximity

FEEDBACK

Meaning attributed to observed output

BOUNDARY CONTROL (US & THEM)
Distinctive character & social cohesiveness

Another characteristic of open systems described by Galanter (1999) is the transformation of "input" from the environment into "output", i.e. returned to the environment. This fits with reports by all ten participants concerning the requirement to go out and evangelise in accordance with the group's Messianic Mission. Thus new recruits are "socialised" into assimilating the group's norms and standards to the point that they, in time, themselves go out and attempt to gain new members, thus ensuring the group's homeostasis (Ezriel, 1950), and so the cycle goes on. Moreover, in addition to maintaining the requisite level of membership, the "conversion" of new recruits also serves to apparently legitimise the group's ideology (Galanter, 1999) along the lines that, if new members are joining, the message must be right and the mission is justified.

"Boundary control" is another trait of an open social system visibly manifested by cultic groups (Galanter, 1999). Within the present study this is reflected by the "us and them; group self-definition in contra-distinction to the outside world", "influence/control" and "reinforcement of them and us" conceptual categories. These data clusters suggest that cultic groups isolate their members from the very outset, both literally and metaphorically, by presenting and reinforcing a number of basic dualities. Thus a clear distinction is drawn between the group and society at large, and also between group members and others in terms of their innate value as people. This is justified by their divine and exclusive purpose, and frequently propagated via secrecy, deception and misinformation, as reported by nine interviewees in this study. This boundary control applies not just internally to members but also to the image and message relayed to those outside the group, which again may mean deceiving and lying to the general public as well as family and friends as seen in the present study.

5. PARTICIPANTS' CONSTRUCTION OF THEIR EXPERIENCES: Discourse analysis and the use of metaphors

Before examining the innovative contribution that social identity theory and branches of sociology offer to conceptions of cult membership, it is first necessary to look at how the participants constructed their experience, as an important means of trying to understand what it meant.

Discourse analysis involves not just the examination of fragments of speech, but also depends on the analyst "reading" the context (e.g. Potter, 1997). This in itself is a constant theme within this research study, namely that the accounts and experiences of interviewees must be regarded in

terms of the context within which they occurred and the manner in which they are constructed in the present. This also this fits with the ethos and practice of grounded theory methodology.

As Potter & Wetherall (1987) point out *"language is not just a code for communication. It is inseparably involved with processes of thinking and reasoning... a large part of our activities are formed through language"* (p. 9). They go on to argue that the researcher should bracket off the whole issue of the quality of accounts as accurate or inaccurate descriptions of mental states, as to focus on this would be to construe the problem at the wrong level. Instead, they suggest concentrating exclusively on the discourse itself, i.e. on how it is constructed, what are its functions, and what it reveals. Certainly the use of powerful metaphors was a particular feature of the accounts of eight of the participants in the present study. These gave a direct insight into the manner in which participants perceived and felt about their experiences, and their analysis thus merits greater attention than the brief examination provided here.

A principal tenet of discourse analysis is that the function of discourse necessarily involves the active construction of versions of the social world, and is demonstrated by the variation in the language used according to the context and purpose of what is being said (Potter & Wetherall, 1987, Potter, 1997). This ties in with another key theme of this study, namely that the actions and choices of members themselves should be viewed as essentially active. This is not to say that the construction process is necessarily deliberate or intentional, as it may be unconscious, however a construction emerges nonetheless as individuals try to make sense of their experiences in a particular way (Potter & Wetherall, 1987, Potter, 1997). The potential relevance of this within the current study relates to the fact that all ten participants shared strong feelings and a largely negative view of their cult membership. It is possible that this is what impelled them to come forward in the first place, having all been absent from their groups for a significant time, and, for the most part, had to struggle to rebuild their lives.

From the perspective of discourse analysis, the fact that participant accounts generally also revealed a sense of having been victims of influence and control processes has a bearing on how they constructed their narrative. This was reflected in the metaphors indicating feelings of dependency and lack of control over their environment, e.g. the self-comparisons to abandoned children, automata, or being on a carousel. These feelings were moreover subsequently confirmed by interviewees during the feedback sessions. The important point to note about the unanimous use of victim terminology is that this must also be viewed in context, as opposed to simply focusing on what happened within the group. Thus the researcher must be conscious of data within other empirical categories after leaving, such as "self-recrimination", "guilt", "self-

vindication/rationalisation" and "importance of being understood", not to mention alleged psychological scars.

It is understandable that interviewees should describe themselves as victims of mind control, in terms of the need to justify why most of them devoted a good many years of their lives to what they, and the society at large to which they now belong, may view as erroneous, outlandish beliefs, and dubious practices. For what feedback also confirmed was not just the re-emergence of individual identity, but also an "inverted polarisation" reflected in the changed use of language. Thus the cult was now described as "the other" (*see section 6(ii)*), and references to the group were cast in terms of "they" rather than "we". There was also a return to the use of "me" and "I", symptomatic of an increasingly personal rather than collective/group outlook and emphasis.

The fact that participants feel that they were victims means that this perspective should not be ignored, particularly as it is their experiences that the project is exploring. Nevertheless, it is argued that the data can also be interpreted in ways that go beyond this one explanation, by objectively viewing the data in its entirety. Moreover, and critically, this helps to explain how the data showed that in many instances they made a series of active (or at least non-passive) choices and decisions, even if this meant effectively choosing not to act or decide for themselves in certain circumstances.

Similarly, the fact that incarceration was another common metaphor gives rise to the question, "why did members simply not leave?" The evidence of "thought reform" in line with the mind control model (Lifton, 1961), as well as social psychological theories of obedience, conformity, groupthink and cognitive dissonance, all go some way to explaining this. However these alone are arguably insufficient to explain what the researcher has interpreted as a "switch" rather than a loss of identity. This is supported by the fact that participants themselves reported that they actively believed in their group's mission, and changed their beliefs, attitudes and behaviour accordingly.

This understanding of a switch in identity, which has been confirmed by feedback from the participants themselves (*see Chapter 2*), arguably ties all these explanations together, as distilled through the strands of sociology, social identity theory (SID) and Reicher's application of SID theory (1984, 1987, 1996) emanating from studies of crowd behaviour, which are explored in the next two sections.

6. SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

(i) "Total" institutions

The sociological concept of the "total institution" is based on the premise that within modern society, individuals tend to conduct the three main aspects of their lives, namely work, recreation and sleep, in different places, with different co-participants, under different authorities, and without an over-all rational plan (Goffman, 1961). Against this backdrop, the central element in "total institution" theory concerns the breaking down of the divisions ordinarily separating these three spheres of life. Given that this was a basic reported feature of all the groups studied, this theory links directly to the experiences of participants and the resultant data, and moreover supports the insights provided by Reicher's (1996) study of totalitarian authority on subject groups discussed in *Section 7*. Indeed, in writing at length on the subject, Goffman (1961) lists religious groups among the five categories of total institutions: *"those establishments designed as retreats from the world even while often serving as training centres for the religious"* (p.5), that by implication include bible-based cults.

Goffman (1961) describes how within a total institution daily routines and activities are tightly scheduled and brought together within a single plan designed to fulfil organisational objectives. This certainly chimes with the data relating to the various means of influence exerted by cultic groups, e.g. "influence over everyday life, time, sleep and eating", and also the notion of individual wants and needs being subordinated to the group's prerogatives. Samuel Wallace (1971) goes on to assert that: *"When any type of social institution – religious, educational, legal or medical – begins to exercise total control over its population, that institution begins to display certain characteristics: communication between insider and outsider is rigidly controlled or prohibited altogether; those inside the institution are frequently referred to as inmates- subjects whose every movement is controlled by the existence within the institution, which defines the inmate's social status, his relationship to all others, his identity as a person."(p.1-2)*. Again this accords with the accounts of participants in terms of the general "us and them" polarisation, and the control over contact with society at large.

Linking in to the ideas expounded within the above section on discourse theory, it is interesting to note that five of the ten interviewees used metaphors describing elements of perceived institutionalisation. One directly stated that *"it was an institution and we were institutionalised"*, while three made direct imprisonment analogies, even though they were clearly not "inmates" as such, having chosen to join. Similarly, although not formally quantified, a cursory word search of the transcripts reveals that the very words "total" or "totally" are used

frequently by all participants in relation to most aspects of their experience, and one actually described the group set-up as being characterised by "*total, total control*".

Goffman (1961) further argues that "the self" is inextricably linked to the prevailing norms within the social system to which a group's members belong. The self is thus not the exclusive "property" of the individual to whom it is attributed, but rather dwells in the pattern of social control exerted in the immediate environment. As a consequence, the institutional norms do not so much support the self as constitute it. Goffman therefore goes on to describe the "loss of self" that can occur when an individual exits such an institution. Certainly this was to some extent reflected in the loss of meaning or purpose alluded to by all ten participants within the wider conceptual category of "effect on identity", while two in particular couched their accounts of leaving in terms of the social adjustment of those leaving prison. However, what is also critical is what happens to identity thereafter, and how.

(ii)   The role of "the other"

A corollary to the concept of "the self" is that of "the other". As Corby and Leerson (1991) point out, "*all cultures articulate and situate themselves by categorising the world...cultural identity proceeds by silhouetting it against a contrastive background of otherness*"(p.16). The "other" is thus construed as what we are not or what we would like to think we are not. Similarly, a key theme of Foucault's "Madness and Civilisation" (1961), is that others are elected to live out the chaos that we refuse to confront in ourselves. To illustrate the point, he uses changing social perceptions of and attitudes to "madness" through history, whereby "the insane" were progressively criminalised and therefore incarcerated. In the same vein, Freud also talks of the "innere Ausland" to explain how the unfamiliarity of foreign cultures evokes disquiet within the psyche (1912, p.114).

These concepts are born out by the accounts of participants, within the pervasive "us and them", "good and evil" etc. dichotomisations, and the sense of "elitism" propagated by group norms and beliefs. This therefore fits with the reported reinforcement of the group's separateness, or rather society's "otherness", underpinned by fear. As Corbey & Leerson (1991) comment, the denigration of others may be used as a defence against the unknown which poses " *a threat to one's cognitive grip on the world*" (p.21). In the case of the groups described, this defence was against any diminution of the influence of the "total" group, while the role of the "other" is implicit in the title of the conceptual category "group's self-definition in contradistinction to the outside world" and the reinforcement of this by the leadership.

(iii) The role of the audience

Within the study of *"intrapsychic mechanisms operating in abstract inter-individual encounters"* (Mugny,1984) in the field of social psychology, the role of the audience relates to the role of "others" rather than "the other" per se. Thus Billig (1985) argues that what cognitive dissonance theorists (cf. Hales, 1985) have missed is not so much the self as such, but rather one's perception of how other people perceive us. He relates this to comments by Rosenberg & Abelson that *"Careful study of normal argumentative discourse ... has shown that when affective-cognitive inconsistency is established in a context that forces the person to think closely about it, then the intolerance for inconsistency is maximised ... Particularly this is true when the person believes that the product of his (sic) thought will be available to others who will judge him by that product."* (Rosenberg,1960, p.56).

Similarly, Mead's (1934) theory of action proposes that self-awareness, or "selfhood", originates in the experience of interacting with others within the framework of a shared language and culture. Mead goes on to say that within a given culture, one can predict the way others will react due to familiarity with cultural norms. If the meaning of an act is derived from the response elicited from others, individuals will frame and react to their own behaviour according to the anticipated reaction of others. This emphasis on the importance of others relates directly to the concept of the role of the audience in regulating behaviour, which, in the case of the groups studied, was God, whether directly or refracted through the group's leader and/or the collectivity of group members. Thus participants' recollections of their own experience of interacting within their movement illustrate how they obeyed and conformed to behaviour and social norms defined by others, which they believed would improve their chances of salvation in the eyes of God. In other words they shifted their beliefs, behaviour and, ultimately, identity in response to their audience, real and imagined.

The role of the audience also links in with other theoretical ideas about the social and interactive nature of identity formation. Heider (1958) examined the impression the "self" has of others, based on the notion that we are only intermittently aware of how conjectural or even inaccurate this impression may be. Moreover, in "The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life" (1959), Goffman explores individual identity in terms of social interactions, which he views as performances, constructed to provide others with "impressions" that are consonant with the desired goals of the actor, and metaphorically as well as literally linking with the idea of an audience. The role of the audience therefore also relates to Milgram's (1967, 1974) findings regarding obedience to an authority figure present or assumed to be watching. The abnegation of personal responsibility based on the implicit approval of God as the watching authority figure in

the present study may thus be explained by an implicit belief that God will intervene if the individual starts to step out of line. This view is supported by the empirical category "fear of divine retribution".

(iv) Foucault – surveillance of the self

Linked to the role of the audience is Foucault's notion of the "power by surveillance", expounded in "Discipline and Punish" (1979), that explains how control becomes internalised within the individual and thus reinforces external influence and pressures to obey and conform. Thus he asserts that due to progressive internalisation of surveillance and monitoring, individuals "patrol" or police their own thoughts and behaviour in line with socialised perceptions of how they should act, not least to avoid punishment. In doing so he uses the idea of the Panopticon, an influential 19th century prison designed to make inmates feel that they were being watched at all times. These ideas are again reflected in the coded interviews in terms of almost unanimous accounts of fear, punishment and instilled beliefs in divine retribution for any misdeeds. The public as well as private confessional rituals reported, thus arguably served to actively induce a tendency to self-survey, again with God as the ever-present audience. This equally ties in with Lifton's notion of "milieu control" as a fundamental element of thought reform.

(v) Charismatic authority – Weber

The pivotal role played by group leaders has already been identified as a prevalent feature within the interviews conducted, and Weber's theory of charismatic authority also helps to enhance Milgram's explanation of the process of subordination and obedience to authority with regard to the present study.

Weber asserts that history has repeatedly witnessed the rise to power of those who are granted the right to rule by virtue of their "supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (Weber, 1964, p. 358-9), i.e. charismatic authority, rooted in the display of seemingly divine gifts. The list of those ascribed with charismatic authority includes not just Hitler and Alexander the Great, but also the founders of the world's great religions.

The relevance of this is the notion that true charisma is not so much an attribute of an individual leader's personality as a socially attributed quality that depends on the recognition of others, who bestow authority upon the designated leader. Thus, as Weber (1964), Wilson (1975), Wallis (1982), and other commentators have stressed, the authority of the charismatic leader is founded

in a deeply personal relationship with his or her followers, implying extraordinary faith and trust. Within the religious cults studied, the position of the leader is also immeasurably strengthened by the belief this authority is also granted by God. In discussing the prophetic claims of David Berg, the leader of the Children of God, to which two of those interviewed had belonged, Wallis (1982, p. 37) highlights some of the possible ramifications of this:

"Few things can be more precarious than a conception of oneself as a direct agency and voice of God whose present doctrine and approved practice is so much at variance with tradition. So precarious a situation must be protected by considerable milieu control. Only those who are completely committed can be permitted to remain in contact with the source of everyone's self-conception. Considerable care must be taken over the selection of those permitted access to the leader. If his standing is upset or denied, not only is the leader's self conception jeopardised, but also that of everyone around him. Thus, the elite, the "charismatic aristocracy"...has a substantial incentive to protect his environment against those who undermine or discredit his identity as a prophet". This again accords with descriptions by participants of the God-given authority of their respective leaders, as well as group self-protective behaviour, with rejecting or ultimately expelling discordant individuals as the ultimate sanction.

Similarly, Dawson (1996) lists six strategies that charismatic leaders may use to preserve their authority, all of which were explicitly mentioned by some or all of those interviewed:

- arbitrarily or suddenly altering the movement's espoused doctrines and policies, in order to maintain attention on his/her edicts and teachings

- an escalation of the demands placed on members to reaffirm their loyalty in terms of service and sacrifice

- a tendency to "demonise" non-members and play upon fears of persecution by inventing new or greater enemies

- The stifling of dissent through the careful control of information, public ridicule, and other means of peer pressure.

- demeaning or physically separating couples or other close pairings, in order to test loyalty, heighten emotional dependence, and pre-empt the formation of relationships that could threaten affective ties to the charismatic leader.

- Repeatedly moving devotees around, sometimes to a different country.

The resulting heightened dependence and homogenisation of members, coupled with a denigration of critical faculties, may therefore set the conditions within which charismatic leaders may *"indulge the darker side of their subconscious"* (Wallis & Bruce, 1986; cited in Robbins &

Anthony, 1995: p. 247). Within the present study, this may help explain the allegations of child/sexual abuse reported in this study in by half of those interviewed.

7. SOCIAL IDENTITY & REICHER'S CROWD THEORIES

Social identity theory and the specific contributions of Reicher (1984, 1987, 1996), derived from research into crowd behaviour and Hitler and Mussolini, arguably serve to synthesise the contributions of the other theories mentioned above. In other words, their combination may provide a theoretical architecture within which the contributions of other theories can be better understood, and the experiences of participants more fully explained as a result.

(i)   Social identity theory

Social identity theory is crucial to understanding the process by which the switch occurs from personal to social/group identity within cultic groups, one of the central findings of this study, and alluded to throughout. As outlined in the literature review, the guiding premise of social identity theory is that *"People derive their identity (their sense of self, their self-concept) in great part from the social categories to which they belong"* (Hogg & Abrams, 1988, p. 19). An important part of our sense of self may thus be said to derive from our membership of certain groups and categories, that in turn influences our behaviour just as much as individual personality traits or cognitive processes. This in itself hints at an important distinction between personal and social identity, although it is also critical to underline that the two are not mutually exclusive, but rather existing and overlapping on a continuum. For it is contended that what happens to individuals within cultic groups is that the "social identity" they gain during membership overrides their individual preceding identity. This is not altogether "lost" however, and will reassert itself upon leaving, albeit having been changed by the intervening experience.

Whereas traditional social psychology tends to examine the role of the individual within the group, social identity theory turns this approach on its head and focuses instead on the concept of the group within the individual. Social identity is thus defined by Tajfel (1978) as *"that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership"*(p. 63). Central to the theory is also the notion of social categorisation, which Tajfel describes as *"The ordering of the world in a way that makes sense to the individual. It helps to structure the causal understanding of the social environment and thus helps as a guide*

for action" (1978). Social identification is therefore the process by which the individual categorises him-/herself within the overall social matrix of categorisations, and social identity corresponds to the sum total of these personal identifications. As a result, social identity and self-categorisation theory highlights "salience" rather than self-esteem as the central motivation behind behaviour, which Hogg & Abrams (1990) in turn relate to the search for meaning, according to socially and historically specific criteria. This is particularly significant for the present study, given that one of the key common denominators given by participants for having joined in the first place was a searching or idealistic nature.

Salient group membership may be defined as: *"one which is functioning psychologically to increase the influence of one's membership in that group on perception and behaviour, and/or the influence of another person's identity as a group member on one's impression of and hence behaviour towards that person (Oakes, 1987, p. 118).* On this basis, the groups described by interviewees qualify as "salient". Turner et al (1987) further argue that a critical consequence of a salient social identity is depersonalisation, or "self-stereotyping", whereby *"people come to perceive themselves more as the interchangeable exemplars of a social category than as unique personalities defined by their individual differences from others"* (1987: p. 50). This was directly recorded within the "self-sacrifice/group over individual" empirical category and in the "switch in identity and heightened conformity" conceptual category. It also ties in with the theories of conformity, mind control and Foucault's (1979) notion of "self-censorship" outlined above (*Section 6(iv)*).

This explanation of how an individual adopts a social identity accords with the explanation of how the cult operates as a "social system" as outlined in *Section 4(v)* above. SIT thus helps to explain how the cult transforms members through social and cognitive change, and the way in which they come to define themselves in terms of group's ideology and shift their beliefs, attitudes, behaviour and identity accordingly. If individual and group interests come to be seen as synonymous [10], this explains why members act to protect the group and ensure its continuity as a social system. This in turn helps to explain both the reported processes at work, e.g. conformity, obedience and subordination, as well as their various expressions, such as boundary control, punishment mutual monitoring and evangelical recruitment. This application of SID is supported by other research evidence showing how social categorisation and group pressure to conform may have affected the participants (e.g. Kelman, 1974; Turner, 1982; Hogg & Abrams, 1988).

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[10] the *"mutual inextricability of the individual and group"* (Ash, 1953, p.152)

According to SID, depersonalisation in terms of a change from personal to social identity, may thus be seen as a <u>gain</u> in identity, since it is a mechanism "*whereby individuals may act in terms of the social similarities and differences produced by the historical development of human society and culture*" (p. 51). This stands in contrast to previous theorising that represents depersonalisation as a <u>loss</u> of identity (see Zimbardo, 1969), and is even more significant in that individuals in the current study perceived themselves to have experienced a loss of their identity. The key factor within interviewees' accounts that allows this to be interpreted otherwise is the recurrent theme of inner conflict, as this can be characterised as a struggle between the adopted social and residual personal identities. This therefore also links back to the concept of cognitive dissonance.

(ii) <u>Reicher's theory of crowd behaviour</u>

A particular area that social identity theory has been applied to is crowd behaviour (cf. Reicher, 1987). This section does not attempt to equate cultic groups with crowds per se, but rather aims to show how Reicher's theories developed from the study of crowds contribute to the understanding of individual experiences and group dynamics within the religious cults described by interviewees.

Reicher's emphasis on the rationality and shared meaning of crowd behaviour is very different from the traditional social psychological approach that can be traced back to the work of Le Bon (1847). Le Bon's work continues to find favour, despite the methodological shortcomings of many of the experimental studies involved, and his notion of the atavistic impulses of a gullible, mindless crowd has become "mainstreamed" and widely accepted in lay circles. Thus ordinary people, and indeed the police, often explain crowd behaviour in Le Bonian terms when asked to describe such events (Reicher & Potter, 1985; Reicher, 1987; Waddington, 1992).

These early theorists painted an unflattering portrait of the crowd by emphasising the irrationality and unconscious processes underlying its actions. The aspect of Le Bon's theories that has attracted the most attention from social psychologists however was the idea of individual sublimation into the crowd, equated with a loss of personal identity, and referred to as deindividuation (c.f. Zimbardo, 1995). Within the present study, this accords with the self-interpretation of their experiences by participants themselves, i.e. to a great extent as passive "victims".

The perceived irrationality and negativity inherent in this interpretation of collective behaviour as a "mindless mob" is in direct contrast to that of Reicher and others (e.g. Reicher & Potter, 1985). They criticise this emphasis on deindividuation for neglecting the meaning that the event may have for the "in-group" members of the crowd themselves, by artificially divorcing it from its social, ideological, and inter-group context. They accordingly compare this to media images homing in on a crowd of demonstrators without panning out to show riot police, whereby the actions are bound to appear senseless and inexplicable: *"If the outgroup is ignored, violence cannot be understood as arising from inter-group conflict. Instead it is attributed to the crowd itself"* (Reicher, 1984, p.172). This may also be to ignore or discredit any original rational or justifiable motivation for the action, regardless of how apparently irrational group behaviour subsequently becomes. Again this applies directly to the experiences of those interviewed in general, in so far as adopting the widely-held pejorative view of cults as inherently bad, and cult members as necessarily suffering from psycho-social problems, is to denigrate the meaning of the experiences of those involved, and the often positive reasons they had for joining the cult in the first place.

Instead, Reicher (1984) and others argue that crowd behaviour is far from random and senseless, but rather part of developing inter-group processes, and expresses the *"collective understanding of what crowd members have of what is proper and possible in their social world"* (p. 174). So, according to Reicher, individuals define themselves in terms of a membership of a social category, and crowd behaviour is the product of self-stereotyping or self-categorisation and the internalisation of "in-group" norms. This occurs when social identity/category membership is made salient within a crowd situation, perhaps by the physical presence of other in-group members, and as it becomes salient, the individual then conforms to those attributes of that category. As Reicher says *"The evidence indicates that crowd events are uniquely social; they allow a glimpse of people's social understanding of themselves and their social world that is hidden amongst the concerns of everyday life...attacks may express a social understanding of the relationship between target and community"* (p. 175).

Reicher thus promotes social categorisation theory and the social identity perspective as ways of enhancing limited and overly simplified explanations of crowd phenomena. In doing so, he also maintains that group behaviour, as demonstrated by crowds, should rather be seen to involve a shift in identity, characterised by the salience of a social identity over personal identity, on the basis that a crowd is *"a set of individuals who...adopt a common social identification. This common identification...provides stereotypical norms of behaviour"* (Reicher, 1984, p. 42). He backs this up with experimental research and field studies of crowd and riot situations, for

example data from the 1980 Bristol street disturbances, that suggests a clear pattern of events with strict limits as to what was deemed appropriate behaviour, consistent with the idea of self-stereotyping (Reicher, 1984). In his study, participants interviewed stressed the sense of collective purpose, the meaningfulness of crowd action and the solidarity and positive emotional feelings associated with group membership (Reicher, 1987; 1996; Reicher & Potter, 1985). This accords with the recollections of current interviewees coded under the "rewards" conceptual category", relating to feelings of belonging and "good times and positive experiences", but moreover, fits in with the fact that the participants believed in their group's ideology and mission.

Reicher thus illustrates how, contrary to widely held views, crowd behaviour can be understood as highly differentiated, meaningful, and implying considerable conscious control by the self, according to a person's understanding of the situation. By implication, approaches to cult membership based on the idea of deindividuation equally neglect the wider meaning of actions for the individuals involved and the ways in which those actions may be expressions of their particular social identity. In line with Reicher, the researcher proposes an alternative interpretation of cult membership as a meaningful experience reflecting active choices, in line with the finding that participants changed their beliefs, attitudes and behaviour.

(iii) Reicher's application of crowd theory to the rhetoric of Mussolini and Hitler

As described, many recent theorists point to the flaws of Le Bon's crowd psychology in abstracting the behaviour of crowds from their social and ideological context. Yet many highly "successful" leaders claim to have based their techniques of mass manipulation on his ideas. Reicher's (1996) dedicated study thus examines why Le Bon's ideas are still useful, despite being seemingly flawed, and he attempts to resolve this apparent paradox by examining the rhetoric of Le Bon's most notorious admirers, Mussolini and Hitler.

This analysis of Hitler and Mussolini using social identity theory complements his work on crowd theory profiled above. It is also directly relevant to the current study in providing a fuller understanding of how identity shifts, the role of the group leader, and the importance of the notion of God as audience, building on the insights offered by the mind control, obedience to authority, groupthink, conformity and total institution theories outlined earlier. Moreover, it is particularly resonant given that four participants in the present study used political metaphors when recounting their experiences, while two directly and unprompted compared aspects of their movement to those found in Nazi Germany (see *Chapter 3*). It should be pointed out however

that this is not to equate bible-based cults with the evils of Nazism in any way, but merely rather to explain analogous group processes.

Reicher (1996) identifies three phases in the rhetoric of Mussolini and Hitler that serve to make their authority seemingly unchangeable: the construction of a new identity; prescribing this new identity on the audience as inevitable or natural; mythologising the process as historically legitimate. This paradigm is based on a number of common themes, all of which clearly accord with the experiences of the more or less "totalitarian" groups described by interviewees. Thus Reicher's ideas are presented below and tied to the findings of the present study:

- Replacing decadent norms as a revolutionary and liberating mission: this accords with the radical, idealistic appeal that attracted many of the interviewees to join their groups in the first place, linked to dissatisfaction with the mainstream church, as well a particular sense of a greater purpose inherent in the respective Messianic mission espoused once they joined

- Ideology as the basis of this implied new identity, grounded in the spirit of noble transcendent values rooted in a mythical past, equivalent to the notion of a "fall from grace" and used in turn to legitimate the ideology: all the groups had their own particular norms, standards and interpretation of mainstream Christianity

- A crucial element of the ideology is the concealment of its ideological basis; obscuring the controversial or paradoxical nature of definitions and thereby rendering them necessary rather than contingent: control over beliefs was a key conceptual category for all interviewees, while deception was also reported by nine of the ten

- The totalitarian rhetoric is simple, assertive and repetitive, involving self-reflexive slogans or catch phrases [11]; the ability to condense complex concepts to simple ideology into such a simple form is a feature of the ideology itself , although the slogans are themselves dependent on an elaborate ideological structure: manipulation of language was described by seven participants, while simplicity and certainty had been common initial appeals

- The audience is defined in terms of a strongly delineated group identity, founded in opposition to "demonised" others; this fits with the polarised world view within the "us and them construction of reality" subsequently reinforced, while conforming to the group identity was another key theme

- The merging of audience identity with the group regime is both project and accomplishment, and the new identity is not a choice, but rather a self-evident entitlement to be embraced: identity switch is one of the fundamental concepts revealed and discussed.

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[11] e.g. "Italy is Fascist and Fascism is Italy"

- The leader enjoys quasi-metaphysical authority conferred by innate links to the mythological greatness he embodies - what he does and says is therefore, "by definition", infallible; this ties in with the investiture of divine attributes in group leaders, as well as the influence over beliefs and denigration of critical thinking

- The totalitarian leadership and group are inextricably bound together, whereby the leader is the apotheosis of the group and the group is the embodiment of the leader: similarly, the leader was the embodiment of not only the group but also God's divine purpose

- Similarly, the group is an organic whole, possessing a single will, that of the leader, to which all other wills (whether individual or collective) must be subordinated: this clearly fits with the subordination to leadership described, in addition to self-sacrifice to group imperatives

- The group has its own particular norms and practices: again, this exact theme was reported by all participants under both the "attributes of the group" category as well as the various categories relating to influence over all aspects of daily life

- Democracy is presented as an "alien" invention of non-members: one interviewee expressly commented on the lack of democracy within the group (*"They make it clear there is no democracy in the kingdom of God")*, while this was also born out by punitive practices and the sanctions imposed on anyone who questioned the group's beliefs

- The group's elite status and exclusivity is complemented by an expansionist approach: this accords with the reported elitist self-conception of the groups, as well as the evangelical mission.

As demonstrated by the examples given above, Reicher's findings chime with the key findings of this study. The relevance of Reicher's contention that group membership entails a shift from personal to social identity, as opposed to Le Bon's assertion of a loss, is already described in the preceding sub-section. What this particular research into Hitler and Mussolini therefore contributes to the present study is a further insight into the role of obedience and conformity, linked to the concept of God as audience. This belief, which individuals may already subscribe to, may be actively manipulated by the group/leadership, in so far as it can be used to justify any group actions if the leader and group are genuinely believed to be a chosen elite acting on God's authority, and therefore beyond reproach. Moreover, if God is always watching, this denies members any opportunity to question such actions, for fear of retribution, or rather of jeopardising their positive reward for keeping the faith.

However, the fact that these participants believed in the Messianic Mission and believed that their personal salvation was conditional upon their compliance with group norms, means that they

were arguably making conscious choices to be involved in advancing these goals. In common sense terms, people accept interpretations of events that seem reasonable given their emotional needs and existing beliefs. Similarly, people do not act contrary to their perceived best interest unless "compelled" to do so, and only then with a great deal of internal resistance. By strategically manipulating an individual's needs however, and restructuring beliefs and attitudes, skilful persuaders can therefore effect dramatic changes in behaviour without coercion. In the case of bible-based cult members, the key initial element may thus be their existing religious convictions, as they themselves identified.

8. BEREAVEMENT THEORY

Bereavement theory provides a tangible way of understanding the reported experiences of former cult members, given that nine of the ten participants expressed emotions described as, or tantamount to, profound loss after leaving the group, as collated under the dedicated empirical category. Indeed several participants expressly identified their reaction as one of grief, and there were several direct references to bereavement and feeling "as if" someone had died. Moreover, this was the case whether the individual left of their own accord or involuntarily. What is particularly useful about the recognition of members' reaction to leaving the group as one of bereavement is that it "normalises" the participant's experiences rather than pathologising them. This equally provides insight for mental health professionals who may be called upon to work with such individuals.

Bereavement theory essentially describes how loss triggers a period of mourning, and has been charted by Bowlby (1988) and Murray-Parkes (1997) according to the following four stages:

(a) Numbness, particularly close to the time of loss: this was reported by nine participants within the "general difficulty coping" and "loss of meaning or purpose" categories.

(b) Protest, yearning and searching, including denial and anger: this again was reported by 9 ex-members as a common reaction to leaving the movement within the "frustration and anger" category, as well as to a limited extent within the "self-vindication and rationalisation" category.

(c) Disorganisation and despair, as well as difficulty in functioning: as described in the "emotional fallout" conceptual category in the present study.

(d) Reorganisation, detachment and new attachments as the individual pulls their life back together: this is seen in the conceptual categories "coming to terms with experience" and "regaining identity" in the present study, which were both heavily saturated.

Bowlby's (e.g. 1980) attachment theory links these stages to reactions during childhood separations, which ties in with the analogies made by four interviewees to feeling like an abandoned child. These ranged from comparisons to being a new-born baby to being like a toddler abandoned in the park by one's parents. The data from the present study therefore suggests that it may be useful for therapists to consider the aftermath of leaving cultic groups as an adaptive response to loss, and acknowledge accordingly that coming to terms with this loss is an active process which takes time. Similarly, the circumstances of leaving the group also needs to be considered along with individual styles of coping (e.g. Worden, 1982). Sanders (1999) offers insights into how to work with difficult grief reactions which involve losses other than death, as do others within the contemporary psychodynamic and attachment clinical literature (e.g. Silverman, & Klass, 1996; Rosenblatt; 1996). These may warrant further consideration with regard to the post-cult context.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

(i)   Overview of the study

The overall aim of the study was to contribute to the understanding of cult membership by examining the experiences of former members, from a broad range of theoretical perspectives. The introductory *Chapter 1* therefore set the scene by presenting a review of the existing literature on cultic groups [1]. This was followed in *Chapter 2* by a detailed explanation of the grounded theory methodology used and how this was applied. *Chapter 3* then set out the results produced, the meaning and relevance of which were then discussed from various theoretical perspectives in *Chapter 4*, which accordingly proposed how the experiences of former cult members could be understood.

This thesis will close by examining the possible limitations of the study, reflecting on the researcher's own experience of conducting it, suggesting areas of possible future research, proposing further useful theoretical approaches, and outlining the clinical utility of the findings, before making concluding remarks.

(ii)   Limitations of the study

The project was intended to be exploratory and open to all phenomena, and grounded theory was therefore selected as the best methodological approach to facilitate this. The data driven approach of grounded theory means that the researcher is advised to study as little potentially applicable theory as possible until after the initial results have been formulated (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). However previous academic study meant that the literature on cults was in fact already familiar to the researcher before this project began, which could be argued as a weakness from a "purist" grounded theory point of view. This existing knowledge cannot help but have influenced the researcher, and the study would undoubtedly have been different if this had not been the case, although this arguably holds true for any qualitative study. It is felt that this prior knowledge did not lead the analysis of the data, as the constant vigilance of the researcher in this regard, plus the rigour inherently demanded by grounded theory methodology, both mitigated against this, as reflected in the unexpected findings produced.

Another possible criticism of the method is that participants were only interviewed once. Although preliminary analysis and modelling was fed back to participants for reaction and

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[1]   From the definitions presented in *Chapter 1*, it was taken as read, that all the groups described could be readily classified as cults, and they were treated as such throughout the rest of the thesis.

comment, conducting multiple interviews with each would have been preferable in order to provide more focus. The reasons for not having done so were simple logistical constraints in terms of time and funding.

There were also possible weaknesses regarding the participants. The fact that the sample of former cult members was self-selected is certainly an issue. The data showed that all participants viewed their membership of their respective groups in a predominantly negative light, which poses questions about how representative they are of former religious cult members as a collectivity, in so far as a desire for "retribution" as well as "absolution" may have been an incentive for having volunteered in the first place. Similarly, all those interviewed had been members for a number of years. Although this was an explicit reason for having welcomed their participation, it is reasonable to assume that their membership was considerably longer than the overall average, again potentially undermining the extent to which they can be said to represent former cult members in general. Again, all had left their group some time before, and therefore, without even accounting for the vicissitudes of memory or the way in which memories are repeatedly reconstructed after the event, it is hard to justify a comparison with the findings of, for example, a study interviewing cult adherents during membership.

As with any study, a greater number of participants would have legitimised wider applicability. That notwithstanding, a significant finding in itself was that the accounts of one member originating from a different culture and another who had been born into the group were indistinguishable from those of the rest in terms of the themes and experiences recounted[2]. In the same vein, despite the striking commonality of accounts, little effort was made to distinguish between the different groups concerned, each of which had their own particular norms and practices, some of which were mutually contradictory, e.g. attitudes to sexual promiscuity.

Perhaps the most obvious limitation of the present study was that it was arguably over-ambitious in attempting to investigate experiences of joining and after leaving, as well as of time spent in the group itself. This is reflected in the large number of categories and the volume of data produced, that in turn meant that a great deal of time was spent on the mechanics of coding. This may have been at the expense of both examining particular results in depth, and of honing the theoretical discussion, as a number of facets of experience, such as inner conflict, could justifiably have warranted dedicated studies in their own right, but in the event were necessarily skimmed over. Thus, with hindsight, an initial exploratory stage, followed by concentrating on data collection in one particular area such as identity, could have provided greater insight. Equally, the discussion itself attempted to

cover a great deal of ground, spanning a multitude of theories, which again ran the risk of over-generality at the expense of detail.

Although it is therefore recognised that this thesis perhaps attempts to cover too much material, there was nevertheless good justification for the broad-based approach adopted. The subject matter itself is extremely complex, moreover the project was intended to be exploratory, and was de facto a pilot given the absence of any prior grounded theory research into cultic groups. This did mean that it was inherently limited by the lack of prior findings, methodological "tips", and reported pitfalls etc. to draw upon. Nevertheless, it was ultimately felt that this in itself justified a pathfinder study looking at "before, during, and after" experiences of membership, in order to inform further research of this kind into cultic groups. As charted below, this study has indeed identified a number of novel findings and indicated areas for useful future research, in addition to highlighting limitations to be avoided. Moreover, pursuing this more holistic approach, i.e. examining the three different phases of cult membership, in itself exemplifies the contextualisation of cult experiences that this thesis argues throughout should play an integral role in any examination of their meaning to participants. Finally, the first pilot interviewee supported this broad-based approach from the outset, on the basis of not only her own experiences as a former cult member, but also as an academic experienced in using and supervising grounded theory.

(iii)   Reflections on the process of conducting the study

The constant comparative process did provide ongoing checks and balances that alleviated the researcher's concerns that, despite constant vigilance, prior knowledge of this field of study could unconsciously drive the analysis. A number of unexpected findings, for example the extent of inner conflict, testified to this.

According to Rennie (1998), a grounded theory study need only be accountable to the data. This is evidenced in the quotes contained in *Chapter 3*, the category saturation tables, and the quality control exercise. Conducting the present study was however a personally challenging experience, not least in terms of the sheer volume of the rich data produced, which did leave the researcher feeling somewhat overwhelmed at various points during the analytical stage of the project. Furthermore, locating relevant cult literature was in itself time consuming.

Coding and re-coding of the data was particularly time-intensive, especially as multiple versions of coding schedules were produced in an attempt to achieve the correct balance between comprehensibility and portraying the complexity and variety of the experiences

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[2]   Although the participant born into her group did not report inner conflict or guilt after leaving..

reported. In spite of this, the complex and inextricably linked nature of much of the data made it difficult to differentiate some categories and determine where to code some data. Moreover, it seemed possible to relate categories in any number of different ways. Similarly, deciding when to conclude the interpretative theory-building stage of the analysis was difficult. In practice however, this process was brought to a close when it was felt that the selected categories and relationships made sense of the data as a whole and constituted a sufficiently comprehensive account. Thus, while the account presented does not represent the definitive or only way of making sense of the data, it was felt to be satisfactory within the existing constraints.

The study also made considerable emotional demands on the researcher by virtue of the strong feelings and views expressed by the participants, and the personal significance of the experiences described to them. Elliott (1996) compares the process of becoming immersed in qualitative data to empathy, and this certainly rang true with regard to the present study, although the methodological procedures described did help to retain some distance. Being so close to the participants' accounts also meant that the researcher felt an added responsibility to represent their experiences accurately. This in turn made the process of analysis and writing-up more difficult and somewhat frustrating, in wanting to convey the actual complexity and uniqueness of their experiences, particularly given the researcher's more lateral knowledge and insight gained from studying social anthropology and social psychology.

This tension made returning to the participants for feedback on the models and preliminary analysis especially important, as it was felt that they might feel "betrayed" by the generic nature of conclusions drawn and the "social" bent of the analysis portraying them as active rather than passive participants in their own experience. As it transpired, the researcher's fears proved largely unfounded, in so far as participants accepted the analysis as an accurate portrayal of their experience. The consideration of how the accounts had been constructed, and the use of discourse analysis (e.g. Potter, 1997, Potter & Wetherall, 1987), were particularly helpful in this regard, as it balanced their subjective recollections with objective analysis, and acknowledged the "room" for different valid interpretations of their experience by both participants and researcher. The time-consuming nature of feeding back therefore proved eminently worthwhile. This was not only in terms of enhancing the validity of the data and helping to tighten the final models, but also in reinforcing the trust of those interviewed, reassuring them that the researcher was sensitive to their concerns [3], and giving them a degree of ownership in the process.

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[3] NB. general distrust of others was a widely reported by-product of participants' group membership

Finally, the scale and breadth of the project meant that time constraints were keenly felt, and it was frustrating to have to overlook newly discovered links within the data. The relevance of "critical psychology", given its emphasis on the analysis of subjectivity and selfhood, as well as its recognition of the cultural, political and historical factors that shape experience (e.g. Bhaskar, 1989; Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997, Henriques, 1998; Pilgrim, 1992) was a particular example of this, as it was discovered too late in the "writing up" process to be integrated into the main discussion.

(iv)   Future research

Many of the study's findings warrant further research. This is particularly the case given its inherently pioneering nature, as alluded to above. A general methodological suggestion arising from this, is to apply grounded theory to individual in-depth studies into joining, membership and leaving, given this vacuum in existing research. An apparent stumbling block to this encountered within the present study, is the propensity of interviewees to broaden out the context of their experiences when telling their stories. In other words, they found it difficult to concentrate solely on one particular phase of group membership within a qualitative study of this kind. A couple of participants also mentioned that they rarely discussed their cult experiences with others, which may have added to this propensity. A proposed way round this, that could help provide the requisite focus, would be to conduct a second round of interviews, once the experiences of participants have been contextualised. Pioneer studies of this kind on more specific elements of cult membership would equally highlight further areas of useful follow-up study and interest.

More specifically, the rich data contributed by the participant who had been born into her movement suggests the possible utility of conducting a similar study exclusively with former cult members who had been born and raised within a cultic environment, and subsequently left as adults. Notable differences in her account related to her lack of inner conflict whilst in the cult, which she attributed to the fact that she only knew that way of life. Similarly she felt little guilt or self-recrimination after leaving as she had clearly not been responsible for having joined the movement.

Despite the remarkable similarity of the experiences and group processes recounted by participants from a variety of cults (as reflected in the saturation table), it might prove useful to study a single cult, or, alternatively, to investigate specific variations between different cults, and the significance of these. By the same token, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study with former members of non-religious or non-bible based religious cults, or psychotherapy cults. This view is based on the fact that some of the present findings are either specific to bible-based cults, or might be non-apparent or expressed in different forms

in non-bible based groups. Such findings include the concept of God as the audience, the attribution of divine authority to the group leader, and the importance of the Messianic Mission, as well as the critical role played by pre-existing spiritual convictions in the decision to join in the first place. Following that, one could also compare the experiences of former members of religious and non-religious cultic groups. One could also broaden the parameters to conduct a trans-cultural study, for example comparing the experiences of former members of bible-based cults in the UK with those of similar individuals in the United States.

Several findings within the current study warrant further research, as they were not examined in any detail here were they documented in pre-existing literature. These include the inability to live up to group standards and other issues involved in involuntary expulsion from the group, as well as the differing attitudes to sexual relationships reported within different groups, plus the notable role of inner conflict experienced by the present participants. The rich nature of the metaphors and the language used by participants suggests that discourse analysis and a "semantic focus" may also be useful avenues for future research. The increasing emphasis on qualitative research techniques in psychology reflects a move towards examining the strategic use of dialogue in constructing realities anyway (e.g. Shotter, 1993; Smith, Harre & Van Langenhove, 1995).

The usefulness of social identity theory as a synthesising theory with regard to understanding experiences of cult membership was particularly highlighted, and it is suggested that this whole approach merits more detailed and dedicated examination accordingly. For example, Andrew (1991) argues that social identity does not sufficiently differentiate between the voluntary and involuntary group memberships that combine to determine a person's world-view. Involuntary memberships include things such as gender or nationality that play a critical role in formation of individual self-perception, yet which individuals have (virtually) no ability to choose or change. By contrast, an individual can enter into an almost limitless range of voluntary associations across the whole gamut of human activities, and it is arguably through the prioritisation of these chosen affiliations that individuals communicate to the world about who they perceive themselves to be. What is of particular interest with regard to cults is that membership is initially voluntary, yet functions in practice more along the lines of an involuntary membership, in so far as all aspects of individuals lives tend to be regulated, including their membership of other groups, as well as basic functions such as parenting.

(v) Other theoretical approaches

There are other theories that could arguably provide insight into the meaning of group membership and the processes involved, that, due to constraints of time and space, were not examined within the present discussion. In addition to systems theory as a whole, the two that stand out are psychoanalytic theory and, above all, the growing school of critical psychology.

Psychoanalytic group theory may be of particular use with regard to exploring group phenomena within totalitarian systems. Thus Freud's (1959) seminal ideas about primary groups, Bion's (1959) concepts of "basic assumption" and "group work" mentality, as well as Fromm's (1941) analysis of culture and social character, all arguably provide insight into the way that these groups can have an unhealthy influence over individual members.

It is proposed that the emerging field of "critical psychology" may represent a particularly important way forward for cult research. This is a rapidly developing sub-discipline of psychology, which spans the whole spectrum of the discipline [4], and combines a critical approach to psychological theory, research and professional practice, with the application of innovative theoretical, epistemological and methodological approaches.

What unites these diverse groups of psychologists is their approach. This is based on questioning fundamental received "truths" and adopting a constructively critical stance to both the discipline of psychology and the research enterprise itself. Central to critical psychological research is the analysis of subjectivity and self-hood, and a recognition of the social, cultural, historic, political and economic context that shape experience via power, values and ideology. In studying subjectivity, critical psychologists invariably draw on research and theory from other disciplines, however what differentiates it from the work of related disciplines is that it remains rooted in the field of psychology. The overall aim is thus to refine and improve prior theory and practice rather than reject them outright, and is essentially a unifying approach that acknowledges the fundamental importance of the context in which we live.

(vi) Contribution to the understanding of (bible-based) cult membership

1) Cult membership is an extremely complex field of experience and research that cannot adequately be understood in terms of any single theoretical conception

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[4] for example, there are now critical psychologists working in developmental (Bradley, 1989; Burman, 1994; Walkerdine, 1990), social (Potter and Wetherall, 1987; Parker, 1992), personality (Sloan, 1996), clinical (Pilgrim, 1992; Ussher, 1991), cognitive (Richardson, 1991), community (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 1997), cross-cultural (Shweder, 1990), gender (Walkerdine, 1997; Ussher, 1997) and legal psychology (Fox, 1997).

2) A number of inter-linking factors help to explain why individuals join, however a particular social background, a searching or idealistic nature, and pre-existing religious convictions were the most commonly reported predicators

3) Groups commonly employ a host of practices to influence and manipulate group members, whether to recruit them in the first place or retain their allegiance, however such practices, as often categorised within the "mind control" model, do not per se adequately explain the dynamics witnessed. Nevertheless, the participants all reported that such practices had played a significant role within the context of their cult membership, and their view of their own experiences should therefore be respected.

4) The process of assimilation, conformity and obedience can be conceptualised in terms of a switch from individual to group or social identity. This helps to understand both how the context affected the individual, as well as how individuals were adapting to the context in which they were embedded.

5) The religious beliefs that may have attracted people to join a bible-based cult, also play a pivotal role in their subsequent behaviour, with the notion that God is the constant audience, whether directly, or via the group leader, being of particular significance

6) Explanations of why members leave cultic groups are not as cut and dried as presented in the existing literature, in so far as a number of participants reported having left involuntarily, but not as a result of benign abduction; this finding has not been widely reported elsewhere

7) Recognising that group members may experience a grief or bereavement reaction when they leave may help to normalise this experience and accelerate the recovery process, and therefore provide a useful initial mode of intervention by mental health professionals, of benefit to client and practitioner alike.

(vii)   Clinical utility

Most clinical therapeutic approaches to psychological distress consider the individual in terms of their personal "pathology", and accordingly use various means to help him/her modify, overcome, or "accept responsibility" for it. It has been argued however that in many cases such approaches have not proved effective (Hagan & Smail, 1997). The accounts of many of the participants in the present study suggest not only that dealing with the after-effects of prolonged cult involvement may be one such area, but also that the "individualist perspective" may do as much harm as good. This in itself is a significant finding, that has important consequences for the way that former cult members are treated by health professionals in general.

These findings therefore suggest that a more fruitful approach may be to first consider and attempt to understand the particular and "social" nature of the cultic environment in question, and the related demands placed on the individual, before looking for any "pathology" within the person. This may inherently help to alleviate any self-recrimination and guilt individuals may be feeling, which in itself may be an important part of the therapeutic process, particularly at what is reported as a time of considerable confusion and vulnerability. Certainly this may assist in providing a supportive structure within which ex-members can more readily understand and come to terms with what they have been through, and learn how to adapt accordingly. Conversely, to decontextualise their experiences may merely serve to reinforce any sense of guilt or self-blame, and tap into the individualistic bias present within western psychology (Farr, 1996). Moreover to pathologise individuals may equally serve to perpetuate the polarised view of cult members evident in the literature, and the common pejorative conception of those that join them. Indeed, this may fit in with the very warnings of social intolerance and non-understanding inculcated in members by cultic groups. In short, it seems important to address the sociology as well as the psychology of the individual.

Cognitive techniques that test the "reality base" of the individual's experience, such as fear of divine retribution, may prove useful if they are applied in a manner that is both flexible and sensitive to the person's spiritual beliefs, both past and present. In this vein, the "Well-Spring Therapy Centre" based in the USA specialises in treating former cult members by using a mixture of cognitive techniques and educative interventions to help inform residents about some of the practices within their former groups and how this may make them feel (c.f. 1993).

Almost all those interviewed not only stressed the importance of being listened to, believed and understood, but also reported feelings and symptoms analogous to a grief reaction. Understanding the aftermath in terms of a bereavement may accordingly not only help to normalise their experience, but also bring into play particular therapeutic techniques that may prove effective, such as bereavement counselling, as informed by attachment theory (e.g. Bowlby, 1988).

(viii) Concluding remarks

This study is certainly topical, coming at a time when cultic groups are rarely out of the news. However, as mentioned above, conceptualisations of cults and those who join them, both in the literature and within society at large, tend to be highly polarised, just as former members reported that they were encouraged to view the world in terms of a series of strict

dichotomisations. One of the aims of this study was therefore to help break down this implicit stereotyping by examining and combining ideas from across the conceptual divide.

It is also advanced that the other broad objectives have been attained, namely promoting understanding of what the experiences of cult membership meant to those formerly involved themselves, examining the particular effects of cult membership upon individual identity, and informing the future clinical psychological treatment of former cult members. Although the limitations of its pilot nature have been acknowledged, it is nevertheless hoped that this study will prove useful to future theory and practice in the field, at the very least as a point of reference. Moreover the choice of grounded theory methodology appears to have been vindicated. It was particularly gratifying that this approach found support among those interviewed themselves, as reported in feedback, in terms of allowing them to be heard, and facilitating the process of providing meaning to, and coming to terms with, their experiences. Grounded theory is therefore to be commended to future researchers seeking to conduct studies in this area as a useful methodological approach.

It therefore seems reasonable to encourage further objective research in general into cultic groups, the processes involved, and the effects on individual identity in particular, not least to facilitate more open dialogue and greater mutual understanding between members of such movements and researchers. For although one of the aims of the study has been to discourage polarisation and stigmatisation, the sociological concept of "the other" illustrates how, by understanding groups that willingly define themselves in contra-distinction to mainstream society, we may gain insights into wider human interactions and how society functions, and thus, in turn, ourselves.

Ultimately, it is important to bear in mind that everyone is in the habit of constructing reality, whether consciously or not. Thus cults create a reality about themselves and society constructs a reality about them, and so it goes on, with reality being constantly refracted through executive or editorial decision and reflected in everyday semantics. In realising this, one begins to understand why the interpretations of present cult members, former members, academic researchers, and the media etc. differ so fundamentally. It is therefore argued here that both the individualistic and the social perspectives on cults are valid. In the same way, the self-perception of former members as victims, and the view of the researcher that they were nevertheless non-passive participants in their own experiences, are not mutually exclusive. Accordingly, this thesis advocates avoiding the pathologising of cult membership, and suggests that research perpetuating this viewpoint may, on balance, lead to further conflict rather than greater understanding.

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APPENDIX A

1) Undergraduate and postgraduate research projects

The project supervisor has read this form and affirms that appropriate ethical safeguards are in place:

Signature ....Date...16/11/98

           Project supervisor

Block Capitals ....ANNA MADILL.............

2) Postgraduate, research and academic staff research projects

The ethics committee, or chair of the ethics committee as representative of the ethics committee, has read this form and affirms that appropriate ethical safeguards are in place:

Signature ....Date......................

           Postgraduate/researcher/academic

Block Capitals ....

Signature ....Date...8 - Nov. 1998

      pp. Chair of the school of psychology ethics committee

Block Capitals ....JOHN BLUNDELL..............

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in an interview for my research. The purpose of this form is to make sure that you are happy to take part in the research and that you know what is involved.

Have you had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study?	YES/ NO
If you have asked questions have you had satisfactory answers to your questions?	YES/ NO/ NA
Do you understand that you are free to end the interview at any time?	YES/ NO
Do you understand that you are free to choose not to answer a question without having to give a reason why?	YES/ NO
Do you agree to take part in this study?	YES/ NO
Do you agree to the interview being audio-recorded?	YES/ NO
Do you grant permission for extracts from the interview to be used in reports of the research on the understanding that your anonymity will be maintained?	YES/ NO

SIGNED..

NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS...

DATE...............................

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APPENDIX : C

Participant information sheet

(completed immediately prior to interviews)

Have the following been clearly explained to you?

1) This interview will be tape-recorded   **Yes**   **No**

2) The tape will be heard only by myself & by   **Yes**   **No**
    someone employed to transcribe the tapes

3) The tape will be returned to you after it has been   **Yes**   **No**
    transcribed, or otherwise erased if you prefer

4) In the transcripts of the tapes any information which   **Yes**   **No**
    may identify you personally will be changed

5) Parts of the written transcript may be read by   **Yes**   **No**
    one or more of my supervisors

6) Parts of the transcripts will be read by two other   **Yes**   **No**
    individuals - to check my coding of the data

7) A written report of the project will be submitted to my   **Yes**   **No**
    examiners and will include quotes from some of the
    transcripts. Any identifiers will be changed in the quotes

8) The report may be submitted in a research journal   **Yes**   **No**

9) You have the absolute right to (a) take a break   **Yes**   **No**
    or (b) terminate the interview at any time & to
    (c) refuse to answer any questions that you are
    uncomfortable with

10) You have the absolute right to withdraw from the   **Yes**   **No**
    project at any time.

Signature..   Date..............

APPENDIX D

Volunteer Information Sheet

Researcher:	Simone Mallett
Telephone:	0113 273 5563
Department address:	Department of Clinical Psychology Hyde Terrace University of Leeds Leeds, LS2 9JT
E-Mail:	mrpsjm@leeds.ac.uk

I am currently doing a Doctorate course based at the University of Leeds. This involves an in-depth research report on a particular subject; my area of interest is looking into issues concerning various aspects of cult membership, and how these groups may influence their members. I feel that this area is under-researched in the UK, meaning that the perspective of former members has received little attention.

This sheet will hopefully provide you with enough information about the study to allow you to make an informed decision about whether or not you would like to participate. This research is subject to ethical guidelines set out by the British Psychological Society. These include principles such as obtaining the informed consent of participants before the research actually starts, notifying participants of their right to opt out at any point, and guaranteeing to protect the anonymity of anyone involved. It is also important to stress that it is neither my intention nor wish to "judge" people, and I am interested in interviewing both people who have had positive and negative experiences during their time as members. However, if you have any concerns or questions, or indeed if you would like to discuss any aspect of it whatsoever, then please do not hesitate get in touch.

The reason I am approaching you as a potential research participant is that you have been a member of a cult. Specific areas of interest are learning about how you came to join the cult, the ways in which you feel the group influenced you while you were in it, as well as the effects of this immediately after leaving. Finally I would be interested to hear what your feelings are now about the whole experience. In practice, this would involve interviewing you somewhere where you feel comfortable. This interview would probably last about 1 ½ hours, although it is difficult to put a precise time on it, as issues may inevitably come up during our discussion that were not originally anticipated. As a researcher I fully encourage an open and flexible process of this kind.

Another thing I should point out is that I will need to audio-tape the interview in order to be able to study the information you give me at a later date. The audio-tape will then be typed-up in the form of a transcript in order to help me do this. I might also want to use extracts from the transcript when reporting research, for example in presentations at academic conferences or articles in academic journals. It is worth re-emphasising however that **you will remain completely anonymous**, and any names or places mentioned will be changed so that no one will be able to identify you.

Please contact me at the above address or telephone number should you chose to participate in this research. Thank you very much.

APPENDIX E

Initial Pilot Interview Schedule

Question 1: If you were to choose the most important event that led to you joining the movement, what would this be?

(Was there a particular event that influenced your decision to join the group?)

Question 2: What event stands out in your memory regarding the time you spent in the movement?

Question 3 : Can you recall a specific event that you feel typified the way that the group influenced the way that you felt and acted?

Follow up: Can you recall a specific event that you feel reflected the way that you related to other members of the group?

Follow up: If you had to describe to somebody considering joining the movement an event that encapsulated what they should expect, what would this be?

Question 4: Can you give me an example of an event that influenced your decision to leave the movement?

Follow up: What do you feel the significance of this was for you?

Question 5: Can you give me an example of an event that illustrates how you felt when you left the movement?

Follow up: What do you feel the significance of this was for you?

Question 6: Thinking of yourself now and yourself in the movement - What would you say was the biggest single difference?

Follow up: Having left the movement can you give me an example of an event that highlights how you feel about alternative religious movements now?

Follow up: Has there been any event since leaving the movement that has made you consider returning to it?

APPENDIX F

Interview Schedule

1. Could you tell me what led to you joining the movement?
    - Follow up: Could you give me an example of an experience that you consider to be especially important to this?
    - Prompt: What do you feel it was about this experience that proved so significant?

2. What stands out in your memory regarding the time you spent in the movement?
    - Follow up: Could you give me an example of a particular experience that you felt to be especially memorable?
    - Prompt: What do you feel it was about this experience that proved significant to you?

3. Do you feel the group influenced the way you felt and acted?
    - Follow up: Can you give me an example of an experience that illustrates this?
    - Prompt: In what ways do you feel being in the movement made a difference to you?

4. Could you tell me what influenced your decision to leave the movement?
    - Follow up: Could you give me an example of a particular experience that was especially significant to this?
    - Prompt: What do you feel it was about this experience that proved so significant?

5. Could you tell me how you felt when you left the movement?
    - Follow up: Could you give me an example of an experience which illustrates this?
    - Prompt: What do you feel that it was about this experience that proved significant to you at this time?

6. Thinking of yourself now and yourself in the movement - What would you say was the biggest single difference?
    - Follow up: How do you feel about alternative religious movements now?
    - Prompt: Has there been any experience since leaving the movement that has made you consider returning to it?

After interview number 5, the final "prompt" in question 6 was dropped and the following question was added: "What do you feel mental health professionals should know about how this experience has affected you?"

At the end of each interview the following question was asked: "Is there anything that we have not covered that you think is important?"

Prompts used:
→ Correct me if I am wrong because I do not want to misrepresent what you said/what this experience meant to you, but are you saying...
→ Can you think of an event that typified this experience for you?
→ What do you feel that someone close to you would say was influential to you at this time?
→ Does anything stand out in your memory regarding this time?
→ It sounds like that was...
→ May be if you think back to the time when you were (in the group)
→ How do you feel those around you were influenced by this experience?
→ Could you tell me more about that...

After the first 5 interviews, the following prompts were used when descriptions of the effects on individual identity were given:
➤ That sounds really interesting – can you tell me more about that?
➤ What do you feel actually happened to your identity?
➤ What role do you feel your common beliefs as a group played in that?

APPENDIX G

FOLLOW UP QUESTIONNAIRE REGARDING ACCURACY OF ANALYSIS

Please comment on any aspects that you feel do not accurately reflect your experience

1) Do you feel that my suggested models and the categories and codes that they were built from accurately reflect your experience?

2) Do you feel that I have missed out anything that would further clarify what you experienced?

3) Do you feel that my analysis of what happens to an individual's identity while in a given movement – i.e. that it switches to a group identity – accurately reflects your experience?

4) Do you feel that you experienced a type of bereavement reaction when you left the movement, as suggested by my analysis?

5) Do you feel that my analysis will facilitate better understanding among those who come into contact with an ex-member of a religious cult?

Please add any further comments or suggestions and continue on another sheet if necessary

Appendix H

Sample of transcript

S: I mean I remember having to make a list of all the sins I had committed prior to joining and then having to burn it in a ceremony, while repenting – which meant not only feeling but showing regret for them – you know displaying regret to others and telling them all about it. Also to pay for my sins I did four seven day water fasts and winters of cold showers! I know I sound like such a mug! ...Yeah that's another good example of how strongly I believed in it all.

I: Going on from there – In what ways do you feel being in the movement made a difference to you?

S: Well basically I had not just changed my beliefs but I had adopted an ENTIRELY new identity if you like. I mean I was very different to how I was before I was involved...I suppose maybe this identity was like a mask that I pulled over my eyes to screen out influences and ideas that might challenge my new beliefs.

I: Now that sounds really interesting - I wonder if you could tell me more about what you feel happened to your identity?

S: In a way you could say that I abandoned my identity and so changed the way I behaved for that of a higher or more noble cause – Little did I know but that's it - what I believed – It goes back to me being a spiritual person and all that probably – Oh I don't know really but I know that I thought that I was doing the best by doing what the church believed to be correct and I really believed that. We were acting for the greater good or at least for God's and Moon's greater good. I mean when we took on the church's ideals we thought of ourselves as being transformed, enlightened and empowered and we would reinforce this idea to each other – praising each other for our sacrifices and so forth - in fact we expected it from each other in a way as we were now above the world who of course was not enlightened by the church's philosophy. Have I made that clear?

I: Yes you have thank you – you see as far as possible I don't want to misrepresent you and what things meant to you...

S: Well...its extremely difficult to put into words because the church became everything so it seemed natural to be working towards salvation and a better world so your own needs no longer seemed so important. I mean spiritual life rather than physical life took up your life and governed any decisions you may make. So ultimately there was no room to be a person who maybe was feisty for example or whatever...as such because it is God and M (Leader's name) – who we thought of as the Messiah who wanted you to act in a certain way and it would not be right to argue with that because they know better – You are insignificant if you like but you can be significant by furthering the cause. Furthering the cause makes you feel worthwhile...

I: Right, yeah, I see..

S: You see I can't stress enough that anything that contradicted M...(leader's name)'s teachings was regarded as coming from Satan, and we were instructed not to give and take so to say - with these influences. They had to be shut out. Also a huge factor was that changing who you were and what you did brought benefits in terms of approval from other members. So you see letting this slip for a moment brought disapproval and fear that I was being "invaded by Satan".

APPENDIX I

Series of one type of memo
- exploring preliminary links in the data

GOD AS AUDIENCE – HE SEES EVERYTHING

*

IMPORTANCE OF FAITH

**

POINT OF GROUP = MESSIANIC MISSION – Importance of Evangelising

*

*

EXCLUSIVITY/ELISTISM + POLARISATION TO OUTSIDE WORLD – "US & THEM"

*

*

LEADERS AND GROUP HAVE GOD'S AUTHORITY = Justifies their actions/demands

*

*

CONFORMITY AND SUBMISSION TO LEADERSHIP

*

*

*

GROUP OVER INDIVIDUAL > SWITCH TO GROUP IDENTITY

*

*

HIGH STANDARDS OF GROUP

*

*

GOD HAS HIGH STANDARDS > PUNISHING GOD
CONTROL/ MANIPULATION OF FAITH AND INTERPRETATIONS justified

*

FEAR OF NOT LIVING UP TO GOD'S STANDARDS + LEADER'S/GROUP'S STANDARDS WHO HAVE GOD'S AUTHORITY

*

*

FEAR OF DIVINE SANCTIONS

**

FEAR OF REJECTION BY GROUP > OUTSIDE WORLD = HELL

US AND THEM – RELATIONSHIP TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD

■■■

ELISTISM/EXCLUSIVITY OF GROUP > MESSIANIC MISSION
✱

POLARISATION – outside world bad – go to hell/ inside world good – go to heaven
✱

Importance of evangelising – save world
✱

✱

GOD AS AUDIENCE
✱

✱

LEADERSHIP HAS DIVINE AUTHORITY + GROUP AS GOD
✱

SUBMISSION TO LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE
SALVATION ONLY THROUGH CONFORMING TO GROUP
✱

✱

GROUP OVER INDIVIDUAL – SWITCH TO GROUP IDENTITY
✱

Reinforced by influence/control within the group
Denigration of critical thinking
Inner Conflict but guilt
✱

FEAR OF NOT LIVING UP TO GOD'S/ LEADER'S/GROUP'S STANDARDS
✱

✱

MANIPULATION/INFLUENCE OVER BELIEFS AND INTERPRETATIONS
✱

✱

FEAR OF DIVINE SANCTIONS/REJECTION FROM GROUP = outside world = hell
✱

✱

CUT OFF TIES WITH OUTSIDE WORLD – Isolation from society
Cut off ties with family
Influence/control over information by group
✱

IGNORANCE OF OUTSIDE WORLD
✱

✱

DISTRUST OF SOCIETY
✱

SECRECY + PROTECTIVE BEHAVIOUR OF GROUP
✱

✱

REJECTION BY GROUP AFTER LEAVING – now outsider = evil

■■■

Links to - Bereavement reaction after leaving
- Negative emotional consequences + Regret
- Identity problems after leaving
- Practical difficulties adjusting
- Continuing fears of divine sanctions
- Effects on faith

INFLUENCE/CONTROL
Elements = Control over relationships

Control over environment
Control over faith/beliefs
■■■
Causes INNER CONFLICT but > GOD AS AUDIENCE + Importance of MESSIANIC MISSION
+

Belief = LEADERS HAVE DIVINE AUTHORITY = justifies their actions
*

Upheld by: **SUBMISSION TO HIERARCHICAL LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE OF GROUP**
*

*

*

Demands of environment/leaders = HIGH STANDARDS + CONFORMITY FROM GROUP MEMBERS
*

*

Encourages DENIGRATION OF CRITICAL THINKING + SELF-SACRIFICE
*

*

*

GROUP INTERESTS ABOVE INDIVIDUAL ONES
*

SWITCH TO GROUP IDENTITY
*

Encouraged by relationship to outside world – ISOLATION, SECRECY, PROTECTIVE BEHAVIOUR OF GROUP
+

US & THEM – ELITISM OF GROUP = Only answer – resulting in POLARISATION to outside world = hell
*

*

so FEAR OF REJECTION FROM GROUP > outside world = hell
FEAR OF DIVINE SANCTIONS > outside world = hell
FEAR OF LEADERS > Who have divine authority
*

*

FEAR OF NOT LIVING UP TO GROUP STANDARDS + fear of punishment
*

*

Further encourages conformity and obedience + denigration of critical thinking > erosion of free will
*

*

Less likely to question group/leaders > links to abuse and susceptibility to influence/control

SUBMISSION TO HEIRARCHICAL LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE WITHIN GROUP
■■■

LEADERSHIP HAS DIVINE AUTHORITY – are closer to God so represent God
GOD AS AUDIENCE
*
*

LEADERSHIP USES INFLUENCE/CONTROL OVER INDIVIDUALS
*
*

DEMANDS CONFORMITY FROM GROUP MEMBERS
*
*

GROUP OVER INDIVIDUAL – Group goal = Messianic Mission = more important than
individual needs/wishes
*
*

SELF SACRIFICE + DENIGRATION OF CRITICAL THINKING
*
*

SALVATION/ACCEPTANCE ONLY THROUGH CONFORMING TO THE
GROUP/LEADERSHIP DEMANDS
*
*

SWITCH IDENTITY TO GROUP IDENTITY > link - rationalisation via cognitive
dissonance
*

Upheld by FEAR OF NOT LIVING UP TO LEADERSHIP/GROUP
STANDARDS = punishment – fear of divine sanctions + rejection from
group = outside world = hell
*
*

Upheld by group's relationship to outside world – US & THEM/
POLARISATION/ISOLATION FROM SOCIETY
*

INDIVIDUAL INSULATED WITHIN GROUP + EXCLUSIVITY/ELITISM >>GROUP
WORLD VIEW = CORRECT
■■■

Links to: INNER CONFLICT (Group versus individual)
Negative Emotional Consequences
Repercussions on others
Identity problems after leaving
Regret – anger etc.
Continuing fear of divine sanctions
Re-examination of faith

************************************ABUSE**********************************

Upheld by – SECRECY
ISOLATION FROM MAINSTREAM SOCIETY – they can not police what goes on
GROUP'S BELIEFS ARE THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY AND ABOVE SECULAR
LAW
GOD AS AUDIENCE – ultimate authority
♦
♦
BELIEF THAT LEADERS HAVE DIVINE AUTHORITY – justifies actions
♦
♦
FRAGMENTED SENSE OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS
♦
♦
SUBMISSION/OBEDIENCE TO LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE
♦
♦
INFLUENCE/ CONTROL OVER RELATIONSHIPS & CONTROL OVER
PARENTING
♦
Causing FRAGMENTED SENSE OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS
♦
♦
GROUP CONFORMITY
♦♦
DENIGRATION OF CRITICAL THINKING
♦
♦
GROUP OVER INDIVIDUAL
♦
♦
SWITCH IDENTITY TO GROUP IDENTITY
♦♦
♦
FEAR OF REJECTION FROM GROUP – HELL
♦
♦
But INNER CONFLICT (Group versus individual) > negative emotional effects on
individual

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Links to:

Questioning group
Reasons for leaving
Negative emotional effects after leaving – e.g. guilt/anger
Regret
Repercussions on others