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A Qualitative Exploration of Cultic Experience in Relation to Mental Health Difficulties

Yvonne Susan Walsh

Thesis Submitted for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Counselling Psychology

City University

School of Social Sciences

August 2009

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Acknowledgements

There are four academics I would like to thank:

Dr Janet Feigenbaum – who made a fair appraisal

Dr John Rhodes – who helped me to conceptualise my use of statistics

Professor Pam James – my supervisor for the last year or so of my research and who has been an absolute pleasure to work with and whose clarity and calm good humour has been a gift

Alan Frankland – my friend, from whom I learnt a huge amount about writing

I would also like to thank David – my husband, who made it all possible

Joy – my daughter, for bearing with me!

Lastly I would like to thank all those who helped me to begin to answer some of my questions by making their thoughts and feelings available to me.

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Abstract

The thesis explores the nature of religious cults and the question of what it is about such groups that leads some former members to experience them as producing lasting harm. The methodology of Classical Grounded Theory is identified as the most suitable for this enquiry and two interrelated studies using Classical Grounded Theory are reported. The first gives rise to a coherent and overarching conceptual model of the structure and function of groups that are now defined within the study as 'mission focussed'. The second study produces a model of the elements that contribute to what certain members of such groups have identified as lasting difficulties. It is theorised that the mission focussed function of certain groups interacts with elements in some individuals (principally their perception of themselves as 'outsiders' with a consequent high 'need to belong') to produce effects which participants within this research experience as lasting difficulties in living. The thesis goes on to explore which main-stream psychological paradigms might lend themselves to an understanding of this interaction and the emergent theory is related to psychotherapeutic constructs to derive an approach which may enable psychotherapists who undertake work with this client group to have a sound conceptual framework underlying their interventions. In the conclusion the potential generalisability of some of the constructs is considered.

Chapter 1 Introduction, the Context for the Research, Defining the Groups to be Studied, and the Research Questions

1 Introduction: the Author's Perspective

The author of this thesis has been involved with cults for over 30 years; firstly as a member of a cult, then as an ex-member and then for more than sixteen years as a psychologist (currently a Chartered Counselling Psychologist) occasionally working with ex-members and researching this somewhat elusive topic (Walsh, 200I, Walsh & Bor 1996, Walsh, Russell & Wells, 1995). Having had this experience I therefore make no claim to come to this research topic naively, being aware of a considerable body of evidence about groups that have been variously called high demand groups, new religious movements, cults, and sects or even charismatic groups (Barker, 1994, Davis & Davis 1984, Furnari, 2005, Hassan, 1988, Zablocki, 2001). Existing evidence about such groups, some empirical and some anecdotal, raises many interesting questions. However, it is the issue of what it is about certain of these groups and their practices which appears to cause some people to emerge from membership of such groups with long term difficulties in living[1] (Barnett, 1980, Fromm-Reichmann, 1960, Greenberg & Mitchell, 1984, Sutton, 2000), such as substance misuse, depression, suicidality, anxiety, panic attacks, low self-esteem and so forth that has most intrigued me and has led to the decision to undertake this research study.

Responses to these questions will not only be affected by previous engagement with such groups but will inevitably also be informed by the author's experience of being a Consultant Counselling Psychologist within a large mental health Trust where the notion of evidence based practice along with practice based evidence and research is recognised as essential to the work (Corrie, 2003). Furthermore,

[1] This phrase has been used throughout this thesis for what has been described elsewhere as psychological problems, psychopathology and so forth, except where it relates to other, published work, and in such a case these difficulties have been referred to in the manner in which the authors have used.

being a Counselling Psychologist is not solely a career decision; it says something about the individual's philosophy of life and also reflects on her[2] approach to carrying out and using research. As such, over time, such a person would have had to reflect on and develop a rationale for their philosophy of practice and research. The rationale underlying this study does not conflict with best practice and traditional research paradigms, but philosophically sits most comfortably within what could be seen as a 'softer' empirical research tradition.

Counselling Psychology as a profession mostly works with the client's world-view as a guide to practice. It espouses a broadly phenomenological and relational frame: Thus for example, Counselling Psychologists construct case formulations or case conceptualisations by drawing together theories and data from their discipline base with data emanating from their relationship with their client and privileging particularly the client's experience and sense of where the endeavour of therapy should be focussed (see for example Beck, Wright, Newman, & Liese 1993, Persons, 1991).

Corrie in 2003 raises for consideration the appropriateness of Counselling Psychologists using evidence derived from nomothetic research, that is to say research that relates to the abstract idea of a theoretical frame encompassing the notion of 'universality'. Such an approach is commonly contrasted with research that is idiographic and therefore derived from the individual, her experiences, her beliefs and how she makes sense of the world. The reasons that are given for this are that adopting a nomothetic stance suggests that it is accepted that there are commonalities shared by most if not all minds. An ideographic stance celebrates the uniqueness of the individual. As Counselling Psychologists work from a phenomenological position, but also respect the traditions of scientific psychology they endeavour to combine the strengths of both of these explanations and this is what this thesis will endeavour to do (see also Walsh, 2003).

---

[2] To avoid sexism and clumsy writing gender will alternate between chapters

Counselling Psychologists are continually negotiating with clients a shared understanding of their client's world-view. If a therapist is not in harmony with her client the therapeutic endeavour they are engaged in will not be very successful; as both participants will be working to different agendas. It is suggested here that this skill of negotiating meaning is just as relevant within different activities such as research (Walsh, 2003).

2 The Context for the Research

2.1 Elements of Risk to Group Members and the Wider Society

The climate of the present times with the recent rise of theocratic states, fundamentalist terrorist cells, suicide bombers and the so-called war on terror has focussed attention on how religious and politico-religious cults and military sub-groups operate and influence their members to carryout violent and apparently self-destructive acts. The origins of this study predate most of these issues although it may eventually throw some light on them.

This study is part of an earlier set of concerns about other cult groups and cult membership. The issue of involvement in these groups[3] and its consequences is one which has at times over the past five decades been perceived as controversial, partly because of the secrecy which surrounds their practices (Hassan, 1988, Keiser & Keiser, 1987, Singer, Temerlin, & Langone, 1990). Some researchers, clinicians and cult observers claim that an element of both psychological harm and even physical risk to members can be present within what they term as cults (Keiser & Keiser, 1987, Landau-Tobias & Lalich, 1994, Lifton, 1961, Zablocki 2001a, Zablocki 2001b). However, this is an assertion which is challenged by other researchers who view these groups as new religious movements (Colman, 1984 and Robbins, 2001, Melton & Moore 1982). The ensuing debate between these two points of view considers whether there are elements of risk involved in how these groups operate on a psychological level.

The debate also addresses the question of what methods of control, if any, are used within these milieus, and the effects of any such control methods on group

[3] See section 5.1 page 24 for explanation of the use of this phrase.

members (Colman, 1984, Keiser & Keiser, 1987, Lifton, 1961, Melton & Moore, 1982, Walsh, 2001, Wright, 1987, Van Zandt, 1991). In view of the closed nature of these milieus (Lifton, 1961, Walsh, 2001) it seems likely that very few psychologists have had direct knowledge of the practices, beliefs and issues that have been associated with the psychological problems sometimes experienced by members of such groups. Suggestive evidence in relation to these control issues comes from the indisputable fact that some of these organisations have proven harmful to many of their members (and others outside of the groups), in a manner which appears incomprehensible to the majority of people within our society (Davis, 1984, Enroth, 1994, Walsh, 2001). But such evidence of harm, whilst showing that some aversive controls may be present does not tell us anything about the mechanism of control present in these groups.

2.2 Evidence of Risk to the Wider Society

It has been estimated that there are between 500 and 800 different groups described as cults active in the United Kingdom with membership ranging from under ten people to thousands (Howarth, Personal Communication. September 1999). Some of the methods of operation of these cults may be discordant with the wider society in which they operate. Additionally, sometimes with a pivotal point such as the new millennium as a catalyst, members' conviction and feelings of commitment to their cause can take on an ominous hue. An example of this is The Aum Shinrikyo a group which operates in Japan and the Far East, whose members believe they should try to bring about world change using the techniques of guerrilla warfare, causing death and injury to people, whom those outside of the Aum would view as innocent bystanders.

As the new millennium approached and passed there was increased activity within many of the new cultic movements. Many of these organisations promise a future paradise on earth, with a prescribed stratagem for the membership to bring this about, and as such they could be identified as millenarian cults (Keesing, 1981). Others predicted the end of the world with the focus for this event being the New Millennium, the beginning of which was mutable, some claimed it for the year 2000 others the year 2001. The date for the end of the world can be quite idiosyncratic. It

was, for instance, believed by the Movement for the Restoration of the Twelve Commandments to be due in March 2000, when over 1000 members of this particular Ugandan cult lost their lives, many through strangulation. The death toll was a stark demonstration of what appears to be some form of extreme control exercised within such groups (Mayer, 2001).

Common predictions within many of these groups relate to the return of Jesus Christ, the appearance of the Anti-Christ and the battle of Armageddon. For example, one group; The Family International (previously known as The Children of God or the Family of Love) had suggested that a move to the more mountainous regions of India would be a good idea for their members. This was because they predicted that the One World Government of the Anti-Christ will be brought about through the use of computers. They believed that the number 666 written on the foreheads of all people (as prophesied in the Book of Revelations in the Bible) would be a computer microchip inserted under the skin. This micro-chip would allow people to buy and sell i.e. to engage in normal social functioning and this would demonstrate that they were part of the Anti-Christ's system. The Family International hoped that by relocating to a less industrialised area that they would be able to avoid the insertion of microchips at this time. As a consequence of remaining microchip free they anticipate eventually going "*to live with Jesus in New Jerusalem, the Heavenly City*" thus avoiding the insertion of micro chips altogether (Page, Personal Communication December, 2000). Another group; The Students of the Seven Seals (Branch Davidians) taught that there would be world wide disaster in March 1999 and that David Koresh would return in August 1999 to raise the dead and judge humankind (Kersletter, 2004).

The debacle at Waco which brought about the deaths of David Koresh's Branch Davidians in 1993 reminds us of the mass suicide brought about by voluntary ingestion of cyanide by 900 people in Guyana 1978: These people were followers of the Reverend Jim Jones, members of a group know as the 'People's Temple'. Over 200 of the dead were children, while another 200 were over the age of 65. Babies had cyanide squirted into their mouths whilst adults queued up to drink theirs which was mixed into Kool-Aid. There was also a mass suicide of 21 female and 18 male members of the Heaven's Gate extra-terrestrial group in March 1997 and there

have also been other mass suicides for example those in The Order of the Solar Temple in Europe and Canada.

Although different from these ritual events the most recent murder/suicide attributable in some way to involvement in such a group happened in January 2005. It involved the murder by the son of the present day spiritual leader of the Family International of one of the members of the commune in which he was brought up and then his subsequent suicide. Although this appears to be quite a sensational introduction to a doctoral thesis it serves to underline the necessity for the development of a mainstream psychological understanding of the function and functioning of such groups.

3 The Research Questions

The Author's personal and professional background and the intellectual and practical issues outlined above have been brought together in the research which forms the basis of this thesis. Put as simply as a complex set of issues will allow, this thesis explores the following key research question:

In what ways do the structure and functioning of the kinds of groups that are variously termed cults, new religious movements, high demand groups or charismatic groups etcetera interact with self-identified elements present in certain members of cults (as defined within this thesis) to produce effects, which have been described here as lasting difficulties in living, such as substance misuse, depression, suicidality, anxiety, panic attacks, low self-esteem and so forth?

This question will be answered through an exploration of three more detailed questions:

1. Can an analysis of a body of descriptive and theoretical material give rise to a coherent and overarching conceptual model of the structure and function of such groups?

2. Can an analysis of the testimonies of those who identify themselves as having long term difficulties in living, which they attribute to their

membership of such groups, produce a potentially generalisable theoretical model of the common elements in their way of relating to the world that contribute to these difficulties?

3. Which main stream psychological paradigms might lend themselves to an understanding of the interaction between the findings from questions 1 and 2, and which will be most useful to enable psychotherapists who undertake work with this client group to have a sound conceptual framework underlying their interventions?

Accordingly, it is intended that this thesis will develop an analysis – largely at a psychological level – of the common features of groups which have been termed variously as cults, new religious movements, high demand groups or charismatic groups. This will allow the development of a theoretical understanding to emerge of (1) the psychosocial processes[4] experienced by those individuals studied here, (2) the psychological processes[5] used to make sense of their experiences of joining, belonging to and leaving such a group, (3) the psychological sequelae of these experiences, and (4) common features identified by participants studied here as being present in their way of relating to the world from before they joined their cult, and who described themselves as experiencing long-term difficulties on leaving their cult.

It must be noted that it is not the purpose of this thesis to explain why there appear to be high functioning and psychologically sound people operating in cults or to deny that such people exist. Such a research topic would need to be addressed by using a different sample of membership to that which has participated in this research study.

By carrying out this research a theoretical explanation will be generated of (1) how the psychosocial processes found within cults and the psychological processes used (to process their experiences) by individuals who self-report negative

[4] See section 5.6 page 32 for an explanation of this term

[5] See section 5.6 page 32 for an explanation of this term

psychological consequences of having been involved with cults interact and (2) if there are negative consequences for such individuals, how can these be addressed psychotherapeutically.

4 The Format of this Thesis

Following this introduction this thesis approaches the generation of psychological theory using a methodology that can be used with either with either qualitative or quantative data (Glaser, 2003), with the reasoning for this explored in Chapter 2. The use of this approach shapes both how the research questions are posed (see page 20) and how the thesis is constructed; rather than follow the format of Introduction, Literature Review, Design, Methodology, Analysis, Results and Discussion, which would be the norm for a quantative, experimental psychology thesis, a different structure has to emerge as explained below.

The purpose of using a qualitative research model is to allow theory which is grounded in the data to emerge through the analysis, rather than by testing one or more hypothesis which are derived from previous research and the literature on the subject (Charmaz, 1995). Thus, the purpose of the review of the literature and previous research, which in experimental psychological research forms a starting point to direct the path of travel of the researcher, is different within this qualitative paradigm. This is especially so when the method of research used is that of Classical Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1992, 2001, 2004), the research paradigm chosen for this study. In this approach the knowledge base held within the literature is reviewed subsequent to the analysis to test whether the new (grounded) theory derived from the data either fits with the 'given' wisdom of previous research, or whether it contradicts previous research or whether it casts a completely different light on what has been known previously. It also serves to further delineate the theory's boundaries of applicability, helping to broaden the theory and testing whether it may be more generally applicable (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

It is also the case that in the idealised form of the model the researcher would not have any pre-formed notions about the material so that in reviewing the raw data of such research for commonalities of ideas etc the groupings would emerge wholly

from the material and not from the pre-theorising and imagination of the researcher. Even though this author cannot be said to be completely inexperienced in this respect, conducting and prefacing the analysis with a traditional literature search and review would unnecessarily further disrupt this 'naïve' process. For these reasons presenting the literature review close to the beginning of the thesis would misrepresent the research process.

This method of research then dictates the place of this previous knowledge base within the structure of such a thesis; any literature review is carried out post hoc and not at the beginning of the process, as doing so would lead to the analysis being fashioned from outside of the data, rather than allowing it to emerge from and be grounded within the data (Charmaz, 1995). Consequently, within the structure of this thesis the knowledge base held within the literature is located subsequent to the data analysis and the purpose that it is used for is to analyse the newly generated theory in relation to this knowledge base. That is to say developing the grounded theory with regards to previous findings, rather than shaping the derivation of theory in the first instance thereby in effect treating the literature as more data (Dick, 2003).

4.1 The Structure of this Thesis

Chapter 1 An introductory chapter in which the reader is given an explanation of what is being studied and why

Chapter 2 Methodology and Data collection

Chapter 3 The first Classical Grounded Theory analysis (Glaser, 1992, 2001, 2004) is carried out

Chapter 4 Theory emerging from the first analysis is integrated into the previously established knowledge base from within the literature

Chapter 5 The second Classical Grounded Theory analysis (Glaser, 1992, 2001, 2003, 2004) is carried out

Chapter 6 Theory which emerged from the first and second analyses is integrated into the previously established knowledge base from within the literature.

Chapter 7 The constructs which have emerged from this research are discussed, integrated and modelled. Suggestions are made as to how the negative psychological consequences of cultic experience can be addressed psychotherapeutically

Chapter 8 Evaluation and implications of this research

5 Some Definitions

Since the terms used in this area of enquiry are themselves controversial some attention must be given at the outset to questions of definition.

5.1 The Designation of the Groups to be Studied

The type of organisation that is explored here is often identified in the literature both interchangeably and generically as a cult or a new religious movement (See for example the work of Barker, 1994, Hassan, 1987, Langone, 1993 and Singer & Lalich, 1995). However, either way of describing these groups can have very negative emotional connotations for people involved in or around them. The term cult is offensive to those who respond positively to the groups, and the term new religious movement is equally offensive to those who are suspicious of them. This may be because within many western cultures the word 'religion' is still often seen in an affirmative light, and so by calling the groups religions, their detractors feel, they are being identified as 'good' groups. On the other hand because of the negative connotations associated with the term cult such a description of the groups is frequently seen as stigmatising for group members.

As stated previously, terms such as high demand group, new religious movement, cult, and sect or even charismatic groups are also used interchangeably throughout much of the literature about these groups (Baker, 1994, Davis, 1984, Furnari, 2005, Hassan, 1988, Lalich, 2004, Zablocki, 2001a). This plethora of terms can be problematic when seeking to write inclusively about such groups, therefore, until a definition is arrived at within this thesis, (which is an outcome of the research in Study 1), phrases like *such groups* and *these groups,* although ungainly, will be used with the intention being that the groups referred to in this way are those which

might elsewhere be described as high demand groups, new religious movements, cults, and sects or even charismatic groups (Barker, 1994, Furnari, 2005, Zablocki, 2001a inter alia). None of these popular designations for such groups will be used unless they are used by the authors cited or the definitions sought in this chapter make it clear that there is an appropriate name for the particular group or groups discussed.

5.2 Cult and Culture

Both cult and culture share the same Latin root; colere; to cultivate (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2003) and so it seems useful to take the exercise of definition a stage further and examine whether cults could be considered cultures in their own right. At this point the term "cult" is also used to signify other terms which have been included within this research area by writers such as Lalich (2004), Robbins (2001) and Zablocki (2001a) inter alia, for example high demand group, charismatic group or new religion. If such groups are indeed cultures in their own right this could have an impact on how best to study these groups.

5.2.1 An Anthropological Exploration

Anthropologists have sought over many years to understand and define the concept of culture. Anthropological definitions of the construct of culture begin with the idea of learned, accumulated experience. Keesing, in his book '*Cultural Anthropology*' (1981) says that a culture "*consists not of things and events that we can observe, count and measure; it consists of shared ideas and meanings*." He then goes on to expand on this saying;" *'a culture' is seen as a shared pool of knowledge to which individuals contribute in different ways and degrees" (*Keesing, 1981 p70 & p71-72)

This concept has been extended in various ways. Keesing cites Linton who in 1940 said that it is *"The sum total of knowledge, attitudes and habitual behaviour patterns shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society"* p68. Whereas Kroeber (1948) went further to include behaviour. He said that culture consists of the mass of learned transmitted motor reactions, habits, techniques, ideas and values – and the behaviour they induce.

Goodenough (1957/81) echoes this split and says there is a crucial distinction between patterns for behaviour and patterns of behaviour. He refers both to community patterns of living, with recurrent activities, which encompass material, and social arrangements and the structure of ideas, knowledge and experiences. This structure enables people to formulate actions and choose between alternatives, and this definition begins to allow us to see 'culture' as something that can be identified as an ideational system which can be transmitted cross-generationally.

Bodley in 1994 defined cultures as consisting of social organizational, religious and economic themes or categories. He too says that culture is the social heritage or tradition that is passed on to future generations, and that it consists of shared, learned human behaviour; a way of life with its own ideals, values or rules for living which are demonstrated by the way humans solve problems of adapting to the environment or living together. The shared aspect of culture would suggest that it is a social phenomenon which is learned rather than biologically inherited and that it involves patterned and interrelated ideas, symbols or behaviours with symbolic meanings that are arbitrarily assigned, but that are held in common within a society. For example, the colour white has different associations within different cultures; within a western culture it means purity, whereas within an Asian culture it can signify mourning.

The cross-generational aspect of culture has led some anthropologists, (see for example Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952 cited in Keesing, 1975) to treat culture as a superorganic entity, which exists beyond its individual human carriers. They would say that individuals are born into and are shaped by a pre-existing culture and that this culture continues to exist after they die. What these anthropologists argue is that the influence that individuals might have over a culture would itself be largely determined by the culture of which they are a part. Such a superorganic interpretation of culture might then imply a dehumanizing denial of 'free will,' in this case the human ability to create and change culture.

Bodley (1994) on the other hand departs from the superorganic approach and insists that culture includes its human carriers – there is therefore a reciprocal relationship between a culture and the actors that are within the culture. At the

same time, people can be deprived of their culture against their will. Many humanistic anthropologists would agree that culture is an observable phenomenon, and yet a people's unique possession.

In summary Hudleson (2004) has said that an anthropological definition of culture is one in which there is a shared set of both implicit and explicit values, ideas, concepts, and rules for behaviour allowing the functioning of a social group and enabling its perpetuation. Culture she would suggest can therefore be understood as a socially constructed reality that is both dynamic and evolving, which exists in the minds of its members – but is observable. She has called it "*the 'normative glue' that allows group members to communicate and work effectively together*" (Hudleson, 2004 p345).

This ownership of a culture by its members is echoed by UNESCO in their Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2002) in which it is stated:

> *"that culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs"* (UNESCO 2002 p6).

5.2.2 Applying an Anthropological Definition

So a definition of culture for this thesis must include the notion of patterns of behaviour that arise from a structure of ideas, knowledge and experiences which are interactively passed on through generations, but are also malleable by those individuals who make up the culture. Although this might suggest that the concept of free will is entrenched within this definition, malleability of cultural forms does not indicate free will, merely that members of the culture have some lee-way in applying and developing cultural norms, it is not necessarily known whether there are constraints on this lee-way from other aspects of the culture, from bio-psychological or sociological elements: all that has been suggested is that cultural phenomena sometimes/usually demonstrate a degree of malleability/variability between individuals and over time.

To return to the micro-societies that are the focus of this research; both those of a religious nature and those which are not religious and are therefore not cults in terms of Collins (1991) definition[6], it has been found that these groups have their own idiosyncratic structures and codes of behaviour. A good example of this is The Family International – a group that emerged from the American Bible belt, via California, in the late nineteen sixties. Their way of life has evolved over time from large quite autonomous communally based groups, into a homogenous society in which there are very specific rules for living.

These structured and quite defined ways of living, and the belief systems which have shaped them, differ from the cultures that they are nested within and have frequently engendered mistrust in those outside of such groups (see for example Clarke, 1976, 1977, 1978, Hassan, 1987). Because of a lack of comprehension in those who are outside the groups concerning their way of life and the antipathy that some of their practices raise, members of such groups are usually isolated from the cultures that surround them. In addition, these belief systems and ways of living, which are well defined and structured, that are different in pattern and practice between such micro-societies, but common in their presence, have now in many cases been passed onto the third generation.

5.2.3 Cultures or Sub-Cultures

However, before asserting that these groups are cultures in their own right it would be useful to undertake a brief examination of whether a more accurate description would be obtained by using the term sub-culture. As early as 1950 (cited in Middleton, 2002) David Riesman distinguished between a majority, "*which passively accepted commercially provided styles and meanings, and a 'subculture' which actively sought a minority style...and interpreted it in accordance with subversive values* p.361".

Middleton has defined a sub-culture as a group of people which is formed through a variety of methods in opposition to the culture that members were a part of (Middleton, 2002). A sub-culture is defined by a set of values, behaviour and the

[6] See section 5.4 page 30

attitudes of a particular group of people who are distinct from, but related to the dominant culture in their society (Bilton, Bonnett, Jones, Lawson & Skinner, 1996). Although it is a group within the broader society, a sub-culture has a lifestyle, values, and norms which are distinctive from those of the majority for a variety of reasons, such as the age of its members, their, class, ethnicity or race and so forth. The qualities that determine a distinct sub-culture may be a combination of elements such as aesthetic, religious, political, or sexual. The concept of sub-culture is associated with groups that deviate from cultural norms, rather than groups which have different cultural norms (Bilton et al., 1996).

The groups being studied in this thesis have developed their own separate patterns of living and structure of ideas, knowledge and experiences separate and distinct from their originating cultures, which are transmitted through generations. This sets them outside of the concept of a sub-culture and supports the idea of these groups being autonomous cultures, separate from the main stream culture of any country where they are situated (Bodley, 1994, Goodenough, 1957/81, Hodelson, 2004, Keesing, 1984). Proselytizing widely is a core practice of these groups; the membership is drawn from many cultures and thus they do not represent a sub-group of any one culture.

In addition to generally fulfilling the criteria for a culture, the type of group investigated in the second study is a new religion formed from outside any of the mainstream religions not in opposition to them. Since the groups studied here are not formed from an oppositional position to the cultural norm for religion, they do not meet Middleton's (2002) criteria for a sub-culture.

Having examined the anthropological definition of culture and related it to the groups studied here and refuted the idea that the groups studied in this thesis are simply sub-cultures, this then leads to the acceptance, for the purpose of this research, that a defining feature of these groups is that they are cultures in their own right.

5.3 Cults

The first study in this research investigates a wide spectrum of groups. However, in the second study the focus will be narrowed down and the groups that are to be investigated are specifically those that fit within a religious frame. Given that this is the case it is therefore necessary to begin to define as precisely as is possible at this time the type of organisation studied here. As “cult” appears to be the most frequently used term within the relevant literature with a psychological focus, it seems appropriate to begin by explaining and defining that term.

The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology (Reber, 1985) simply defines a cult as:

> *"A loosely constructed type of religious organisation with an amorphous set of beliefs and rituals. A distinguishing feature of a cult is the adherence to a particular individual who is seen as the guiding spirit behind these beliefs and rituals."* p169.

It further defines religion as:

> *"...a system of beliefs with either an institutionalised or a traditionally defined pattern of ceremony. ...Most, though not all religions share certain characteristics, notably the concept of a (or several) supreme being(s), the promise of a pathway to an ideal existence and an afterlife."* p637.

5.4 Cults in Relation to the Nature of Religion

This thesis, however, requires a more thorough understanding of the term cult as that is to be the focus for formal research. Thus, a more comprehensive definition is called for. Since the dictionary of psychology definition (above) includes the notion of religion it may be helpful to start with the work of Collins (1991) who in his book "*The Cult Experience: An Overview of Cults Their Traditions and Why People Join Them*" begins his definition with a discussion on the nature of religion. He says that religion is used as a vehicle of personal transformation to a higher level of existence, to achieve enlightenment or salvation. He goes on to say that the goal of religion is to bring individuals into a relationship with a more powerful reality, which

they assume exists, with this relationship focussed on a Supreme Being or Beings or the concept of such.

Collins (1991) describes religion as having three levels. The first is a mental level which encompasses concepts such as beliefs or doctrines. The second level is that of ritual and includes practices such as worship, marriage or death rites. The third is a social level which is identified by activities like fellowship or charity work. Religion he asserts is generally recognised within society as a church, this can be broadened to include mosque, temple or any place of gathering or organisation for a congregation of believers. These are formal organisations with unambiguous doctrines and rituals. Knowledge about the organisations' practices and teachings are available to members and those seeking to join. The individual belongs, usually as an accident of birth or geography, to this traditional organisation. Collins (1991) describes sects as beginning as protest movements within established organisations; they represent a schism within recognised doctrine and claim generally to be a return to earlier, purer definitions of doctrines.

Cults, Collins (1991) asserts encompass all the three levels of religion: Mental, ritual and social. Differing however, from both the main stream churches as they are newly formed and also from sects, in that rather than being a schism formed from within an established church, they represent a new religion formed from without (Collins, 1991). It is Collins' definition of cults, identifying them as religions, which will be the starting point for the definition used within the second study. The use of Collin's (1991) definition for any of the groups studied here makes it plain that the term cult is an acknowledgement of such a group's status as a religious organisation. So, to be clear, rather than being pejorative, the use of the term "cult" is intended as solely a descriptive term, additionally, it should be stressed the use of the term cult does not comment on the legitimacy or otherwise of such groups beliefs or practices.

5.5 Summary of the Primary Definition of Groups Studied in this Thesis

A definition has been developed for the purposes of this thesis which indicates that the type of group studied here is one which has the characteristics of a separate

culture in its own right. Such a group can therefore be seen to have patterns of behaviour arising from structured ideas, knowledge and experiences which are passed on through generations, but even the main features of the culture including ideas, knowledge, beliefs and practices are not fixed but malleable, permitting ongoing definition and redefinition of the driving ideas and concepts behind such a culture (Bodley, 1994, Goodenough, 1957/81, Hodelson, 2004, Keesing, 1984). In addition those groups investigated within the second study have within their structure and practices the three levels of religion (mental, ritual and social) that Collins (1991) describes. Since they are formed from outside any mainstream religious grouping they can accurately be described as cults according to Collins (1991) definition.

5.6 Psychosocial and Psychological Processes

To promote clarity of understanding it seems necessary to define carefully two particular terms as they are used within this thesis. The first of these is 'psychosocial process' this is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (2003) as:

> "*Pertaining to the influence of social factors on an individual's mind or behaviour, and to the interrelation of behavioural and social factors; also, more widely, pertaining to the interrelation of mind and society in human development.*"

Thus, psychosocial processes entail a close relationship between both psychological and social factors. Psychological factors include emotional processing, understanding of the self and others and such processes as the capacity to learn, perceive, and remember. It should be noted that these types of psychological processes can affect an individual's psychological well-being. Social factors are concerned with the capacity to form and manage relationships with other people and to learn and follow culturally appropriate social codes (Tavakol, Torabi, & Zeinaloo, 2006). Clearly in this definition the emphasis is on the interaction between social factors and human thoughts and behaviour and, in turn, the influence of thoughts and behaviours on people's social world. The interrelationship of the two sets of factors is central in the definition.

Furthermore, Martikainan, Bartley and Lahelma, (2002) propose that social processes can be understood by dividing them into three levels: Micro, Meso and Macro. The Macro level contains those social processes which relate to the control of property, money and legal structures. The Meso level contains psychosocial processes such as social networks and supports, work control, effort/reward balance, home control and family/work conflict. The Micro level contains psychosocial processes such as socialisation, social integration, and the development of autonomy and so forth. The latter two levels all occur within interpersonal relationships and require psychological processes at an individual level. Thus, it can be said that psychosocial processes operate between the completely social and the completely individual level as social factors influencing human thoughts and behaviour and, in turn, thoughts and behaviours influencing people's social world. The interrelationship of these two sets of factors is central in the definition of psychosocial processes used here (Martikainan, et al., 2002, Tavakol, et al., 2006).

Continuing with the conceptualisation of three levels of processes, it would appear that psychological processes such as perception, data storage and retrieval are appropriately located at the Micro level, which would accord with a positivist paradigm. However, it is apparent that other psychological processes such as developing defence mechanisms Freud, 1893 onwards) or the construction of schema for living (Beck, 1967 onward) or developing conditions of worth (Rogers, 1950 onwards) are appropriately located at the Meso level. Certainly within a phenomenological paradigm those processes described above which operate at a Meso level are also included when the term psychological process is used. There are numerous research studies published both within a grounded theory paradigm and other paradigms which use this term in such a manner (See for example Dongxiao & Brinton, 2006, Fyhr 2002, Maeda, Hagihara, Kobori & Nakayama, 2006 and Moore-Schaefer, 1991).

6 Summary of Chapter

In this chapter the topic of the thesis and reason for its choice has been introduced. The research question of this thesis has then been delineated and following a brief discussion of the way in which the qualitative methodology chosen for the study

influences the structure of the written thesis, a brief outline of the contents of this document has been given. Careful attention has finally been paid to exploring and defining a number of the key terms used within this thesis including a brief exploration of ideas about religion and culture which has served to begin to define such groups as those analysed in the first study and has given rise to a preliminary definition of the term ‘cult’ (which is to be used within the latter part of this thesis). The next chapter can now move forward to consider the issues of methodology, data collection and analysis in some depth.

Chapter 2 Methodological Approach

1 Research Methods within Counselling Psychological Research

Research within a Counselling Psychological framework in the UK is only just beginning to carve out its own particular space – this is understandable since Counselling Psychology as a separate profession has only existed in this country for 14 years. As the applied psychological profession that is founded on the basis of relational paradigms (Division of Counselling Psychology, 2004) it has tended to question traditional nomothetic approaches to research and the appropriateness of methods of analysis which focus on the discovery of 'normative' information about groups of participants.

1.1 Responsibility for Challenging Contemporary Definitions of Evidence

To accommodate this development in thinking with regard to research paradigms which appropriately reflect the world view of Counselling Psychology in the UK, Corrie's paper (2003) proposed that an expansion of what is considered valid evidence needs to take place. She suggests that this expansion should focus more on achieving an evidence base that addresses questions around process and content and utilizes a more qualitative approach to research. This approach, she proposes, should be carried out in combination with research protocols that include idiographic assessment and treatment located within a case formulation and case conceptualisation approach to therapy and research (Beck, et al., 1993, Persons, 1989). Nonetheless, the development of and use of evidence based practice (in the terms in which that phrase is traditionally used) cannot be entirely dismissed by Counselling Psychologists because much of the fundamental theoretical underpinnings of Counselling Psychology derive from this type of research (see for example the seminal work of Woody, McLellan, Luborsky, & O'Brien, 1986).

Having identified that for Counselling Psychologists the sole use of empirically-based nomothetic research is problematic; those working within such a structure have to take responsibility to use a more epistemologically sophisticated approach in their research, incorporating a wider base of research protocols. The complexity of thinking needed to develop this sophistication will allow us to enter into what

Moran has described as "*profound engagement with a quandary*" (1999, p45). However, this must be done in a way that is congruent with the belief system that underlies the notion of Counselling Psychology.

Corrie's (2003) point that researchers also need to consider their position in relation to others' research and others' response to their research is well made. The capacity of research to be used to influence does not necessarily reside with an informed readership. Once research is published and in the public domain its findings are open to implementation and interpretation by a raft of 'consumers'. No matter how good the research is and what its viability for directing both therapeutic input and psychological theorising, if those that interpret it are not appropriately informed, then the benefit that could be derived from the research may be transformed into harm and researchers need to be aware of this both when carrying out research and in deciding when and how it is presented for public consumption (Walsh, 2003).

These issues have had to be taken into consideration when deciding which design and methodological approach to use within this research thesis. As a Counselling Psychology thesis it had firstly to be true to the philosophies of Counselling Psychology using research methods rooted in its subject matter, which examine both process and content. Additionally, the evidence base and research findings would need to be transparent to both the scientist practitioner and the lay person, to lessen the chance of misinterpretation.

1.2 Studying the Groups Investigated here as Separate Cultures

Accepting that these groups can be seen as distinct cultures (as discussed in Chapter 1) can be seen as imposing certain restraints on how they may be studied. A move towards determining a method of study appropriate for intercultural research comes from cross-cultural psychiatry. Within cross-cultural psychiatry and medical anthropology, a distinction has been made between the emic and etic frameworks for social analysis. These constructs distinguish analytical frameworks that are rooted in the culture of the group under study, incorporating the 'insiders' perspective (emic) from those based on professional ideologies immovably

established within the outsider's perspective (etic) (Headland, Pike, & Harris, 1990). Thus, from an emic frame, a study of local concepts is rooted in the meanings attributed to these concepts by those individuals who are both rooted in them and maybe helped derive them, and who understand the concepts from within their own frame of reference. However, an etic study is one which employs concepts rooted in the culture of the researcher and so may be more ethnocentric and have less meaning for those whom the research studies.

The majority of conventional research carried out into the groups studied here (see for example research by Barker, 1989 and Clarke, 1976, 1977, 1978) has investigated them from an etic viewpoint. That is to say; the researchers view the groups as extensions of their own culture and use their own frame of reference for developing codes for analysing data. Accordingly, these and other researchers have frequently worked from their own perspective (etic) imposing their own cultural constraints on their data and in doing this are not validating the experience of all participants (Headland et al., 1990). Implicit within this kind of research is a type of cultural-centricity which can lead to what Glaser (2001, 2002) has described as 'forcing'. That is to say making the data fit the preconceived ideas of the researcher, rather than allowing the theory to emerge from the data. Awareness of 'forcing' should lead to researchers questioning the appropriateness of their approach to this subject matter and the exploration of alternative, more appropriate paradigms, and research methods. With this in mind, this study is working from the premise that the groups studied here appear to meet the criteria for alternative cultures; cultures with their own world views, community patterns of living and structure of ideas, knowledge and experiences separate and distinct from their originating cultures (Bodley, 1994). This premise then informs the approach used and also suggests that research should be rooted within an emic frame to allow for the development of an understanding of those who have experienced these cultures own meanings and methods of aculturatization.

It could be suggested that it is arrogance to suppose that any outsider could 'walk in the shoes' of another culture and that the only possible way to study other cultures by definition has to be etic. However, the author of this thesis being in the position of having been a member of a cult and of being a first generation ex-member; has,

the experience of being part of mainstream UK culture before joining a cult: experience of the radically different culture within such a group and subsequently a life out side that culture again after leaving. This allows for both an etic and an emic melding of understanding of these groups and their processes and enables the study to be grounded in a more thorough understanding of cult meanings. It seems possible that these meanings can now usefully be discussed using concepts and ideas common to the academic and professional world without the filter of either preconceived professional (etic) notions (rooted within a different culture to that which is studied here) or a loss of data due to there being misunderstandings in the translation or invalidation of participants' contributions which appear not to 'fit' these preconceived cultural perspectives. (See Walsh, 2001 for examples of such misunderstandings).

1.3 An Appropriate Research Paradigm

Additionally, as asserted above, for a Counselling Psychologist researching such groups there may be seen to be an expectation that the methods that are used in their research are in agreement with the world-view of this discipline. They must fit with the notion of knowing empathetically and respecting first person accounts as valid in their own terms (Division of Counselling Psychology, 2005). Not only do Counselling Psychologists have to engage with those that they work with therapeutically; both subjectively and inter-subjectively, respecting and acknowledging their values and feelings - any research they carryout should also be accomplished in a similarly respectful manner. This means that Counselling Psychologists must elucidate, interpret and negotiate between perceptions and world views not assuming the automatic superiority of any one way of experiencing, feeling, valuing or knowing (Division of Counselling Psychology, 2004). This appears to locate Counselling Psychology research within the emic paradigm without removing the Counselling Psychology practitioner from the etic perspectives of more traditional research common within their parent discipline. The intention here is to develop theory and research that is grounded in the professional practice and the values of the discipline as a whole. One method of research which does this is that of Classical Grounded Theory (Glaser 1992, 2001, 2002, Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

2 Using Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2000, Glaser, 1992, 2001, 2002, Glaser & Strauss 1967) is a qualitative method of research which derives its name from the practice of allowing theory to 'emerge' from data, thus grounding the theory within the data. The method came from the work of two sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss and was first expounded in their text *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). The research method they described was one which had been developed in opposition to the more traditional hypothetico-deductive approaches to scientific enquiry which were prevalent in those times, whilst seeking to maintain a rigorous and transparent framework for research.

The way grounded theory is designed makes it ideal for the study of psychosocial and psychological processes (as defined in Chapter 1) and for enabling psychologists to study the development of such processes, their maintenance and how they change (Charmaz, 1995). It permits the analysis of rich verbal data in a systematic, objective and qualitative manner. It is probably the longest and best established approach to the analysis of textual or verbal data, enabling research questions posed by such data to be addressed without compromising the richness of the analysis (Pauli & Bray, 1998). It also fits with the practice of respecting first person accounts as valid in their own terms that Counselling Psychologists carrying out research must apply (Division of Counselling Psychology, 2005).

2.1 Differentiating between Glaser's Classical Grounded Theory and Strauss and Corbin's Grounded Theory

Although when Glaser and Strauss began writing about grounded research in 1967 they were in agreement, over time they began to differ considerably in their approach. This culminated in Glaser (1992) writing a text; *Basics of Grounded Theory*, the purpose of which was to provide a critique of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research*. In this text Glaser outlined differences between his version of grounded research and that of Strauss and Corbin. For Glaser the theory should emerge naturally from the analysis, with no preconceived ideas on the part of the researcher about what the data will reveal, so categories and structure are not pre-planned and result from the emergent theory, rather than

from hypothesis testing. Whereas, what emerged from the structured methods described by Strauss and Corbin moved the theory back towards more traditional quantitative research methods, with considerable emphasis on retaining the notions of replicability, generalisability, verification and so forth. According to Glaser, what results from using the Strauss and Corbin method resembles more of a detailed description of the cultural scene, rather than an explanation of the processes and theoretical concepts underlying what is being studied. Glaser (1992, p71) maintains that the researcher "*should simply code and analyze categories and properties with theoretical codes which will emerge and generate their complex theory of a complex world.*" He believes that Strauss and Corbin (1990) with their assertion that the extraction of data requires a pre-structured paradigm, results in a full conceptual description of the material they are considering, but at the cost of developing truly emergent theory and that there is always a danger of researchers overlooking the true relevance and meaning of data by forcing it into the preconceived framework necessary to match Strauss and Corbin's strictures.

What Glaser suggests is that theory (an understanding of the underlying processes of a dynamic human phenomenon) emerges as a natural by-product of the processes of open coding, constant comparison and theoretical sampling and that the researcher begins his study "*with the abstract wonderment of what is going on that is an issue and how it is handled*" (1992, p 22).

2.2 Constructivist Grounded Theory

A third strand which one must be considered when deciding which methodology to use is that of Charmaz and the approach that she has described as Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2000). Charmaz explains that within Constructivist Grounded Theory the reality of what is taking place is constructed between the observer and the observed and that within this approach there is a focus on the accuracy of the description of what is being observed. However, for the purpose of theory generation within Classical Grounded Theory (Glaser, 2002) this accuracy of description is not relevant. This is because the task is not simply to describe what is being studied; it is to develop an understanding of the underlying processes that are present in the subject matter that is being investigated. This understanding is

achieved within Classical Grounded Theory by using Glaser's painstaking method of constant comparison linked with sensitive theoretical sampling with the emergent concepts being constantly fitted to the data, rather than the data being fitted to the preconceived structure of the investigation.

Charmaz says: *"…objectivist (classical) grounded theory methods foster externality by invoking procedures that increase complexity at the expense of experience*" (p 525). This may well be true, but as the focus of this thesis is not on simply describing experience but on discerning the meanings and psychosocial processes underlying these experiences, this is not a problem. From a Classical Grounded Theory perspective focusing on a constructivist approach to gain greater accuracy of description of events would not allow theory to emerge, but would be constraining it or as Glaser (2002) says; forcing the theory to fit the constructivist's description of reality, albeit a negotiated one.

2.3 The Choice of which Grounded Theory to use for this Research

In deciding which method of research would be the most appropriate when trying to derive an understanding of both the psychosocial processes at work in the type of groups studied here and the psychological processes used by ex-members to make sense of their experiences during and after their cult involvement, the analysis above indicates that Classical Grounded Theory rather than either Strauss and Corbin's Grounded Theory (Strauss, 1987, Strauss and Corbin, 1992), or Charmaz's Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2000) appears the most suitable. This is a method which generates a "*complex theory of a complex world*" (Glaser 1992, p71) that is derived from within the data, rather than imposed from the researcher; a method which derives theory which is emergent from the data. This means that the research method chosen will fit superbly the conceptualisation of the most appropriate way of exploring the groups as taking a principally emic stance; and as a qualitative research method of analysis it sits comfortably within the ethos of Counselling Psychology. Preferring Glaser's approach however, is by no means a rejection of all the insights into sampling, coding and analysis offered by the other Grounded Theory proponents.

In choosing to work within the framework of Glaser's Classical Grounded Theory this research has been conducted in such a way as to enable the emergence of theory fully grounded in the data derived from a multiplicity of sources.

> *"Rather than "Rich Thick Description," which is the goal of most contemporary ethnographic approaches (in the Geertzian tradition)...* (and perhaps phenomenological approaches also, (author's insertion))*..., a grounded theory study yields substantive theory. A theory may be thought of as an integrated set of hypotheses that has explanatory and predictive power. As such, the resultant theory should be both conceptual (in that it may be abstracted from the context(s)/condition(s) it was discovered in and subjected to different parameters and retain its conceptual integrity) and it should be dense (in that it subsumes multiple indicators of a pattern that has been named conceptually)" (Rhine, 2009).*

By the process of 'grounding' the search for meaning and understanding will be focussed on working from participants' own understandings as seen from their local frames of reference and from their own socially situated emic[7] worlds. Thus, building an innovative theory, rather than testing a previously established model by hypothetico-deductive methods. However, returning to the consideration of the legitimacy of combining the strengths of both the idiographic and nomothetic approach, if the data sampling that is used to generate the grounded theory can subsequently be shown to be representative enough it may allow some limited generalization to be made (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

2.4 Using Classical Grounded Theory

Classical Grounded Theory is extremely flexible in its application, with the aim being to use systematic procedures for shaping and handling rich qualitative materials. The methods combine simultaneous involvement in both the collection and analysis of data, thus developing and refining theorizing as the work progresses. When carrying out grounded theory research the researcher produces analytic codes,

[7] See Chapter 2 Section 1.2 for discussion of the emic paradigm used in this research

classifications and categories which emerge directly from the data, rather than moulding them to fit a preconceived externally derived hypothesis, which as already stated, fits with the notion of research being carried out that incorporates an emic position appropriate for studying an alternative culture.

The research material: verbal data, (text) is initially divided into units of meaning which are then coded in a systematic manner: They may be of different sizes depending on the purpose of the analysis; for example a unit of meaning may be held within a word, sentence or phrase illustrating an underlying theme or concept. This results in the development of classifications and then categories, according to which, the content of the texts can be understood. The process is carried out until saturation is developed, that is to say no more categories emerge from the data. This comes from a painstaking process of drawing out of meaning through constant comparison of data, codes, classifications or themes and categories, whilst exercising a broad theoretical sampling to enable and ensure achievement of saturation. This process eventually leads to the emergence of a theory grounded within the data. So it can be seen that theoretical conceptualizations drawn from constant comparisons in Classical Grounded theory are more powerful in application than just knowing how to describe what appears to be happening.

In the next part of this chapter both the process details of the research paradigm and how these were applied to the particular material in this study will be identified. This approach was chosen because the methodology is not wholly pre-determined in quite the same way as it would be in an experimental design, but varies according to the material being researched and the evolution of the particular study.

4 The Data Set: All Is Data

The theory generated by Classical Grounded Theory is directly derived from the data analysed. However, there remains the question of what might constitute the data for such an enquiry? When writing about his approach Glaser (1992, 2001, 2002) offers the maxim ‘all is data’ (Glaser, 2001, Chapter 11) a proposition that merits some deconstruction.

4.1 The Researcher's Knowledge and Experience as Data

As a psychologist who was originally trained within the scientist practitioner model of experimental psychology I have found that one of the hardest things for a me to do in this research is to move from the notion of hypothesis generation and testing to the notion of theory generation via the constant comparison method used within Classical Grounded Theory. Even the use of the first person 'I' in writing about psychology is something I have found difficulty in doing, as for the first 10 years or more of my life within psychology I was taught and then practiced 'scientific objectivity' and believe that 'I' had no place in psychological study and commentary.

However, my studies of Grounded Theory, which I was first taught about whilst studying for a Masters Degree in Counselling Psychology, and my professional training and practice as a Counselling Psychologist, have lead me to an understanding that there is more than one way of 'knowing' something *and* that researchers must choose the appropriate paradigm and thus method for the subject which they study. Which is why the more I learn about Classical Grounded Theory, the more it becomes apparent that this is the most appropriate choice for the derivation of psychological theory concerning the groups studied here.

Having made this discovery I have found that I would not only have to practice the technique of constant comparison whilst analysing my data, I then discovered through my reading and discussions with academics who are steeped in qualitative research methods, that I must also examine what may be considered as data. Classical Grounded Theory research can work with any kind of data; what needed to be determined was what 'data' set might appropriately to be included in this investigation (Glaser, 2002). Glaser's initial guidance, cited above, on this topic is challenging. Fortunately Glaser elaborated on this in 2001 asserting that:

> "…*exactly what is going on in the research scene is the data, whatever the source, whether interview, observations, documents, in whatever combination. It is not only what is being told, how it is being told and the conditions of its being told, but also all the data surrounding what is being told*." *p145*.

Even with this clarification the idea that 'all is data' seems overwhelming when one envisages working with it with the thoroughness that as an experimental psychologist I was trained to expect from myself. Nevertheless, this is what I have had to do in this thesis, and this includes viewing my own knowledge and experiences, as well as that of others, as data. As Glaser says; researcher impact on data is just one more variable to consider whenever it emerges as relevant and as my involvement in and around cults and other such groups has spanned more than 30 years it is demonstrably relevant (Glaser, 2002).

4.2 Using the Researchers Internal Data

Glaser (2002) acknowledges that the degree to which a researcher's personal predilection biases the data is a variable to consider. However, he maintains that the constant comparative process reveals these biases. He also suggests that most researchers that he has worked with, being aware of the issues, take great pains to not allow their own views to intrude on the data and I have endeavoured to do likewise. Glaser (2002) would also maintain that the abstractions that emerge become independent of researcher bias. Indeed, when what could be considered a bias has been identified it has been incorporated into the theorizing emergent from this research. An example of this is how this research is focussed on those members of cults who emerge from their experience of cult membership with long term self-identified difficulties in living. The idea that this could happen would be thought of as bias in some fora, instead it has been used to shape what is studied here and is openly acknowledged. Moreover, whilst personally aware of individuals who would consider themselves as emerging with self-identified long term difficulties in living, I do not consider that my experiences left me long term personal damage, although there can be no doubt that I experienced considerable adjustment difficulties on leaving the cult I was a part of (see biographical note below).

Glaser (2003) gives examples of how things such as *"credentializing, cultivating, spiritual power abusing or pseudo-friending just go on, no matter the bias take on them that may emerge".* Adding that "*furthermore, GT is about concepts not accurate descriptions*" (Glaser, 2002 p3). It is the carefulness of the Classical

Grounded Theory method which makes the generated theory as objective as humanly possible, with a product that is conceptual; providing an abstract distance from the data. Thus the conceptualizations which take place within Classical Grounded Theory could be seen as distant, objectifications of the processes studied (Glaser, 2002).

As 'all is data' and acknowledging potential biases is a part of Classical Grounded Theorizing, I am including an extensive biographical note to enable readers to come to an informed opinion on where my biases and preconceptions might lie, on the whole I take the view that my previous experience in this field has had an enabling effect providing a focussed awareness when exploring developing themes from the many data sources used to generate the emergent Grounded theory.

4.3 Researcher's Biographical Note

I was recruited into a cult at the age of sixteen years. I associated with this group for approximately 7 months before I ran away from home, abandoning my education and ambitions for a career. I then lived with the cult for one year before I was asked to leave and briefly returned to my family home before marriage (to a man I had met within the cult who had also left it). For a time we lived an unsettled life, briefly re-attaching to a part of the same group before settling in London and beginning working life and a family and eventually returning to education and professional training which has eventually led to this research. Given that the time span I spent within the cult was less than two years one might not expect this experience to have such a profound effect on my life, but its influence was so profound that I am still interested in the subject thirty years or more afterwards, indeed interested enough to build my PhD on the subject.

I entered higher education for the first time in 1990 to study psychology as a mature student of 32, still married, with a family, and throughout my career as a psychologist I have worked with and in relation to the issues of cult involvement. I have contributed to research published in this area (Walsh, 2001, Walsh & Bor, 1996 and Walsh, Russell & Wells, 1995) and presented on cults at a number of conferences. I have read everything I could lay my hands on both autobiographical and academic, papers and books. Since training as a Counselling Psychologist I

have worked psychotherapeutically with clients who have psychological problems associated with their cult involvement. I have led workshops with families and friends of cult members and helped to set up and run support groups for ex-members of groups which they described as cults. Over the years I have discussed such groups and their impact on the individual at length with people who have been members of cults and other such groups and the families of individuals who have been involved in them.

4.4 Researcher's Prior Work on this Topic

The paper '*The Personalities of Ex-cult Members'* (Walsh et al., 1995) which derived from my final year undergraduate psychology project demonstrated a correlation between membership of groups that participants described as cults and high levels of neuroticism, sociotrophy and autonomy as measured by the short Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck, Eysenck & Bartlett, 1985) and the Sociotrophy-Autonomy Scale Beck 1983, Beck, Harrison, Epstein & Emery, 1983.) However, what was interesting was that the elevated neuroticism scores increasingly approached the norm as a function of time out of the group. In addition, ex-members in contact with support groups showed reduced levels of neuroticism and sociotrophy compared to those who were not in contact with support groups, (Walsh et al., 1995).

This perhaps has implications for the psychological well-being of those in these groups, but definitely those who leave feeling they are rejected by their reference group, the level of loss and experience of failure experienced also impacts on the psychological well-being of such people (Beck, 1967).

The second piece of research that I was involved with explored the '*Psychological Consequences of Involvement in a New Religious Movement or Cult'* (Walsh & Bor, 1995). This research demonstrated that those ex-members who expressed negative feelings about their involvement in a cult were more socially dependent then those who did not express negative feelings about their involvement. It also showed that the younger ex-members were when they joined their cult, the more they were concerned about disapproval, the more they were worried about separation and the

more important attachment was to them. However, there appears to be a definite connection to their experiences within the cult, as when they left, their dependency on others grew less the longer they were out of the cult (Walsh et al., 1995). Another interesting observation is that the longer these ex-members were out of the group the lower they scored on neuroticism and psychoticism scales (Walsh et al., 1995). There were also significant differences between mean scores on the personality measures of neuroticism and sociotrophy for those who had been in contact with a support group. It is possible to infer that the lower scores of these negative ex-members were associated with being in contact with a support group. This may be because they were the least dependant and least neurotic of the group of ex-members studied, what is more likely though is that the support groups assist those who are having difficulty in moving back into society.

My third academic paper on this subject '*Deconstructing "Brainwashing" Within Cults as an Aid to Counselling Psychologists'* which forms part of this thesis (Walsh, 2001) focussed on the problem of the psychological damage with which some members or ex-members of such groups continue to present and of the techniques of control said to be practised within them and the resultant negative psychological consequences of the use of these techniques. It is the utilisation of these techniques, used predominately to socialise individuals into the cultural milieu of these groups which have been held responsible for engendering feelings of guilt, dependency, low self-esteem, worthlessness, anxiety and hopelessness in vulnerable individuals (Enroth, 1982, Ofshe & Singer, 1986 and Ross & Langone, 1988). These individuals often feel displaced from society and unsure of their frame of reference with consequential effects on their psychological well-being (Walsh, 2001).

This involvement with cults and other such groups and in doing research on them means that when I come to do further research into this area I cannot claim to be naïve on the topic. Additionally, the research I was involved with previously has established that membership of these groups can be psychologically harmful to some people and this has to be in my awareness.

4.5 Choice of Texts for this Study

In this study, in order to explore the processes at work within the groups studied here and to develop theory concerning the psychosocial processes involved in the experience of membership of such groups it was decided that a range of texts should be analyzed using Gasser's Classical Grounded Theory research method as detailed above (Glaser, 1992, 2001, 2002, Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In line with the concept of theoretical sampling (see section 4.6) a spread of data sources was used and they were all already in textual format.

The personal testimonies and academic texts used as data throughout this thesis have been written to inform 'the other' rather than for those who were existing members of particular groups. It is material that has been put into the public domain to explain, assist and inform readers. Thus it may be assumed that the authors had given a reasoned consideration as to what would be valuable for the 'other' to know about the groups when they wrote about their knowledge beliefs and experiences and how they made sense of them.

This form of data was used rather than material that the researcher had elicited because to use researcher-elicited material would to some extent require a structured format for responses and this would not be true to the spirit behind the driving concept of Classical Grounded Theory. As this conceptualisation is one in which the theory emerges from the data, by providing such a structure one moves from the endeavour of capturing emergent theory into that of 'forcing' theory to fit preconceived categories, which Glaser has criticized heavily in his texts (see for example Glaser, 1992, 2001, 2002). Another reason for collecting the data from mainly self-generated textual material in this way was to access personal testimonies whilst preserving confidentiality and privacy around what is felt by many ex-members to be a regretted and shameful experience. It also strengthens the emic stance which, as this research is studying another culture, needed to be incorporated into the research.

4.6 A Developmental Choice of Data

When using the Classical Grounded Theory method the choice of data sources is developmental. The researcher uses a strategy of sensitive theoretical sampling to

ensure that the range of relevant cases (that is, relevant to the emerging theory) of the phenomenon under study is expanded to further *increase* diversity, thereby strengthening the emerging theory when eventually achieving saturation of emergent categories and enabling their properties to be more clearly defined (Glaser, 2003). In total the data used within this thesis was collected from seven types of source material: academic texts, the World Wide Web, personal testimonies, case notes, field notes, texts written by people who have been in cults and other such groups and books written to help people who have been in these groups and have emerged with long term difficulties in living .

4.7 A Glossarial Note on Glaser's Typology of Data

When talking about the notion that all relevant material should be treated as data, Glaser (1998, 2002) advocates the inclusion of all relevant material whether the data is what he describes as "baseline", vague, "properline" and/or interpreted. That is to say the data may be the best account that a participant can give; this is called baseline by Glaser. It may be vague due to the participant either feeling there is no purpose in giving the data or that it is none of the researchers business. It may be what the participant thinks the researcher wants to hear (properline); or it may be interpreted by the researcher to make it more 'professional', but by doing so this alters the way the data is normally seen.

5 How the Theory Emerges

It is the simultaneous involvement in the collection and analysis of data that enables the emergence of theory. The researcher by experiencing submersion in the data, from the stage of raw data through all the other necessary stages to emergent theory, becomes a part of the process of analysis. His reactions to the data and his resonance with this data shape the processes that take place. These reactions and resonances are recorded by the process of 'memoing' which continues in parallel with data collection, coding and theoretical sampling. The memos will have, in time, captured the different aspects of the theory which has emerged from the data and are used to articulate the emergent theory.

5.1 Transforming the Data

Transforming the raw data proceeds in a stage-wise manner, as explained previously. In this research, it started with the choice of which texts to begin with and careful reading and rereading of these texts. The next stage was that of a line by line coding of the texts; this started the formal process of distilling the data and framing the theory. It is the very start of the process of breaking the data into categories and allows the processes that are present within the data to begin to emerge. The next stage is that of focussed coding to group the initial codes into categories. This is done by identifying codes that continually appear in the data such codes can then be applied to large sections of the data to create and then test their capacity to capture and hold the data. The process of categorizing selects particular codes as having overriding significance in explicating processes in the data. Focussed codes should be both dynamic and to the point, so that some codes may eventually metamorphose into categories. This enables the endpoint of the processes used within the analysis to become clearer thereby helping to define categories.

If the codes do develop into categories they should be precise, meaningful and self-explanatory in the context of the research (Charmaz, 1995). As codes become established as categories their properties are explicated, the conditions under which they arise, maintained and change are specified. It becomes possible to understand and describe their consequences, and their relatedness to other categories emerging from the data can be demonstrated. This stage of the work is both developed in and written about in memos. The memos both explicate the theory and the process of developing the theory.

As the procedure and theorizing becomes more sophisticated it begins to reflect the researcher theorizing about the processes, rather than deriving constructs directly from the language and expression of the data. As this develops a core category begins to emerge. A core category can be theoretically modelled as a basic social process that accounts for most of the variation in change over time, context, and behaviour in the area studied. It is central to the theory that is emerging and relates to as many other categories as possible, it recurs frequently in the data as a stable pattern; relating to the other categories. A core category has relevance to the

subject being studied and explanatory power for what is taking place and it has clear and convincing implications for formal theory Glaser (1978, p 95-96). Whether a category can be said to have these characteristics can be discovered through the utilization of the constant comparison method, and by using this method it will eventually become obvious that one particular category emerging from the data fulfils these criteria. Finally a model that coalesces the analysis is developed using the derived categories and memos (Madill, Jordan & Shirley, 2000).

Carrying out the analyses has given a depth of understanding and comprehension I did not expect when I began the research and has been a joy to experience. The results present more than one completely different dimension to that which I expected after 30 years of knowledge of cults and other such groups. This in itself seems to suggest that the observer bias issue mentioned above seems not to have over-ridden the truly emergent theory.

6 Summary of Chapter

In this chapter the intention to develop theory and research that is grounded in the professional practice and the value base of the discipline of Counselling Psychology has informed the choice of which methodology to use. Thus, the research methodology will fit with the practice of respecting first person accounts as valid in their own terms; elucidating, interpreting and negotiating between perceptions and world views and not assuming the automatic superiority of any one way of experiencing, feeling, valuing or knowing. The thesis will examine both process and content, using a research method which is rooted in its subject matter (Division of Counselling Psychology, 2004, Division of Counselling Psychology, 2005).

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, this research must also work from the premise that the groups studied here appear to meet the criteria for alternative cultures (Bodley, 1994). This premise therefore informs the approach used, suggesting that it should be rooted within an emic paradigm to allow for the development of an understanding of those who have experienced these cultures' own meanings and methods of aculturatization. One method of research which does this, and is used

here, is that of Classical Grounded Theory (Glaser 1992, 2001, 2002, Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Classical Grounded Theory is described as a general research method, which can be used with both qualitative and quantitative data (Glaser, 2003). As a predominantly inductive research method based on latent pattern analysis, it produces empirically grounded and robust propositions or core variable(s) allowing a theory to emerge from the analysis of the data, rather than using a hypothetico-deductive method to test hypotheses drawn from previous theorizing (Lowe, 2008). Furthermore by assuming that social events and processes exist irrespective of the researcher, Classical Grounded Theory can be seen as espousing a realist ontology (Willig, 2003)

Additionally, by using such a methodology the research can be located within the emic paradigm without removing it from the etic perspectives of more traditional research common within the parent discipline of psychology. This fits well with the integrative position of Counselling Psychology as practiced in the UK. Accordingly, this chapter has described how the thesis integrates an emic paradigm; drawn from cross-cultural psychiatry (Headland et al, 1990), using a general methodology (Glaser, 2003) rooted in phenomenological data, but it does not exclude the more traditional perspectives common within its parent discipline. This leads to an integration of perspectives or approaches, that is demonstrated in the language used within this thesis, which is largely, but not exclusively phenomenological[8].

7 An Addendum to this Section

There is an additional impetus to carrying out this research at this time. As described in Chapter 1 in January of 2005 a murder, followed by the murderer's suicide, was carried out by a second generation adult ex-member of a group which is a constituent of the type of cult studied here. This murder/suicide was committed by the son of the leader of the group, who was born into the group but had left the

[8] The author is indebted to Helen M Scott, Fellow of the Grounded Theory Institute, for her help and advice on the use of language in Classical Grounded Theory research. See also footnote 1 on Page 15.

group 5 years previously. He, before his death and in a video tape he made in preparation for his acts, told a tale of systematic sexual, physical and emotional abuse that he and other children within the group had experienced over a number of years and in multiple situations at the behest of the groups' leadership. What has emerged from subsequent information coming from other adult second generation ex-members of this cult and other such groups is a need for understanding of what was it about these groups that meant that their parents could have remained in such a group, whilst cognisant of these practices and often either perpetrating these abuses or being aware that these abuses were being perpetrated on their children. These grown up children want to know 'why' - and so do I.

Chapter 3 Using Classical Grounded Theory to Develop a Grounded Theory of the Psychosocial Processes within the Groups Studied Here

1 The Context for the Study

1.1 Criticism Levied Against Previous Research into Psychosocial Processes within the 'Cultic' Experience

A major criticism of much of the research that has been carried out on groups which have been called cults, high demand groups, new religious movements and so forth (see for example the work of Furnari, 2005, Hassan, 1987, Langone, 1993, and Singer & Lalich, 1995) has centred on the idea that studies which have findings that reflect negatively on these groups were carried out using participants who had little objectivity on this issue (Colman, 1984). It is also suggested by Beckford and Cole (1988) that the general public's perception of what they describe as new religious movements is formed by what they see or read about in the media and that this is predominately negative. Barker (1986) believes that those who ascribe to a 'brainwashing' theory of psychological harm arising from membership of such groups have rarely carried out empirical research and rely predominately on the views of ex-members who have been 'de-programmed' out of what she describes also as new religious movements. Melton and Moore (1982) say that what is described as 'brainwashing' is actually the demonstration of a young person's wish to be honest about his or her real feelings, changes in their value base and their commitment to a group or lifestyle. According to Melton and Moore (1982), a young person who joins such a group could equally well be said to be taking a significant step towards independence from the primary family, towards an alternative way of life

1.2 Addressing this Criticism

In the UK however, much of the research into the psychological consequences of involvement in such groups (see for example Tylden, 1995, Walsh & Bor 1996, Walsh, Russell & Wells, 1995) has tended to work with participants who have, in the main, not been 'de-programmed' or in contact with the 'anti-cult' field.

As the author of this thesis is a mainstream psychologist with an original training in experimental psychology, an awareness of the potential validity of the criticisms cited above has tended to shape the way in which data for this study was collected and in how the emergent theory is focussed. Training in experimental psychology has also taught the author that it would be unacceptable to make sweeping claims for the generalisability of the theory that emerges given the focussed sampling that has been carried out. So, to be clear; this research thesis begins by studying the psychosocial processes that are found within certain types of groups, (which have been called cults, high demand groups, new religious movements and so forth (Furnari 2005, Hassan 1987, Langone 1993, Singer and Lalich 1995, and Zablocki 2001a)) the experience of which appear to be affecting those particular individuals who go on to describe experiencing long term difficulties in living as a consequence of their group membership. Whilst it is intended that the study will bring to light some deeper theoretical understanding of the experience and its effects only careful and limited generalisations about these processes can be made.

2 Rationale for the Selection of the Texts Used in this Study

As discussed in earlier chapters this first research study was carried out using Classical Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1992, 2001, 2002, Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to develop a model of the psychosocial processes present in the way in which certain groups function. The focus of this research is on certain types of groups, drawn from those categories mentioned above, from which a proportion of former members emerge with long term psychological problems. A grounded theory is developed through the detailed analysis of relevant texts (original texts, transcripts of interviews et cetera), and those texts which have been chosen for this study have come from a variety of sources. As criticisms have been levied at previous research into these groups it is important to describe clearly the rationale for selecting the texts used in this study, as this selection process will have a powerful determining effect on the emergent theory.

The texts which were used were drawn from (a) academic texts and textbooks, (b) autobiographical accounts or testimony (texts written about their experiences by people who have been in such groups) and (c) broadly therapeutic or self-help

materials written to help people who have emerged from the groups with psychological problems. All the texts were written by people with the intention of informing others and were placed within the public domain for this purpose. The academic works which were used were chosen as they would be considered exemplars in their field and represent a high level of scholarship. The personal testimonies of group involvement were chosen to represent a range of views from people who were happy to publicly analyse their own experiences to inform others. The 'self-help' books were used as they too could be considered exemplars in their field and they would be considered to be best sellers and represent those self-help books which have been written by ex-members themselves. A full account of the texts analysed is given in section 4 of this chapter.

3 Ethical Considerations Concerning Data Selection

When studying groups of this nature the researcher has to be constantly aware that there is potential for harm to those who have been members of such groups. The request for information can be experienced as a request to revisit sensitive issues and it may trigger old traumatic reactions or deepen psychological distress in other ways. Many people who have had traumatic experiences that have given rise to psychological problems exhibit avoidant behaviour, and experience recalling the trauma as almost too painful, shameful or distressing to contemplate. Herman-Lewis (1992) describes this very well in her book *'Trauma and Recovery'* explaining that when working therapeutically with those who have survived trauma one of the most frequent experiences is that of the survivor avoiding addressing the very issues they come to address, because they feel that it is too painful to do so. Research, unlike therapy, is not generally undertaken for the benefit of the individual participant and therefore when working with potentially traumatised participants one must be particularly sensitive to the possible negative outcomes of requests for information or exploration of this kind of material.

Additionally, it could also be harmful to their place in society if research participants were to be identified from their testimonies. Many ordinary people find the actions of members of these groups incomprehensible. They may (understandably) react in a manner which could be seen as excluding or ostracising of ex-members when they

find out that their friend, colleague or neighbour has been involved in practises such as being married in a mass ceremony to a person they hardly knew or being a 'prostitute for Jesus'. Therefore, any identifying information has been either omitted or changed to protect participants and all participants (those who have been members and those who have studied these groups and written about them) are solely referred to by anonymous initials in the analysis.

The use of texts written when their authors felt ready to do so, of their own volition, and in such a manner as to offer others the information the authors felt would be valuable to them, means that there is a great deal of face validity in the information provided. It also means that problems about confidentiality and potential harm to the authors are in many ways side stepped by using work that is already in the public domain.

4 Data Used in this Study

In research that is carried out for the purpose of verification and description of theory careful decisions concerning the collection of data are made in advance. However, when working towards the generation of a grounded theory, apart from decisions as to what which data is collected as a starting point (these initial decisions are based only on a general perspective on a subject or problem area) these decisions are taken developmentally as the research progresses. The researcher will begin with a few principle or commonly shared ideas concerning the structure and processes in the situations she will study. An example of this would be that within a school the researcher would know that there are teachers, classroom aides, a caretaker and school rooms and probably a gymnasium, although the relevance of these concepts to what is being studied is not known and it is this that must emerge from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

This is the beginning of a process called theoretical sampling, whereby the researcher concurrently collects, codes and analyses her initial data and decides what data to collect next as the analysis progresses. The process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory and the researcher needs to be sufficiently theoretically sensitive so that she can conceptualise and formulate the theory as it emerges from the data.

If the reiterative nature of the constant comparison method is used sufficiently well it enables the researcher to move beyond the original material into developing a theory conceptualised from the patterns found within the material, based on the themes which run through it rather than just recounting what is described by the data.

Such meta-analysis moves the researcher beyond thinking *of* the data to thinking *about* the data and it is this thinking that enables the emergent theory to be derived from the data.

4.1 Nine Original Sources of Data

A broad spread of texts was used to enable the author to be confident of saturation of coding and categories emergent from the area studied. In this case all of the texts were chosen as they contained definitions of what constitutes the type of group studied here and each author had thought through what they wanted readers to be aware of and what they were happy to put into the public domain as their views on this matter. The analysis began with text extracted from Collins (1991) which approached these groups as new religions or cults. The next choice was Keiser and Keiser's (1987), a scholarly text written for academics in the main, the extract from this text did not differentiate between the ideologies of groups for example as to whether they were religious groups or were not religions. The third choice was a piece of work commissioned by the American Psychological Association, the purpose of which was to identify the psychosocial processes present in groups that it was calling cults and establish some basis for understanding the concept of 'brainwashing'. This was counter balanced with the text from John Hadden (1999) who has been described as being sympathetic to such groups as being new religions and takes a stance that suggests that these groups are not problematic for their members or society (Mytton, Personal Communication, April, 2006).

For the latter stages of the analysis it was thought that it would be useful to turn to texts which had been written by people who had had direct experience of such

groups and so Steve Hassan's (1988) definition of what makes a group a cult, from his self-help help book and other texts which had been posted on the World Wide Web which had been written to inform 'the other' about such groups and their practices were sought and used. Theoretical sampling continued until saturation was reached and no further categories emerged from the data. All the texts that were analysed for the purposes of this study are listed in section 4.1 below in the order in which they were analysed.

The original nine sources of data used within the first analysis are:

1. Collins J.J. (1991) The Cult Experience. A scholarly text written for academics p5-10, p109-110.

2. Keiser T.W. and Keiser J.L. (1987). The Anatomy of Illusion. An academic text which was written for academics p4-7.

3. Singer, M.T., Goldstein, H., Langone, M.D., Miller J.S., Temerlin M.K., and West L.J. (1987). Report of the Task Force on Deception and Indirect Techniques and Control p14-15. Report prepared for the American Psychological Association. This was to enable the APA to take a stance on the controversial subject of 'brainwashing'. Posted on http://www.cesnur.org/gandow-eng.htm

4. Hadden J.K. (1999). Lecture handout Sociology 257: New Religious Movements. A course given by the University of Virginia on cults. Posted on http://cti.itc.virginia.edu/-jkh8x/soc257/lectures/brainw.html

5. Hassan S. (1988). Combatting Cult Mind Control. A text book written by an ex-member of the Unification Church which has a subtext of protection, rescue and recovery from destructive cults p97-98, p78-84.

6. King A. (1997) My Two Cents written to *provide the public with some unbiased information regarding 'cults'*. Posted on http://www.prism.gatech.edu/-gt3011b/commentary.htlm

7. Schwartz S. (2000). Cultism in Amway. A description of what a cult is from a personal viewpoint, posted on http://thingy.apana.org.

8. Posting by an ex-Amway distributor 1. (2000). First person account of their experiences in relation to what is 'cult like ' about Amway in response to Cultism in Amway (cited above). Posted on http://thingy.apana.org.

9. Posting by ex-Amway distributor 2. (2000). Another first person account of their experiences in relation to what is 'cult like ' about Amway in response to Cultism in Amway (Cited above). Posted on http://thingy.apana.org.

The academic approach of the first four texts was counterbalanced by the self-testimonies and the self-help texts. The extracts used from these particular texts, which describe the authors' conceptualisation of what such a group is, were chosen as they represented a broad-spectrum; from those who had studied such groups to those who had experienced them. It was anticipated that this would capture a more comprehensive understanding and theory generation than the exclusive use of one category of sources. In addition the authors address a wide range of groups from Judeo–Christian cults belonging to Western industrialised capitalist/entrepreneurial cultures to groups whose beliefs and origins are from a more Eastern perspective. Some also include commentaries which could apply to organisations sometimes called cults etcetera which are not religious, such as self-improvement groups or political groups.

4.2 Further Sources of Data

As discussed in Chapter 2, when carrying out a grounded theory analysis the research data is initially divided into units of meaning and coded in a systematic manner, resulting in the development of classifications and then categories. This process is carried out until saturation is developed, that is to say no more categories emerge from the data. A further data source was used to ensure saturation when this stage appeared to have been reached. This was feedback on a draft of the Meta-Categories from 3 ex-members. These were two first generation ex-members (people who joined such groups as adults) and one second generation ex-member who was born into a cult. Their comments and responses to the analysis have been further incorporated into the data.

In addition, to further test for saturation and to begin to authenticate the theory which emerged from the data, the results of the study were used to form the basis of a workshop run for a support group for friends and family of cult members. The title of the workshop was 'Understanding and Communicating with Cult Members'. 16 people took part in the workshop, four were ex-members of groups they described as cults, one was an interested supporter and the rest friends and family members of people either involved at the time of the workshop in such groups or who had been involved in them in the past. As part of the workshop participants were given worksheets which were also able to be used as feedback sheets for the purpose of authenticating this research. Submission of the feedback sheets was voluntary and 12 people submitted their feedback. A copy of the feedback sheet can be seen in Appendix 1. Comments from these sheets will form part of the discussion of the emergent theory.

5 The Emergent Categories

Nineteen Categories were derived from the data, these were combined into five Meta-Categories (see Table 1), and it was from these five Meta-Categories that the theory about the psychosocial processes that shape the individuals experience of such groups emerged. These nineteen individual Categories will be discussed within their groupings.

A Core Category has emerged from the analysis and this is the Category of 'Fulfilling a Mission'. Discussion of this Core Category will mainly take place after an account of the other emergent Categories, and this discussion will be founded on the theorising emergent from the narrative about the other Categories. 'Fulfilling a Mission' will also be considered briefly in relation to the first Category: Configuration, as it is the foundation on which the groups' characteristics and their configuration are built and a brief exploration here will serve to structure the overall discussion.

All quotes used, which are taken from the texts analysed in this study (see section 4.1), serve the purpose of illustrating Categories and are not given to authenticate them. As stated previously, the research method used here; Classical Grounded

Theory (Glaser, 1987, 2002) does not seek to test a null hypothesis i.e. the hypothetico-deductive method of research, but to allow the psychosocial processes that underlie the data to emerge and form into a theory of what is taking place in the data studied. Thus, quotations are not cited to 'back up' the emergent Categories but to give examples of them in action.

Moreover, as some texts are written by those who could be viewed as experts in their field, fully identifying the authors could give these quotes more credence than other texts which are written by experts-by-experience and this would be contrary to the aims of Classical Grounded Theory. In this study a system of anonymised initials has been used to indicate quotations (or paraphrases, see below) from different authors. In fact, some Grounded Theory purists would not use quotes at all as they would feel that they distract from the emergent theory and focus attention on the descriptions and opinions of those studied rather than the underlying concepts, categories and the emergent theory. In addition, the BPS *Guidelines for Ethical Practice in Psychological Research Online* (BPS, 2007) is very clear as to the level of anonymity to be awarded to participants where data is gathered from discussion forums and so forth.

> "*Researchers should avoid using quotes that are traceable to an individual's posting via a search engine unless the participant has fully understood and consented to this. Instead, they could consider the use of composite 'characters' for analysis, and the paraphrasing* of quotes*, if this is consistent with the research design*" *(BPS, 2007 p4).*

This not only dictates that any quotations taken from these web sites must be anonymous; they must also be paraphrased so as to prevent search engines being used to track down and identify authors, if as in this case, this is consistent with the research design.

Initial coding and categorising suggested a potential 25 Categories, but the use of the constant comparison method and memoing lead to the recognition of overlap between some of the initial categories eventually leaving 19 significant emergent Categories. Further immersion in the Category contents suggested that it would be

useful to conceptualise these Categories within 5 Meta-Categories (which have been labelled Configuration, Trancendency, Reciprocation, Opposing Forces and Ascendancy) and that these clustered around a single Core Category (Fulfilling a Mission). The Categories and Meta-Categories may be tabulated as in Table 1.

The Five Meta-Categories with their Nineteen Categories
Configuration ▪ Fulfilling a Mission ▪ Characteristics ▪ Structure
Transcendency ▪ Special People in a Special Group ▪ Special Rules ▪ Special Knowledge. ▪ Special Powers
Reciprocation ▪ Responsibility ▪ Leadership ▪ Each One Teach One
Opposing Forces ▪ Hope ▪ Fear
Ascendancy ▪ Indoctrination ▪ Obedience ▪ Conformity ▪ Deception ▪ Group First ▪ Separation ▪ No Way Out

Table 1 The Five Meta-Categories with their Nineteen Categories

5.1 The First Category: Configuration

The first grouping of Categories to be explored here is the Meta-Category of Configuration consisting of the Categories labelled: Fulfilling a Mission, Characteristics, and Structure.

5.1.1 Fulfilling a Mission

The Category of 'Fulfilling a Mission' has been identified as the Core Category within this study. This is because it explains what is taking place within the data and it does this with as much straightforwardness as possible (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and as it structures the configuration of these groups it is discussed briefly here. This Category refers to the tasks that are necessary for such groups to function – it says that there are specific tasks that shape the remit of the group. These tasks may differ between groups, for example for one group the mission may be to 'save the world for Jesus' for another it may be to prepare a cadre of people to welcome the world saviours from a distant planet, for another it may be to bring about paradise on earth and for yet another it may be to enable a corps of people to reach self actualisation or for another the societal adoption of a chosen political system. Thus, the groups have specific tasks to accomplish, a mission to fulfil. The members believe that what they do to carryout this task is beneficial for themselves and/or others and that the action of carrying out the task is in itself beneficial. In fact fulfilling this mission is intrinsic to the group's reason for existence, it is its raison d'être. The notion of 'mission' operationalises the belief system of the groups, focusing on the beliefs that are present in them and it dictates the practices of such groups. It also gives rise to the characteristics of the groups and their structure. These mission focussed groups have a goal to achieve and their overriding function and purpose is to achieve this end. The mission determines the actions of members with little regard to the cost for a particular individual.

> *…they feel that they have been chosen (by god, history, or some other supernatural force) to lead mankind out of darkness into a new age of enlightenment. Cult members had a great sense not only of mission but also of their special place in history.* TI

This mission pervades every aspect of the member's life, even in their day to day activities as can be seen from KB's comment below

> *We believed we were going to win the world for God in our generation. We really, really believed it. I would play tapes in the car both music and sermons fully expecting that one day in a traffic jam someone would overhear and be so affected by what they heard they would join and help us.* KB

5.1.2 Characteristics

The groups are characterised within the data as organisations in which there is a sense of movement and of aims to achieve, but with little regard to the effect that striving for these aims has on the individuals who form the membership of the group; their needs are sublimated to the mission of the group.

There are many more negative characteristics than positive characteristics emergent from the data. Characteristics that are identified as positive include phenomenon such as the notion of salvation; often this is not solely a spiritual salvation, but also for many individuals it also refers to salvation from a previous life which was often very painful. A life in which the member had no sense of belonging, feeling isolated and out of step with those around them. Another characteristic is that of the strength of focus of the group, there is generally a sense of working towards a deadline, in most cases a momentous deadline and again a drive towards the achievement of the group's goals. The negative characteristics which are identified tend primarily to be about control and are identified as resulting in separation, responsibility, guilt, submission, and obedience. Interestingly there does not seem to be a middle ground between positive and negative characteristics or any notion of a continuum. So, these types of groups are predominately described in negative terms.

An example of this way of viewing these groups is given by NT where groups (which he terms cults) are described as:

… exhibiting a great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea or thing and employing unethically manipulative (i.e. deceptive and indirect) techniques of persuasion and control designed to advance the goals of the group's leaders, to the actual or possible detriment of members, their families, or the community. NT

It is interesting that even when talking about the positives a rider is given that *the negatives far outweigh the positives* in the excerpt below.

In our post-cult experience it was important not to throw the baby out with the bath water. We accepted that we had gained a lot from the cult, Biblical knowledge, our marriage and our child. I was able to exercise a great level of self control over personal addictions giving up smoking, drinking for about 18 months and then being moderate and I also lost a lot of weight actually reaching my target weight as defined by Weight Watchers. But the negatives far out weighed the positives and one of my friends is so angry against the cult as she feels looking at me that I have lost my faith. KB

5.1.3 Structure

The structure of the groups is seen as authoritarian and hierarchical. There is a leadership structure, but top layers of the leadership structure are restricted to an elite cadre and the notion of fluidity and change is encompassed in this hierarchical structure. Promotion and demotion happens frequently and often without any obvious reason. People are moved from location to location, often in a seemingly arbitrary manner, with little or no consultation or explanation.

…they have an authoritarian structure. Leaders, gurus, prophets or whatever, make decisions as to the beliefs and behaviours of lay persons or ordinary members who are less gifted with the truth. KD

They transferred members frequently to new and strange locations, switch their work duties, promote them and then demote them on whims. TI

5.1.4 Summarising the Meta-Category Configuration

From the Categories of Characteristics, Fulfilling a Mission and Structure a theory is beginning to emerge concerning the configuration of the groups studied here which indicates that they are configured in a predominately negative way. It is suggested that whilst these mission focussed groups are hierarchical in structure and authoritarian, there is a fluidity of responsibility (in that beneath a cadre of leadership roles and positions are changed frequently and there is a sense of constant change), which may be why authors of the texts analysed here have frequently found it hard to generalise about the configuration of these groups when seeking to define them.

Group members believe that they have a beneficial task to carryout; a mission and through carrying out this mission they operationalise their belief system. Their mission has such overriding importance that it is carried through with little regard for the needs or even well-being of the individual member, as it is taught or assumed that members will get their reward simply through the achievement of the mission. The focussed nature of the group enables members to work for the mission, which is seen as ultimately beneficial, and the notion of salvation from negative outcomes which will be the result of fulfilling this mission is seen by the membership as a positive, desirable goal to work toward. These groups are negatively configured around the concepts of separation, responsibility, guilt, submission, and obedience.

> *Because essentially there is nothing wrong with what a cult is doing, it is goal directed. This is what makes the definition hard, many groups operate like this and what is it about a cult which makes it cross the line and become abusive?* KB

5.2 The Second Meta-Category: Trancendency

The second grouping of Categories to be explored is the Meta-Category of Trancendency. Within which each Category relates in some way to going beyond the usual norms and rules which would apply in other settings in for example a western context. These transcendent components are: Special People in a Special Group, Special Rules, Special Knowledge and Special Powers.

5.2.1 Special People in a Special Group

Within the belief system of a mission focussed group there is the notion of it being a special group. These groups have a belief system which maintains that as a group they are successful above all similar groups. However, it should be noted that this is frequently not the case for the ordinary member's beliefs about themselves; a sense of failure and inadequacy is often the norm on an individual basis. Additionally, the groups' belief system incorporates an extreme confidence in the value of their lifestyle. This sense of being special extends to how the membership views the leadership. They see their leaders as individuals who typify all the qualities of great leadership and are sincere in what they say and do. Moreover, their leaders often believe what is claimed of them.

This sense of superiority is described by KD.

> *…an attitude of moral superiority prevails in cults, not only the truth but a feeling that what members do is right or correct under any circumstances; secular laws count for less.* KD.

> *We certainly believed that anything was OK if it helped win the world for God. But were told to do nothing illegal although leaders them selves did many things that were illegal visa fraud, tax evasion etc.* KB

Members feel that they have been chosen to fulfil a special destiny and they represent an elite cadre, which is superior to those outside of the group, promoting the conception of the group against the world. However, this elitism is often seen by outsiders as producing an arrogance which maintains that it alone has the corner on 'truth'.

> *Members are made to feel part of an elite corps of mankind. This feeling of being special, and of participating in the most important acts in human history with a vanguard of committed believers, is strong emotional glue to keep people sacrificing and working hard.* TI

I'm not sure I would say elitism, we weren't better but our truth was better. Only our church had the truth and wasn't afraid to say it. Individually we knew our sins and knew that we were scum and if only people outside the group knew what we knew they would realize how scum like they were to. Arrogance though I would agree with. KB

5.2.2 Special Rules

These groups often approve of behaviour that could be seen by outsiders as unethical. This is because they attribute superior motives to their actions, which are in turn legitimated by special demands and rules. They operate outside of commonly used means of making sense of the world, but express no moral doubts as their actions have higher meanings attributed to them. They are unconventional and often disregard common societal standards and laws.

There is a secrecy or evasiveness that permeates the groups regarding their activities and beliefs, with information being disseminated cautiously down through the hierarchy and only the top leadership are fully aware of policy, doctrine and practices at any time**,** which also maintains both the mystery of special knowledge and the elitism within them. An example of this can be seen in the fact that recruits frequently do not know the nature of the groups they join; they may join a self-help group, or a socially active group or a support group for example, but are unaware of the primacy of the groups' mission. KD talks about how:

…cult members may misrepresent themselves in recruitment activities and in raising funds and feel no moral doubts since what they do has higher meaning. KD

And she describes the presence in these groups of:

Lying about the purpose of the cult to new or potential converts the dissemination of inaccurate information to the outside world (family, media, etc.). KD

Here KB talks about her experience of this when she first met the cult she was to join:

> *Also they will hide their name. I asked my father about the cult and was told perfectly respectable group. Neither of us knew this was a breakaway group.* KB

She then goes on to talk about her experience of doing the same thing to others once she was a member of the cult.

> *We felt if we told them everything then the devil would plant doubts and they would never join. You took them through the studies one by one. Getting them to buy into the next thing because they had already agreed with the first. You would do the word study first. Because then after this they agreed the Bible was the Word of God so any arguments they came up with later you could demolish with 'it is in the Bible and you agreed the Bible was the word of God', and so it would go on.* KB

5.2.3 Special Knowledge

Within these mission focussed groups there is a belief in a knowledge that is reserved for only those who are deemed to be worthy of it. This causes members to strive for faultlessness as a member to enable them to obtain this knowledge, which will put them above those who do not have it. But the group itself defines what it is to be faultless and this definition can often change. The special knowledge separates those 'in the know' from those lesser beings who do not understand. It promotes separation from those outside of the group, stratification within the group and constant meticulous obedience to group practices and beliefs in the hope of achieving the status of 'one who knows'.

KD describes this

….. belief that only members of the cult are gifted with the truth. Only they know the nature of and best relations to the higher reality that promises salvation or aid in life. KD

And KB tells of the process she went through which helped to inculcate this belief, and of striving to be special so she could partake of the special knowledge in her group.

When we had mid week meetings and we separated off into different groups for instruction (generally just two in my experience) you were desperate to get past first stages and being in the second group. The leadership meetings were seen as something so special because all those great men and women of God were there. Just to be among them.

Exclusion from those leaders was absolute. I had a special friend who I supported in the full time ministry. She lived in my house didn't pay rent and in fact I gave her money every month. She left to go on the mission team to Munich. I had given her a ring of my mothers and the leaders wanted to get her a present and I suggested getting earrings to match. I worked near Hatton Garden and spent ages going in every shop until I found the matching earrings. They presented them to her at a leaders meeting and I never got to see it. I was shown a photo. She knew it was me that had chosen them and paid for them but neither of us questioned the wisdom of my not being allowed to see her being presented with them. KB

This is succinctly described by EAD when she says:

Cult leaders invariably claim to have some special gift, knowledge, or divine inspiration. Whenever a cult member encounters anything that does not make sense, he is told something like 'It is not for you to understand all at once, only the privileged comprehend it—in time, it will be clear'. EAD

5.2.4 Special Powers

This Category concerns the methods, goals and function of spirituality and higher learning for the groups. It suggests that methods drawn from esoteric sources are used in a search for a personal encounter with higher realities. This search for mystical or transcendent experiences facilitates the integration of beliefs, practices and inspiration by striving towards the demonstration and experience of the reality of a paranormal or supra normal universe. This personal encounter with a higher reality is an end point that members work towards; although they rarely attain this goal, they are required to work towards it as a means of both self-fulfilment and as a route towards fulfilling their group's mission.

> *These groups contact the spirit world through mediums, live off the findings of parapsychology, and demonstrate the reality of the paranormal universe. BL*

Members work towards the attainment of special powers, which they are taught can be obtained through the experience of group membership and adherence to group teachings and beliefs. They believe their leaders to have obtained such powers and that it is one of the consequences of the effort, time and commitment invested in the group. In talking about the leaders of such groups, who as the role models for this belief also represent key goals and aspirations to work towards, TI says *they consider themselves better, more knowledgeable, and more powerful than anyone else in the world.*

5.2.5 Summarising the Meta-Category Transcendency

Encompassed within the Meta-Category of Transcendency is the concept of transcending; that is to say going beyond. In this case this refers to going beyond the normal beliefs and practices of the society that group members find themselves within but not a part of. The Categories within this Meta-Category enable us to understand that members believe that they are part of an elite cadre and that if they are good enough group members, they will attain special knowledge and special powers. This knowledge will take them beyond the necessity to follow common ethics, and will bestow on them special motives for their actions, allowing them to

operate outside of commonly used means of making sense of the world, expressing no moral doubts as their actions have higher meanings attributed to them. Group members are often unconventional and disregard common societal standards and laws as they live by different 'higher' rules.

> *Publicly we were always admonished to follow the rules/laws it was only at the higher levels that they bent them. We would more likely add rules on top. We would be told to take it higher.* KB.

5.3 The Third Meta-Category: Reciprocation

The third Meta-Category is that of Reciprocation**:** this contains the Categories of Responsibility, Leadership and Each One Teach One.

5.3.1 Responsibility

The groups' belief systems teach that the members carry the responsibility for the well-being of themselves, their family, society and even the world (albeit well-being as defined by the cult). The individual member is responsible for their own achievements, but they do not get personal credit for success, because that comes about through whichever higher power or learning the group subscribe to. If members are unhappy, however this is their responsibility, as unhappiness is an indication of failure.

Members believe that within the group they come face to face with reality, which is a heavy responsibility and they believe that outsiders do not comprehend their burden of responsibility. They feel that they are responsible for the whole world. This inculcates feelings of anxiety, guilt and shame and provides a sense of urgency that spurs them on in their lives.

> *… cult members often feel more responsible than they have ever felt in their lives. They walk around feeling as though the world sits on their shoulders. Cult members don't know what outsiders mean when they say you shouldn't try to escape reality and responsibility by joining a cult.* TI

This feeling of elitism and destiny, however, carries a heavy burden of responsibility. Members are told that if they do not fully perform their duties, they are failing all of mankind. TI

5.3.2 Leadership

Within the mission focussed groups studied here there is an extremely focussed leadership, the leaders believe in what they do, they are authoritarian, powerful and charismatic. Group leaders often begin with good intentions, but this can change because they too experience the pressures of needing to achieve and fulfil the group's mission, so their actions are not necessarily beneficial for members: their focus is on getting the job done. Members strive to obtain a leadership role because they recognise the power, status and privilege which comes with it. However, to be a leader you need people to lead and they need to be successful, as their success not only reflects on the leader, but is also pivotal in the drive to fulfil the group's mission. Arbitrary promotions and demotions happen frequently (as discussed in 5.1.3). Leaders are dependant on the membership for their position, they have to set examples and they have to exemplify, in the group's view, what it is to be a successful leader as they will be expected to be a role model.

And members accept this as we were told Jesus had no where to lay his head so why should we. Somehow we never noticed that the leaders always did have somewhere very nice to lay their head and even if we did, they deserved it because they were busier, bring more people into the group, had responsibility whatever. And accepting it cheerfully and joyfully, never criticizing and saying but I would be more use there. KB

One thing that makes these people so dangerous is their psychological instability, and the fact that they actually believe their own propaganda. They are not just cunning con artists who want to make money. TI

I don't think there is one person that they have at the cult that isn't charismatic, just drumming one of two things into your mind. First is how

successful they are, and second is that they were successful by following the examples and instructions of their leaders. Time after time we hear examples of how they ran into a problem, and ran to their leadership who solved everything. Time after time we hear how they were down on their luck, but they persevered, and made it through, and now look at where they are at. Time after time, we are reminded that if we are good little worker bees that eventually we can be on top too... EAD

We always had to look to those who were above us in the group, for guidance, for how to behave, how to interpret the leader's writings, decisions about our lives – in fact for everything! We weren't considered mature enough in our development as members and so had no 'voice' of our own. S

5.3.3 Each One Teach One

There is interdependency between group members. Members are given the task of mentoring and teaching both new and failing members. The success of the mentor is assessed by the accomplishments of the mentored, thus, progress and development within the group is often reliant on the behaviour of others. This all rests within the hierarchical organization, which is supported by a 'buddy system'. Members are expected to lead by example and thus if the more junior group member is not succeeding this is because of the failure of the more senior member to be a good example.

It is not so much buddy because there is always a dominant partner. Let us get together and confess sins. But actually it is the junior that does the confessing. The senior will say I used to do that then I repented you need to repent too. You never heard about a senior figure struggling with sin only that they had overcome it and if you followed them then you could too. KB

2nd thing they teach you is not to tell anyone how long you have been in, how much (little) money you make, etc. To talk in vague concepts because we don't want to violate the law... this in reality is to say that you don't want people to think of you as LESS successful than what you really are. EAD

The new member is often induced to abandon his former behaviour patterns and become dedicated by being paired with an older cult member who serves as a model for him to imitate. The newcomer is urged to be this other person. Mid-level leaders themselves are urged to model their superiors, the cult leader himself being the ultimate model at the top. TI

5.3.4 Summarising the Meta-Category: Reciprocation

The Meta-Category of Reciprocation encompasses the Categories of Responsibility, Leadership and Each One Teach One. These Categories and hence the Meta-Category are all concerned with reciprocal relationships and despite the fact that there may be a degree of control in these interactions it is clear that for the most part group members are active participants in the process. The group member is both responsible for and responsible to the group. Their achievements in relation to the group's goals and teachings ensure the triumph of the group; they are responsible for the accomplishment of group goals thus fulfilling the group's mission. The group is responsible for giving the member a sense of belonging and being special through having a mission to fulfil.

The role of leadership within these mission focussed groups and all it conveys is dependant on there being a following. That is to say; a successful leader must ensure that they have a following if they want to remain in a leadership position. As no member is secure in any position, except maybe those at the very pinnacle of the hierarchy, there is great motivation once a member has become a leader to remain as such. There are two ways found within these mission focussed groups of maintaining this position. The first is by providing for the needs of followers (for example by giving them a mission to fulfil) and the second is by brow-beating and intimidation (actions which could be claimed by the cult to be in members' best interests and not about maintaining the position of the leadership). Even so, coercion as such does not emerge as a major theme or significant category within this study. Reciprocal relationships between the group and the member, the member and their leadership and the member and their more junior category of member are emblematic of the interdependency that is threaded throughout the nature and configuration of these groups.

5.4 The Fourth Meta-Category: Opposing Forces

The fourth Meta-Category is that of Opposing Forces this signifies the push-me-pull-you of the group-inspired emotions which are drivers for group members for the achievement of the group derived goals delineated by the mission which is the group's raison d'etre. The Categories within this Meta-Category are: Hope and Fear.

5.4.1 Hope

These mission focussed groups teach hope, the hope that members will achieve what the group promises; whether it is leadership, salvation, a better life, a new world. Hope of fulfilment is a necessary concomitant of the sense of mission and it is towards the fulfilment of this hope that group member's work. Many of the groups' promises are for the future and this both gives hope and defers all critical analysis, partially because the member hopes that one day they will be able to really understand and because of this will have achieved what they joined their group to achieve.

> *You find the leader to be the most inspired, caring, compassionate and understanding person you've ever met, and then you learn that the cause of the group is something you (had) never dared hope could be accomplished. EAD*

However, as well as being a motivator this can also generate the next Category; that of fear – if you don't attain what you are promised and that you hope for, no matter how hard you try, this engenders fear; fear of not being good enough and fear of failure and its consequences.

> *To a cult member, the future is a time when you will be rewarded because the great changes finally come - or it is a time when you will be punished. In most groups the leader claims to control, or at least to have unique knowledge of, the future. He knows how to paint visions of future heaven and hell to move members this way or that. TI*

5.4.2 Fear

This Category concerns members fears, these are fears about their performance of group practices, which are predicated on the belief system they subscribe to and fear of what these belief systems tell them will be the consequences of failure. This failure could be either failing to achieve group goals or a failure to develop within the hierarchical progression perceived within the groups and ultimately failure to fulfil the groups' mission. This anxiety is tied into the pressure they feel to attain advanced status to be worthy of whatever the particular group promises, and the fear of the consequences for themselves and others of the failure to do this.

> *Each group has its devil lurking around the corner waiting for members to tempt and seduce, to kill or to drive insane. The more vivid and intangible a devil the group can conjure up, the more intense is the cohesiveness it fosters*. TI

> *Falling away was the worst thing that could happen; where is so and so? - They have fallen away. Why? - They had a hard heart. You didn't really understand what that meant but you were determined it wasn't going to happen to you. Frightful stories were told of what happened to people that fell away: their involvement in drugs, sex etc. KB*

> *I remember well the constant feeling that a time bomb was ticking away beneath my feet and that the world might become a heaven or a hell depending on how well I carried out my current project.* TI

5.4.3 Summarising the Meta-Category: Opposing Forces

Within the Meta-Category of Opposing Forces is the concept of being driven towards the attainment of goals, the involvement of the person in striving towards these goals and also the desire for the actuality of arriving at an end point. The goals within those mission focussed groups studied here are perceived as bestowing positive outcomes, but it is often the tension of trying to attain and achieve what can come to be seen as unattainable goals, which inculcates anxiety within the group member. This leads to a deterioration of members physical and

mental ability to cope both with the demands of group membership and with the drive to self actualisation as a group member, with its just rewards for self and the rewards that this attainment bestows on significant others. Hope is not a static thing, but again something that inculcates the need to strive in the individual.

> *Not having visitors at your Bible discussion, not being able to give names of people and phone numbers, not having baptized anyone, all these things were hanging over you. Some people would continue to ride the tube at all hours until they got their 20 contacts. KB*

5.5 The Fifth Meta-Category: Ascendancy

The fifth Meta-Category is that of Ascendancy**:** encompassing Indoctrination, Obedience, Conformity, Deception, Group First, Separation and No Way Out; each of these describing a way in which the group holds power over its members and maintains its ascendancy over them.

5.5.1 Indoctrination

Recruits are expected to assimilate vast amounts of information very quickly, with little or no time for critical evaluation. They are told that understanding truth comes from working harder and having faith. The message is that by being a good member you will develop in your ability to understand and that critical faculties must be suspended. Your trust in the group leadership and doctrinal compliance must be developed so that you can become more advanced and you will then be able to understand anything you can't understand at this early phase.

> *We were never told this but were sat down with two other senior figures and battered with Bible references until we could barely stand. So after a while you accepted everything because you knew that if you questioned you would be shown it in the Bible and then made to look really awful for daring to question. The ultimate reference was always the Bible but of course it was their selection. KB*

There is the notion of things being done to members to indoctrinate them; such as the use of childlike games, singing, hugging, touching, lack of sleep and huge workloads, plus the bestowing of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards being contingent on compliance with doctrine.

> *…that use the techniques of thought reform (intense indoctrination or re-socialization), coercive persuasion, brainwashing…i.e., the systematic manipulation of social and psychological influence, distinguished from other forms of social learning… KLI*

Members are controlled and manipulated through guilt, fear and a feeling of culpability. They learn that they must allow themselves to be told what to do, feel and think about things in order to progress within their group and to complete the group's mission. They learn to ignore their inner self, in fact to distrust their inner self and have reliance on the external authority figure. This control is exercised through the belief that adherence to the groups belief system and way of living is the only way to achieve the group derived goals they have set for themselves with the help of the more enlightened and more developed senior group members.

Frequently behaviour modification techniques are used without the member's knowledge or consent. Critical evaluation is seen as dissent and access to information originating from outside of the group is not allowed or wanted as it is seen as a distraction from the task in hand and the development of a 'better self'.

5.5.2 Obedience

There is a strict ethic of obedience maintained within these groups, obedience to the doctrines of the group, obedience to those higher up in the hierarchy. This obedience is inculcated within the member by the requirement for unquestioning adherence to group belief systems, by things which are done to the membership i.e. rewards for those who demonstrate belief, and through the memberships' experiences, which are interpreted to support the ethos of obedience. For example a negative experience is the result of disobedience and a positive experience is the reward for obedience.

The doctrine becomes the master programme for all thoughts, feelings and action. Since it is the TRUTH, perfect and absolute, any flaw in it is viewed as only a reflection of the believer's own imperfection. He is taught that he must follow the prescribed formula even if he doesn't really understand it. At the same time he is told that he should try to work harder and have more faith so he will come to understand the truth more clearly. TI

In fact this was encouraged, the sermon would admonish you all to be like a leader who was doing well and he would be pestered to find out what was he studying in his Quiet times, where did he go evangelizing, could you go with him to see how he does it etc. KB

…Everyone is told exactly how to prospect, how to dress, how to present the plan, how to follow-up, to use the support system, etc. What really made my stomach turn, though, was the behaviour of people at all the meetings. They could have all been clones. EAD

5.5.3 Conformity

Contained within this Category is the notion that within the mission focussed groups conformity is a good thing and that the lack of conformity will lead to the negative consequences of being out of step with 'special people in a special group' who have a 'mission to fulfil'. As well as feeling out of step with the group if they don't conform, group members will also be motivated towards conformity because there are both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards for conforming.

Here KD describes

The threat of spiritual/mystical punishment. Here a person may be threatened with lack of salvation or supernatural punishment if they fail to conform. This is more common than physical threats.

Members must give up their individualised hopes and dreams to achieve group derived goals and responsibilities by means of conforming to group norms. Those

who don't conform feel out of place and at odds with themselves, which increases the need for conformity.

> *It was like being an ant in an anthill, the individual didn't matter it was the group. The group structure would start with your flat (even when it was a house you lived in it was still called a flat). Single sex housing shared. Then it was your Bible discussion, then your zone then you sector then your church. Everyone striving to have the most visitors the most baptisms. And woe betide you if your discussion had no visitors. The leader whose discussion wasn't doing well was in big trouble. And would pass it down. Again it was using the Bible against you and likening you to the lowest of the low and if you argued you had a hard heart and were unrepentant. We were told to imitate a leader as they imitated Christ. But there was no analysis done of the leader's action. People that changed their hair styles to copy leaders and then had sermons preached about them how they were following the leader. Questioning a leader was out of the question because it showed a hard heart and any way if they got it wrong then God would sort it out. KB*

> *One reason why a group of cultists may strike even a naive outsider as weird is that everyone has similar mannerisms, clothing styles, and modes of speech. What the outsider is seeing is the personality of the leader passed down through several layers of modeling (sic)*. TI

5.5.4 Deception

There is a high level of deception involved in mission focussed groups; both group deception and self-deception. An example of this is using deception to achieve their goals.

> *…many cults take conventional theological concepts and redefine them, thus enabling them to give the appearance of accepting conventional doctrine while in fact holding unconventional beliefs. EAD*

This deception is also found in the giving of information or teaching of doctrine, where the new or more junior member is not told about, or is distracted from finding out about the doctrines which are only know to the higher echelons of the group. This deception serves to promote continued membership, as if the less senior membership knew what was going to be asked of them as they progressed through the group before they are fully committed to the groups' mission they may well leave the group.

> *Deception? Don't believe there isn't deception in the cult. First thing they teach you about contacting prospective members: Don't tell them it's the cult. They even coach you on how to avoid the question of is it a cult... some responses are Why do you think it would be? What have you heard about it?, Why, do you know someone who has been successful in it? And of course, our group is different from the others.* EAD

> *I guess it is the deceit; you don't really know what is going on only the bit that has been shown you. If you did you probably wouldn't go along with it or join in the first place. I think junior leaders and even middle management often are trying to do their best and are as deceived as the ordinary member. But the ones at the top, they know. KB*

5.5.5 Group First

Members of mission focussed groups are required to exhibit excessively zealous, unquestioning commitment to the identity, belief system, goals and leadership structure of the group. There is a belief that the goals of the group supersede those of the individual and there is a diminution of regard for the individual. Self must be subordinated to the group and there is financial, physical and psychological exploitation of the individual to enable the accomplishment of the belief driven goals of the group.

> *Cults exist to promote goals beyond any individual and leaders may use members to accomplish those ends. Members exist, as it were, for the greater good and can be worked long hours at recruiting, fund-raising,*

building or whatever and then given inadequate food and rest and housing in return. KD

After you had got to the point of joining then you were told some of the things you would have to do. 10% of your pre tax income, daily bible readings, attendance at meetings etc. But you were so raring to get baptized you just signed on the dotted line. They had scared you that you might die before baptism so you didn't want any further delay. KB

5.5.6 Separation

There is an in group and out group mentality within such groups. Those outside are seen as 'the other' whether they are family or loved ones or have previously been friends. This is because they have either not heard the 'truth' of the group or they have rejected it. As the groups' goals are overridingly important this means that outsiders who are not party to group knowledge or the group's mission, are not owed consideration and in some cases will be seen as the enemy trying to stop the accomplishment of the imperative goals of the group and the group member. KD talks about how:

This includes a lack of privacy for, members, exclusive interaction with other cult members and being cut off from family and friends. KD

One of the reasons for this separation is explained by KB:

We were told that the devil would use family and friends to take us away. At Christmas time when members went home there would be phone call rotas for those perceived as weak, strong members would stay in the flats and avoid home visits. KB

UVL describes methods to achieve this separation:

Cult members described how groups censor mail, discourage communications with non-members and assign spiritual companions who

accompany new recruits everywhere, allowing them little or no privacy. If parents or friends persist in attempts to interfere, groups may relocate the member to another state or another country to avoid contact. UVL

5.5.7 No Way Out

Mission focussed groups take the view that a life within the group carrying out the group's 'mission' is the only truly valid way to continue one's existence. Members are taught that, if they ever leave, terrible consequences will befall them, their loved ones and/or mankind. There is no legitimate way to leave such a group as a success, only failures or weaker members leave. Members experience the group's reaction to those who do leave; the love, warmth and acceptance turns to anger, hatred and ridicule.

In a destructive cult, there is never a legitimate reason for leaving. Unlike non-cult organisations that recognise a person's inherent right to choose to move on, mind control groups make it very clear that there is no legitimate way to leave, members are told that the only reasons why people leave are weakness, insanity, temptation, brain washing (by deprogrammers), pride, sin, and so on. TI

Sometimes they will stalk a leaver for a while in an effort to get them back but eventually they will abandon them. If they had any real issues that might rock the boat contact with them was forbidden. Any leaflets handed out by those who were trying to get people to leave were spiritual pornography. Websites by ex-members were likewise labelled and you demonstrated you faith in leadership by not even reading them because the leaders said what they said was rubbish. KB

It was impossible to leave; you would lose any reward in heaven and be judged by God. And if you didn't suffer this, if it wasn't true, where would you go, what would you do, how could you cope? S

Additionally, many members will have burnt bridges, their education and/or career is abandoned. Relationships with those outside of the group are often damaged and those who have been in for any length of time find they are often out of step with their peers outside of the group as their peers' goals have been around career, housing and developing social standing, whilst those within the groups have had different aims. Society is not quite so amenable to those without a conventional work/life history and financial standing.

> *And it is impossible for you to explain. 'But you seem intelligent' is a comment often given. To try and explain to someone that yes intelligent people do become members of cults brings it all back. When I left we couldn't go out for ages because we could not get a baby sitter. We had no circle of new mums to swap with. And leaving GOD, leaving the group meant leaving GOD. KB*

> *The fear that if you don't do this, then what will you do?... No alternative is given, except of course the occasional negative image of working at your J(ust) 0(ver) B(roke) job, only to have to live on Social Security, be a burden to your family and society for the rest of your pathetic miserable life. How can you let your family down? How can you not support your family in the coming years? EAD*

5.5.8 Summarising the Meta-Category Ascendancy

The expectation in the early stages of the study was that a number of the sub categories would fall together into a Meta-Category that could conveniently be called 'coercion'. However, what became apparent was that although the texts analysed used language which appeared to support this, the underlying theme actually emphasised the reciprocal and interdependent nature of the process; surprisingly members did not see themselves as victims, each participant – leader and junior member, group and individual was gaining from their experience and in some way choosing to enable the experience to continue.

In early theoretical sampling in relation to the emerging categories one former member remarked that most of the illustrative quotes used missed the point that

many of the illustrations about the experience emphasised negatives, whilst during much of the time they were in their group they “loved the experience”. They had something to feel a part of, people who cared for them and that they genuinely cared for and a purpose in life. This does not support the notion of coercion, but rather stresses the reciprocal nature of the relationship and process.

The Meta-Category of Ascendancy captures the sense of members being involved in a reciprocal, but nevertheless hierarchical and constraining set of relationships. To maintain a place or to ascend the hierarchy members must actively participate, not only conforming to the group’s beliefs and practices, but also remaining obedient to the group’s doctrines and leadership. The member is taught, and comes to believe, that there is no way out of the group; this is both because of a belief that the group holds the secret to achieving group generated goals that have become central to the self of the group member and because the lifestyle, practices and belief system that group members adopt frequently puts them financially, socially or educationally at a disadvantage if they return to mainstream society.

The member is indoctrinated into believing that living within the movement and adhering to their belief system is the only hope they have of fulfilling the meaningful goals. To achieve all of this, the member must put the mission focussed group first, the group’s goals and aspirations become their goals and aspirations and they learn to deny themselves and to deny or sublimate their own personal wants and needs to achieve these goals. Much of what takes place is deceptive, information is withheld and all of this bestows on the group a very high level of control over the member, so that they believe what they are asked to believe and want to act as they are expected to act. The group member engages in the sublimation of their own will to the group, believing that this will make them a more successful and happy member.

The ascendancy of the group is completed by separating the member from both the outside world and also at times from significant relationships within the group, whether it is lover, partner, friend or family. This often includes children or spouse and although it can be a physical distance with the group, it can also be an emotional distance which contrives to make the member more reliant on the group.

Real friendships are a liability and are covertly discouraged by the leaders. The cult member's emotional allegiance should be vertical (up to the leader), not horizontal (towards peers). TI

6 Theorising Beyond Meta-Categories

6.1 The Themes that Run Through the Meta-Categories

The themes that run through the Meta-Categories can be summarised as:

- Total dedication to a group derived mission
- Conforming to goal driven group rules
- The sublimation of self to the greater good as defined by the group
- Being a part of something greater than oneself
- Constantly having to strive to do better
- Coping with continuous and often unpredictable change
- Carrying the responsibility for achieving salvation (not necessarily religious) for self and others
- Having to answer to a higher cause that is not necessarily benevolent
- Interdependency between the group and the member
- Living with the constant fear of failure
- Not succeeding at group generated goals
- Having no alternative to being a group member

The Core Category of Fulfilling a Mission includes all these themes and is discussed in the next section.

6.2 A Core Category

From this analysis of the data there are now the foundations for an emergent theory concerning the psychosocial processes found within those mission focussed groups studied here. Five Meta-Categories and nineteen Categories have emerged; these Categories are the subsystems of a Core Category: Fulfilling a Mission. The relationship between these Categories can be seen in Diagram 1.

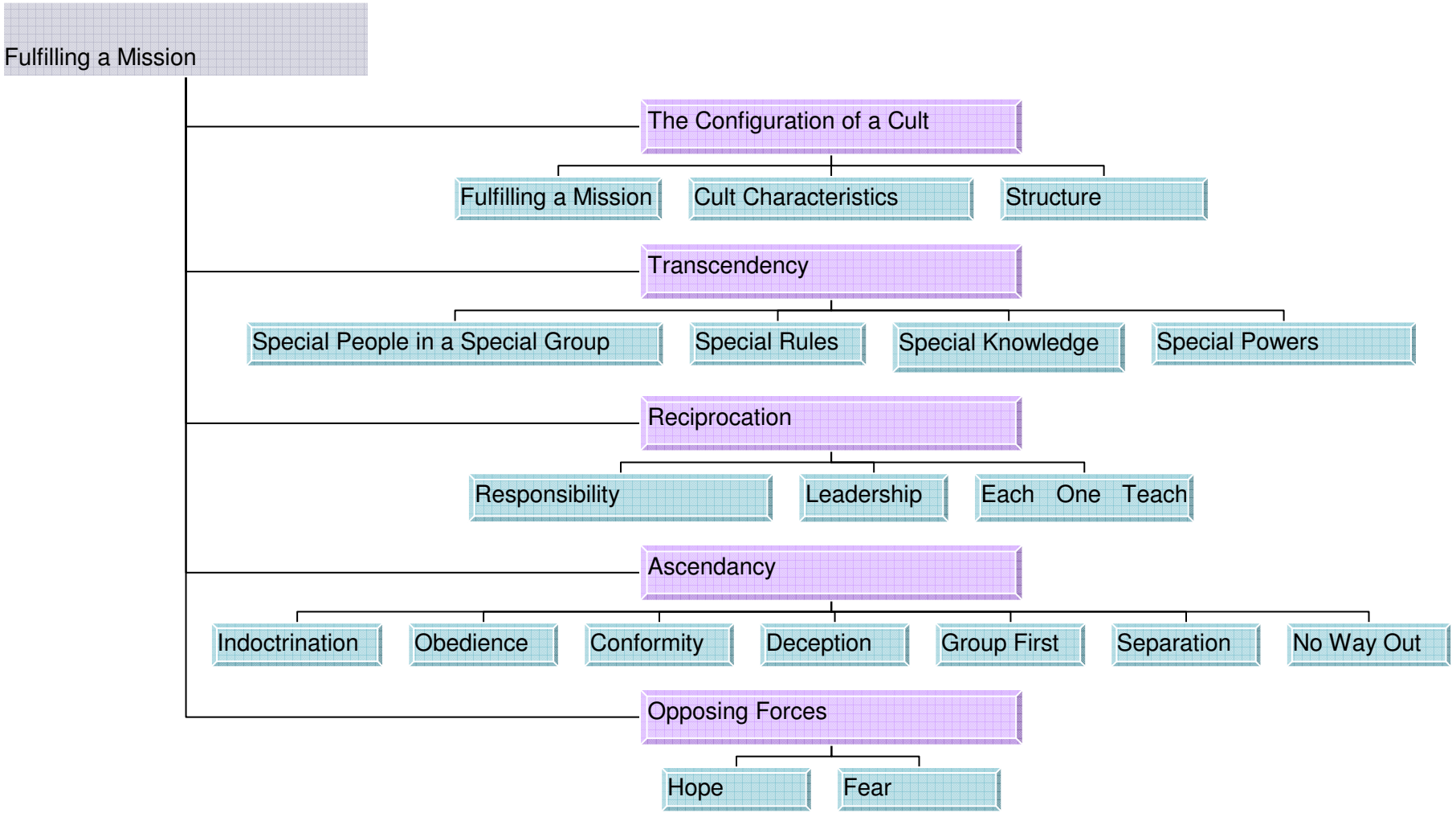

Diagram 1 The Relationship Between the Core Category, Meta-Categories and Categories

The Core Category that has been identified explains both the function and the functioning of a mission focussed group and the reasons for, and the use of, the psychosocial processes found within these groups. It is operationalised by the use of psychosocial techniques for achieving the systematic development of a fundamental personal sense of responsibility for fulfilling (or culpability for failing) the mission of the group.

This Core Category characterizes the nature of the groups in this study as being one where there is a relationship between the essential feature of the group; a group that has formed to fulfil a mission, and its more changeable elements; such as beliefs, structure or membership. It is this drive to fulfil a mission which establishes both the function and the functioning of the group. The sum of the individual's experience is that of being subject to the use of psychosocial techniques (and subsequently making use of them) to develop in both the individual and the group a state of personal responsibility for fulfilling (or culpability for failing) the mission of the group. This in turn is the driver for the use of these psychosocial techniques. This is in essence a reciprocal feedback loop, as the more the techniques are used the stronger the commitment to fulfilling the mission, and the more this then necessitates the use of these techniques.

In being a member of such a group the individual experiences total dedication to a group-derived mission. To achieve this members conform to group goals, sublimating themselves to what is perceived by members and the group as the greater good. They experience being a part of something which is greater than they are, but have to constantly strive to prove themselves as members. Mission focussed group members have to cope with constant and often unpredictable change, whilst carrying the responsibility for both their own salvation and that of others, and they often have to answer for this to a higher authority that is not necessarily always benevolent. Their relationship with the group is one of interdependency, yet fearing failure or not succeeding, whilst feeling that they have no alternative to this way of existence.

One could therefore summarize the psychosocial pressures experienced by the members of these groups (which we can speculate impacts on the psychological

functioning of the individual group member) as being those which cause members to suffer the constant weight of responsibility for self and others at the same time as striving to fulfil a group derived mission, whilst enduring the constant fear of failure. Members also have to contend with the need to strive to progress through a hierarchy to obtain special knowledge and special powers to achieve the fulfilment of these fundamental group derived goals and of having inculcated with a sense of culpability for both oneself and the world.

7 Responses to the Emergent Theory from Experts-by-Experience

7.1 Ex-Members

The emergent theory was tested against the perceptions of three experts-by-experience in this field; two first generation ex-members and one second generation ex-member. The responses of these experts are reported here as they have the potential to begin to authenticate the grounded theory or to call it into question.

The first respondent said:

> *"I need to read and assimilate the Categories and Meta-Categories as I want to use it for my own self development; it was so real to me it brought me to tears", (first generation ex-member).*

The second response was

> *"I liked the Categories - and see that they will be very useful in describing a cult - as I read for example I thought of the cult I was brought up in and how these Categories were relevant or not to them. - as I say excellent job and I can't think of anything left out or anything that should be different I really do think you have done a sterling job on the Categories and Meta Categories - I can feel a paper coming on but whether it will ever be written!! Using these Categories to describe the cult I was a member of and other groups"* (Second generation ex-member; now a senior academic psychologist).

The third ex-member said:

> *"This is something I have never thought of, I did not realize until I read this how the mission drove me on. I thought of all kinds of other things, but it is true – we were there to fulfil the cult's mission and all we did was dictated to by this need to fulfil the mission. Where we lived, where we worked, what we did on a day to day basis. Was it redeeming the time; was it using our time for God's purposes – i.e. did it contribute towards 'saving the world for Jesus?' If not don't do it! Did your relationship 'glorify God' – the only things that did this were things that worked towards achieving the cult's goals, if not the relationship had to go…and so on…."* First generation ex-member.

7.2 The Support Group

7.2.1 Testing the Utility of the Emergent Model

As part of the iterative process necessary to test the utility of the emergent theory some of the initial constructs were used to develop a workshop on "*Understanding and Communicating with Cult Members"* which was then offered to members of a support group for people who have friends and/or family in groups they had defined as 'cults'.

7.2.2 The Workshop

Sixteen people took part in this reference group, four participants were ex-members of such groups and four were people who had had friends or family in a group who had subsequently left, seven participants had a member of their family or a friend who still was a member of such a group and one was an interested supporter of those who had family or friends in a group.

The workshop was run by the researcher who was assisted by a former cult member; who read some excerpts from testimonies used within the research, to illustrate the model.

The reference process had four elements. Following a relatively brief verbal description of the emerging constructs and model, participants were offered a demonstration of the model in action (in a role-played context) followed by an opportunity to explore these ideas in discussion. Finally each participant was asked to complete a worksheet to record their responses to the ideas with which they had been presented.

This process was designed to be interesting and engaging for the participants by going some way to meet their needs for a conceptual framework with which to process the experiences of members in such groups and by using a number of different modalities to get these constructs across (direct explication, demonstration and discussion).

7.2.3 The Feedback/Worksheets

Participants were given worksheets to complete as aids for the workshop they were also invited to consider using them as feedback sheets for the purpose of authenticating the model. The worksheets were filled in anonymously and there was no obligation to use them as anything other than worksheets for the purpose of the workshop.

Of the 16 worksheets handed out 12 were handed in at the end of the workshop.

There were four questions asked in the worksheet these were:
What did you find useful?
What did you find surprising?
Was anything new to you?
What did you disagree with?

7.2.4 Responses to the Emergent Model

It is encouraging that all twelve respondents who handed in their feedback/worksheets found something in the model useful. Their responses ranged from saying that it was all useful, to citing specific aspects or Categories from the

model. The specific Categories that were mentioned in the responses were: Obedience, Conformity, No Way Out, Responsibility, Fear, Constant Change and Fulfilling a Mission.

One respondent said the model "*set out a summary of processes of relief, demands, obedience, conformity and dependency* and that this *resonated with my own group experience".* Although two respondents said there was nothing new, they felt it was useful to have the material "*presented in another way that threw more light on the subject"*. When asked what was new to them one respondent said "*the emphasis on weight on (sic) personal responsibility was interesting – the cult or group identity has become the dominant personnel (sic) identity".* Others found that the notion of the high levels of stress, and emotions such as anxiety, experienced by the group members was different to how their friends and family (who were members of these groups) reflected their experiences to them. These participants had previously perceived their friends' or family members' lives as being entirely stress free; they believed they were having a fairly happy-go-lucky existence within the groups.

Six respondents found nothing to disagree with within the model; with the only disagreement coming from two respondents who disagreed with the emphasis in the workshop on non confrontational methods of communication and felt these would not be helpful.

7.3 Summary of Feedback from Experts-by-Experience

So it can be seen that the model does seem to be useful to friends and family of those in such groups as those studied here for understanding the psychosocial processes which take place within these groups in a very practical way. This suggests that it can help those whose day to day lives are directly affected by friends or family member's involvement in these groups to such an extent that they feel the need to be part of a support group to deepen their understanding. This is illustrated by one respondent who said it had helped them to develop "*insight into a person who is in the cult".*

The findings were also felt, by the ex-cult members who responded on the worksheets, to have given them new material to deepen their understanding of their own experience. Those ex-members who reflected on their own experience whilst reading a draft of the categories also felt that the Categories summed up the experience very well and would have utility for understanding this experience.

What is also very interesting is that three of the respondents to the feedback/worksheets from the workshop felt they would have liked to have more information on how the experience of these psychosocial processes affected the group member and it is this that will be the focus of the next grounded theoretical analysis.

8 Summary of Chapter

The Chapter initially considered how to incorporate valid criticisms of previous studies into the research protocol to avoid potential errors. Then the ethical constraints on research which focussed on membership of groups which have been called cults, high demand groups, new religious movements and so forth (Furnari, 2005, Hassan, 1987, Langone, 1993 and Singer and Lalich, 1995) were discussed. Next a Classical Grounded Theory analysis of a number of selected texts was reported which has identified the psychosocial processes present in these mission focussed groups that have been described as having some members who emerge from their membership with long term difficulties in living. Categories derived from the analysis were considered within Meta-Categories and subsequently the Core Category that was identified within the Classical Grounded Theory analysis was discussed. Finally a further stage of the iterative process to test the utility of the emergent model was reported.

The next chapter in this thesis; Chapter 4 will discuss the results of this Classical Grounded Theory analysis in relation to approaches explaining the psychosocial processes experienced by group members that are most commonly cited within the literature. By doing this, similarities and differences will be highlighted. This discussion will be used to extend further the theoretical model that is being developed within this thesis.

Chapter 4 Integrating the Results of the First Classical Grounded Theory Analysis with Previous Literature Relating to the Area Studied

1 Introduction

This chapter will begin with the analysis and deconstruction of the classic work of J Lifton, from his book '*Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*' (1961) in which he described the techniques that he found present in the thought reform programme which took place within the Cultural Revolution in Communist China. In the absence of specific studies on 'cult' experience this work was used by many authors as a platform for much of the early analyses of behaviour in groups described variously as high demand groups, new religious movements, cults, and sects or even charismatic groups (Barker, 1994, Furnari, 2005, Davis, 1984, Hassan, 1988, Zablocki, 2001a).

As well as deconstructing Lifton's typology of psychosocial processes or techniques employed in what he described as thought reform in relation to such groups, this chapter will go on to explore the important question of the overall appropriateness of the use of Lifton's concepts in understanding the processes at work in relation to the mission focussed groups studied here[9]. Next the three approaches to explaining the use of the psychosocial processes experienced by group members that are now most commonly discussed within the literature will be reviewed, before finally drawing together the strands of the argument by considering the results from the Classical Grounded Theory analysis in Chapter 3 as a way of developing the third of these approaches.

The first two of the more recent approaches to be considered arose from work which began in the late nineteen seventies; and discussion of them can be kept brief. The first approach, apparently derived fairly directly from Lifton's ideas, is one

[9] As Chapter 3 has identified the Core Category for the groups studied here as being 'Fulfilling a Mission' these groups will now be referred to as 'mission focussed groups' unless work is referenced in which the authors call the groups by other names.

in which group members are described as experiencing some form of brainwashing, coercive persuasion or thought reform. It was developed by researchers such as Enroth (1985), Ross and Langone (1988) and Singer (1986).

The second such approach is critical of the brainwashing or thought reform model as an explanation of members' involvement with mission focussed groups and their behaviour whilst in them, considering these groups simply to be examples of newly developing religions. Examples of this second approach come from researchers such as Anthony and Robbins (2004), Barker (1989) and Melton and Moore (1982).

The third approach developed by researchers such as Keiser and Keiser (1987), Lalich (2004), Zablocki (1998, 2001a) is being further elaborated in this thesis. It emphasises a more comprehensive approach and addresses the experience of membership of mission focussed groups from within a more mainstream scientific research model than that which is often found within the first two approaches identified.

2 Lifton's Description of Techniques of Thought Reform

2.1 Introduction

Much discussion in this area stems from the seminal work of Lifton (1961) which is the classic study that is most often cited in the debate about brainwashing, coercive persuasion or thought reform. In his book Lifton describes eight techniques for 'Thought Reform'.

The techniques he identified are:
Milieu Control
Mystical Manipulation
Demand for Purity
Cult of Confession
Sacred Science
Loading the Language
Doctrine over Person
Dispensing of Existence

2.2 The Techniques

2.2.1 Milieu Control

The first technique that Lifton (1961, p420) describes is "Milieu Control". This is achieved by the control of human communication of both what is available to the individual and what they are able to generate. Examples of such control within these groups might include censoring of the television programmes, radio shows or cinema films a person is allowed to see and the books they are allowed to read, (if they are allowed access to any media which are not group generated) as well as the people they are allowed to spend time talking to or being with.

David Van Zandt (1991) in his work "*Living in the Children of God*" illustrates similar processes at work. The formal ideology of this cult does not allow members to hold system (lay) jobs if any other form of financial support is available. Within this world-view most commercial entertainment is also seen as corrupt and corrupting, and to be avoided. Members live together communally in small groups, which the cult describe as being modelled on the social organisation depicted within the Acts of the Apostles in the Bible.

This type of social organisation and control of information means that the membership is extremely isolated; with all points of reference coming from within the group. They have very limited, or no contact with previous friends or family and are only allowed access to information which is group originated or approved (Conway & Siegelman, 1979).

Separation from friends and family serves to intensify members' opposition to and alienation from society at large (Appel, 1983, Singer, Termerlin & Langone, 1990). It also often serves to estrange member's families, who have difficulty in understanding the need for this isolation. This may not be the intention of the groups' leadership, but it is often the outcome in many groups. It could be suggested that this approach to outside influences is adopted to maximise the time that can be devoted to the groups' ideology and mission and minimise the negative effects of corrupting influences or of simple distractions from fulfilling this mission.

However, the effect of this approach is often ‘milieu control’ and with this renunciation of the world ‘milieu control’ is complete (Appel, 1983).

The Category of Separation emerged from the findings of the Classical Grounded Theory analysis in Chapter 3 as a component of the Meta-Category of Ascendancy. What this Category established was that there is an in-group and out-group mentality within such groups. This causes those outside of the group to be seen as ‘the other’ whether they are strangers, family, loved ones or had previously been friends. What differentiates between those who are insiders and those who are outsiders is whether or not they have accepted what is considered by the membership to be the ‘truth’ of the group. Those who are outsiders either have not heard this ‘truth’ or they have rejected it. As the emergent theory has shown the goals of the group to be overridingly important for both the group itself and the individual member, this means that those who are not partial to the group’s knowledge or its mission are deemed to be unworthy of consideration. At times these outsiders can even be seen as the enemy, trying to stop the accomplishment of the imperative goals of the group and the group member, and this is then seen as justification for separating from them.

As discussed in the results of the analysis, the ascendancy of the group is completed by separating the member from both the outside world and from any significant relationships within the group, which could distract them from their role in fulfilling the mission of the group. This includes any relationship be it with a lover, partner, friend or family member, even spouse or children. Separation may be achieved by physical or emotional distancing or sometimes both of these; it serves to make the member even more reliant on the group.

It is clear that the Category of Separation, which is a component of the Meta-Category Ascendancy, *is* in some ways associated with what Lifton (1961) describes as Milieu Control. For Lifton this essentially a technique for thought reform, but a careful exploration of ‘separation’ within the Meta-Category of Ascendancy reveals that its function, rather than one of thought reform, is linked to ‘fulfilling a mission’ and serves to retain the group member’s focus as single mindedly as possible on the goals of the group, with no outside distractions.

2.2.2 Mystical Manipulation

"Mystical Manipulation" Lifton (1961, p422) suggests is the extensive covert use of interpersonal processes to provoke specific patterns of behaviour in a seemingly spontaneous way. For example eliciting confessions of supposed misdeeds from individuals because they must have done something wrong or they would not be being treated in this way; beatings, abuse, misinterpretation of admissions and imprisonment. Singer, Termerlin and Langone (1990) see a similar phenomenon in the groups they term as cults; they suggest that there is an induction of dependency by manipulative and exploitative techniques of persuasion and control. They describe how such groups, using some or all of the techniques identified in Lifton's work, dictate, sometimes in detail, how members should think, act and feel. Appel (1983) reports an attitude of moral superiority, which encourages acceptance of these manipulations on a basis of ultimate trust. Sirkin (1990) speaks of techniques, which facilitate and maintain altered states of consciousness allowing manipulation of behaviour.

For these authors the purpose of such activities is to increase adherence to the group beliefs, but these processes can also be seen as being related to the overriding goal of fulfilling the groups' mission. What is seen by critics as sleep deprivation and behaviour manipulation can equally be understood as late night or all-night meetings, or extended hours of work to reach vital group goals to fulfil the mission. Nevertheless the results may be the same; individuals who have a reduced capacity for rational thought, through over-extension and exhaustion.

Another Category from the analysis in Chapter 3 which has relevance to the second technique in Lifton's typology of techniques for thought reform is that of Control, this is another component of the Meta-Category Ascendancy. This Category reveals how, through guilt, fear and the development of a feeling of culpability, group members are controlled and manipulated. They learn to be told what to do, feel and think about things, ignoring and distrusting their inner self and placing reliance on the external authority figures within the group. This is because members come to believe that with the help of those more enlightened and senior group members they can achieve adherence to the group's belief system thus attaining the group-

derived goals and by doing so attain those objectives that have been described as fulfilling outside of the group. Critical evaluation is seen as dissent, as a distraction from both the task in hand and the development of a 'better self'. This then bestows on the group a very high level of control over the member; both of their belief system, which guides their actions and of the designation of activities as being essential, these activities then are perceived by the member and the membership to be acceptable and desirable.

So, as in 2.1 there is a link between the grounded theory constructs and Lifton's 'techniques' of thought reform, but the basic assumption of the purpose of these processes being coercive thought reform is not suggested by the present study.

2.2.3 Demand for Purity

Lifton (1961, p423) next discusses the demand for purity - but this is purity as defined by the group, not the individual. He describes how within a totalitarian system the world is understood as being divided into good and evil. As there is a doctrinaire belief within such groups that the group has superior access to the ultimate truth, this fosters the idea that there is only one correct belief and one correct practice; that of the group's, and the furtherance of this one true belief and practice allows a systematic exploitation of members' labour and finances (Appel, 1983, Cushman, 1986). This would lead, as Galanter (1982) has suggested, to the development of group behavioural norms. The members are strongly influenced by these group behavioural norms, a process present in any group. These common beliefs sustain a high level of social cohesiveness; those members, who disagree with the doctrinaire beliefs or leave the group, are either attacked or abandoned (Cushman, 1986).

The Category of Special Knowledge is a component of the Meta-Category of Trancendency. It is in concordance with Lifton's Demand for Purity and echoes his conceptualization of there being a doctrinaire belief that the group has superior access to the ultimate truth. As Lifton suggested, this is fuelled by the notion of the world being divided into good and evil with a dichotomy between by those who

embrace the ‘special knowledge’ of the group and those who don’t. The results from the analysis in Chapter 3 demonstrate how there is a belief within those groups studied here in a special knowledge and that such knowledge is reserved only for those who are judged to be worthy of it; those who are faultless as members (or in Lifton’s term pure). This causes members to strive for faultlessness as a member so as to enable them to gain this special knowledge, which will elevate them above those who do not have it. But the group itself defines what it is to be faultless and this definition is changeable. Belief in a special knowledge promotes separation from those outside the group, stratification within the group and constant meticulous obedience to group practices and doctrine. Members consent to such obedience in the hope of achieving the status of ‘one who knows’; being transformed into one who is pure, according to the terms of the group, through this acquisition of knowledge.

2.2.4 Cult of Confession

The forth technique Lifton describes is that of the "cult of confession" (p256). In this, the act of confession takes on an emblematic significance. It acts as a metaphor for personal purification; a psychological purging of transgressions or weaknesses enabling others, through the knowledge they gain by witnessing this confession, to have a hold over the individual’s existential guilt**.** It is generally not a private act. Alternatively, if the confession is commissioned in a more private manner, the knowledge that it bestows about the individual is made available for the leadership to use to manipulate the member into performing better. This is achieved by the manipulation of members’ guilt or the reshaping of the individual’s expression of their temperament. Secondly, it is an act of symbolic self-surrender, the merging of the individual and the environment. Thirdly, it is a means of maintaining total exposure of everything about an individual to group scrutiny; their thoughts, life experiences etcetera. Participation in this form of confession can offer the individual a sense of profound psychological relief. The continuous opportunities for relief of suppressed guilt feelings produce repeated emotional catharsis. In addition, the sharing of confession can create a sense of ‘oneness’ with fellow confessors and the assimilation of self into the body of the movement. Within this atmosphere of

exposure members have constant companionship, with no time or ‘space’ to think or question rationally (Singer, Termerlin & Langone, 1990).

It is interesting that this technique does not feature in the results from the analysis in Chapter 3 and does not appear to be a relevant issue in relation to those featured in this study. Whilst it was seen as significant by Lifton in relation to thought reform in a socio-political context, this study does not so far indicate that confession plays a significant role in the life and structure of the groups analysed in Chapter 3: a mildly surprising finding in the context of what are often thought of as religious organisations (Anthony & Robbins, 2004, Barker, 1989, Coleman, 1984).

2.2.5 Sacred Science

Lifton, (1961, p427) describes “Sacred Science” as being a basic dogma which is portrayed as the ultimate moral vision for the ordering of human existence. This is born out by the ‘sacredness’ that is attributed to the dogma and those who originate it and have the responsibility for carrying it out. Both the dogma and those who are responsible for administering it are beyond questioning. In the context of the groups studied here we see this phenomenon when members are taught that there is a deeper level of understanding which requires extensive training, in-depth study or greater adeptness at group rituals or practices to understand. An individual’s lack of understanding is wholly attributed to a deficiency within themselves rather than a problem within the groups’ stance or doctrine. So members are advised to cultivate an unquestioning acceptance of group stance/doctrine because the understanding they seek comes from being more spiritual, more enlightened (or whatever term used) and this takes time and effort to develop (Keiser & Keiser, 1987).

These groups often claim a special, exalted status (for example occult powers, a mission to save humanity or that they are the only 'true' believers) for themselves and/or their leader(s) (Singer, Termerlin & Langone, 1990). Access to this sacred science is controlled by a charismatic leader (or leadership) who is often thought to be God or carries an exclusive message and mission from God. The sacred science allows the suggestion of a charismatic or divine power to the group or its leadership ensuring members’ adherence to a consensual belief system (Galanter, 1982,

Cushman, 1986). 'Sacred science' thus endows the group leadership with power derived from their greater knowledge. It enables the group to be authoritarian, demanding unquestioning obedience and loyalty to its totalitarian methods; a group in which the leader or leaders have ultimate power. Partly in consequence of this, group members are often excessively zealous, with an unquestioning commitment to the identity and leadership of the group (Appel, 1983, Cushman 1986, Singer, Termerlin & Langone, 1990, Sirkin 1990). Since the sacred science is not for the uninitiated its existence may also encourage a protective dissimulation about the true nature and beliefs of the group (Sirkin, 1990).

This exclusive notion of 'sacred science' means that very few people external to the groups have had direct or even indirect knowledge of the practices, beliefs and issues associated with the difficulties in living that some people experience after membership of such groups. Indeed there are evident measures within the groups to conceal this type of information from the uninitiated. A simple example of this is the categorization of literature produced by The Family International. Throughout its history this group has produced policy statements and ideologies; however, the internal confidentiality of the group has been protected by a series of classification systems within their literature which restrict to whom the literature is made available. One of these classification systems was as follows: GP = general public, DFO = disciples and friends only, DO = disciples only, LTO = leadership trainees only and LO = leaders only.

The construct of "Sacred Science" too is one which is concordant with the Category of Special Knowledge which was discussed above (in relation to Lifton's construct "Demand for Purity"). It also has elements of the Category Separation discussed in relation to Lifton's "Milieu Control". This overlap seems to be leading to the idea that although it may have been possible for Lifton to separate out different techniques for what he describes as Thought Reform, perhaps now a more useful way to think about what is happening in these mission focussed groups is to take a less fragmented view of what is taking place. A reductionist selection of a number of techniques from Lifton's work (Cushman, 1986, Sirkin, 1990 inter alia) does not adequately explain what is happening within such groups. The processes, their interactions, the function of such processes and their meaning for those who

experience them, need to be examined as a whole. Eventually this richer analysis leads to a meta-theory about the psychosocial processes present within the groups rather than just a description of their practices.

2.2.6 Loading the Language

The sixth technique Lifton (1961, p429) discusses is that of "Loading of the Language". This is where whole new meanings are attributed to words. These meanings are derived from the doctrine of the group and are used by the membership to handle contradictions and paradoxes. They also form a barrier to the world outside of the group, since if a word sounds the same to two individuals but means something different to each one, dialogue is extremely difficult.

Van Zandt (1991) illuminates this well in his description of the typification, which happens during a 'Litnessing' encounter. (Litnessing was the selling of group literature in the street for proselytising; it derives from a combination of two words; witnessing and literature, an example of this language loading in itself). He described four types of ‘prospects’, which a member is likely to encounter when on the street proselytising: 'Goats' - those who reject the message outright, 'Sheep' who are the opposite. Next are 'Devoids' whom Van Zandt (1991) described as those who "*simply want to talk with someone or they have their own ideology to present*" p94. Lastly, he describes ‘Romans’ who he defined as the police and other officials who control public areas. These descriptions in themselves illustrate the ease of misunderstanding when language is ‘loaded’. Van Zandt’s (1991) exposition of the meaning of the word Devoid was actually incorrect, ex-members have reported that a 'Devoid' is in fact someone who was perceived by the cult to be devoid of any link with a positive spirituality and was often seen as being possessed by an 'evil' spirit. They are seen as having an agenda to stop 'God's' work being done and to actively hinder any attempt to reach the 'unsaved’. He has also over-extended the meaning of ‘Roman’ as ex-members have defined the word as solely meaning the police.

Not only do single words gain a new meaning; phrases are also taken into a group’s reality and used to define it. Again using The Family International as an example we can look at the phrase "*10:36ers* ". This is derived from Matthew Chapter 10 verses

36-37. (This is from the King James Version of the Bible, which is the only Biblical translation acceptable to The Family International). This short phrase means (to the membership) a parent of a member who is actively seeking to remove their child from the group and is perceived as an enemy of the group.

This passage says: "*And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me*". These verses were required learning along with a host of other verses from this translation of the Bible and paragraphs from the texts of the founder of the group David Berg. The source of these definitions comes from an ex-member of The Children of God (previous name of the Family International). This person recalled the verse from memory after being away from the group and organised religion for approximately twenty years - a strong testimony to the power of memorisation and socialisation. This loading of the language can lead to very rigid and sustained thought patterns (Appel, 1983).

It is evident that this technique is present in the groups – the explanation above demonstrates this in at least one of them. However, this technique also did not emerge from the Classical Grounded Theory analysis in Chapter 3 as a unique theme emerging into a Category which held any importance for those who were describing the significant psychosocial processes which define the functioning of the groups analysed here. It could be seen as a technique to promote separation from those outside of the group and thus come within the bounds of the Category Separation. Additionally, it could also be seen as a technique to promote the elitism seen within the groups which is held within the Category of Special People in a Special Group. Since loading of the language does not emerge from within the texts analysed the best that could be said is that it is potentially a practice which is not incongruent with elements of the emergent categories. This raises again the importance of using a method of understanding these groups which addresses the issues being studied from the perspective of those who are experts-by-experience as a factor in defining the psychosocial processes at work in them rather than one which is centred on what appears to be of importance to those outside of the groups.

2.2.7 Doctrine over Person

Lifton's (1961, p430) "Doctrine over Person" describes a situation in which the doctrine of the group shapes the reality in which the member must exist. Thus, for example the history of the convert is rewritten to make the past serve as a tool to mould the future (Keiser & Keiser, 1987). The individual experiences a conversion experience in which the past life is surrendered or re-interpreted. The member develops a new identity based on the new ideology; there can be nothing attractive or enticing about their previous life (Appel, 1983). At this point in many groups, the member takes on a new name; the adoption of new names by members serves not only to symbolise a new life, but can also restrict the flow of information concerning staff movements. This restriction of information (whatever form the restriction takes) serves to add to the sense of secrecy that is often associated with these groups and can also obscure attempts at scrutiny or understanding.

As Van Zandt (1991) explains:

> *"Members tend to view socialisation into the group as precisely such a replacement of one persona with another through the incorporation of "correct" beliefs and norms. They refer to the need to "wash away one's old self" and "to replace it with a new one...COG (Children of God) members use this theory of socialisation to justify and to explain formal socialisation practices that the group applies to new members"* (Van Zandt, 1991 p150).

Van Zandt (1991) identifies that the most important thing in the members he studied lives' is serving God and that this can only legitimately be done through the cult.

It is interesting that the Core Category from the analysis in Chapter 3 (Fulfilling a Mission) shapes the reality in which the group member must exist. It is this fulfilling of a mission which is intrinsic to the functioning of the groups and which refers to the tasks or the mission that is central to the way they work. It is the mission which guides the development of structure, practices, function and doctrine within the groups. It is this doctrine irreversibly intertwined with the mission of the group which legitimises the practices of the group. In fact the mission operationalises the doctrine of the group to dictate the way a group member must live their lives to fulfil

the group's mission. Carrying out the mission puts their belief system into operation and the mission has such an overriding importance that it is done with little regard for the individual member, or of the group member for themselves. This is because their notion of salvation from negative events, experiences or outcomes, which are a result of fulfilling this mission is seen by the membership as an overriding positive and desirable goal to work toward.

If the mission of such a group is seen as operationalising its doctrine or belief system then the Category of Group First, which is part of the Meta-Category Ascendancy, also has some relevance here. It has been identified in Chapter 3 that there is a belief within these groups that the goals of the group supersede those of the individual and thus the doctrine takes precedence over the individual person within the group. This means that there is a diminution of regard for the individual as the self must be subordinated to the group, which can lead to financial, physical and psychological exploitation of the individual to enable the accomplishment of the belief driven goals of the group.

2.2.8 Dispensing of Existence

Lifton's (1961, p433) last technique is that of the "Dispensing of Existence". He says that within a totalitarian regime there is a sharp line drawn between those who have a right to exist and those who do not. In Communist China's thought reform programme the world was divided into the 'people' i.e. the working class, the peasant class and so forth and the 'reactionaries' the landlord class, the bureaucratic capitalist classes etcetera with only the 'people' having a legitimate right to exist. An example of this dispensing of existence can be seen from within the Divine Light Mission. This group had its highest point in the seventies. The members were known as premies and they joined an ashram (group commune) to keep themselves separate from those who had not yet received 'the knowledge' and therefore were not worthy of associating with. Another example is that of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Members who failed to adapt to the communal life style and continuous devotion ethic become 'bloopers' and have to leave the movement. Those who are outside of the movement are known as 'Karmi'. The group believes that 'Karmi' are not eligible for rebirth (attaining the right

to exist). They are therefore unable to ‘find Krsna consciousness’ and be released from the cycle of death and rebirth with the soul resuming its spiritual existence with Krsna (Collins, 1991).

The Category from the analysis in Chapter 3 which is most concordant with this technique is that of No Way Out and this is because it sums the idea that members beliefs’ centre on the notion that a life within the group carrying out the group’s mission is the only acceptable way to continue ones existence. Members are taught that there would be terrible consequences for them, their loved ones and/or mankind if they leave the group. Members experience the groups’ reaction to those who do leave: love, warmth and acceptance turns to anger, hatred and ridicule or simple ostracisation. Only the group which has the special knowledge can reveal the factors which dispense a person’s right to live; ‘You must be born again!’; ‘You must worship the god of the group!’; ‘You must live according to these rules!’ whatever their doctrine and special knowledge dictates. By leaving, their right to a continued existence in the terms of the group is denied. This is even more the case for those who actually leave rather than the person who has never heard the ‘truth’ of the group; because they know what is necessary to fulfil their existence in this world and they are seen as choosing not to do it.

Additionally, as we have seen many members will have no practical way to leave these groups; they will have burnt bridges when they joined; leaving education, career or loved ones as their commitment to the mission focussed existence is total. In addition, the lifestyle, practices and belief system that group members adopt frequently puts them financially, socially or educationally at a disadvantage if they ever leave the group.

2.3 In Conclusion

Lifton (1961) summed up the techniques that he discerned and related them to religious totalism by saying that it is recognised by exaggerated control, manipulation and a blanketing of the milieu with guilt and shame. Indeed, he would suggest, mankind's irrevocable corruption and insignificance is stressed, alongside

the need for abject submission to a vengeful deity, within an inescapable system of ultimate truth (p456).

Lifton maintains that:

> *"…any ideology - that is, any set of emotionally-charged convictions about man and his relationship to the natural or supernatural world-may be carried by its adherents in a totalistic direction. However, this is most likely to occur with those ideologies, which are most sweeping in their content and most ambitious-or messianic-in their claims, whether religious political, or scientific. And where Totalism exists, a religion, a political movement, or even a scientific organisation becomes little more than an exclusive cult"* (Lifton, 1961 p419).

3 Brainwashing or a Normal Maturation Process

Lifton's initial analysis/research appears to have provided the background and the language of discourse for the analysis of mission focussed groups for an extended period (even if only loosely grounded in Lifton's actual concepts and findings). Not everyone accepted this approach but dissent was most often framed as a rejection of the 'Brainwashing' model rather than Lifton's work per se.

3.1 The Brainwashing, Coercive Persuasion or Thought Reform Model

Margaret Singer was an American Psychiatrist who worked extensively with people who considered the new religions to be cults and who believed that they exerted a negative influence on their membership. Singer (1986) when defining the cults' use of relational techniques and procedures that typify what she tended to call coercive persuasion or thought reform said that they;

> *"refer to those relationships in which a person intentionally induces others to become totally or nearly totally dependent on him or her for almost all major life decisions and inculcates in these followers a belief that he or she has some special talent, gift or knowledge"* (Singer, 1986 p.270).

Additionally, Enroth (1985) reported that what he described as *extremist* cults, made use of recruitment and indoctrination procedures and techniques which caused behavioural and attitudinal modification in recruits. These changes were usually portrayed as being significant in their effects and taking place rapidly, rather than over a period of time. Enroth suggested that these changes in attitude and behaviour resulted in diminished personal autonomy, increased dependency and the assumption of a new identity and that they reportedly led to a diminution in affected members' cognitive abilities i.e. memory, concentration and the ability to exercise independent judgment. This he ascribed to members being subjected to intense indoctrination pressures which also resulted in new recruits becoming extremely loyal to the cult, demonstrating unquestioning obedience to the leadership (Enroth, 1985). However, as discussed above an alternative view to this comes from the Core Category of Fulfilling a Mission which emerged from the analysis in Chapter 3. This Category signifies how members' attitude and behaviour change in line with what is needed to fulfil the mission of the group. Both the Obedience and the Conformity they display comes as a result of the groups' Ascendancy over them and their wish to become Special People in a Special Group, by emulating the groups' Leadership and thereby gaining Special Knowledge and Special Powers.

As the title of this section suggests there is a debate about the use of terms such as brainwashing, coercive persuasion or thought reform in relation to these groups. Wright (1991) in his paper *Reconceptualizing Cult Coercion and Withdrawal: A Comparative Analysis of Divorce and Apostasy*, suggests that the notion of brainwashing rests on the critical assumptions that it is passive, unwilling or unsuspecting victims who are the subjects of these coercive procedures (this will be discussed further in Chapters 5 & 6) and that deceitful unambiguous processes exist which can manufacture an induced dysfunctioning of the brain. Wright suggests that if this physiological change is 'real', it is achieved by means of the use of systematically controlled environments to produce a heightened receptiveness to group demands through techniques such as the manipulation of guilt or coercing participants to engage in forced confessions leading to self-denigration. Other techniques he mentions are food deprivation and information control (see

discussion concerning Separation in section 2.2.1 of this Chapter). Wright further suggests that clinical evidence for this idea is mixed (see for example Coleman, 1985, Galanter, 1983, Ross & Langone, 1988).

Keiser and Keiser in their book "*The Anatomy of Illusion*" (1987), refer to the work of Schien (1961) who carried out a socio-psychological analysis of thought reform within Communist China. In his analysis Schien contended that most collaborators with the Chinese Communists did not show significant ideological changes, they superficially conformed to the demands of those who were using techniques of thought reform in an attempt to minimise their suffering. This, he asserted, signified that the Communist tactics did not effectively change basic beliefs and values. Any change that did occur happened when there was physical restraint, confinement and either the threat or actuality of physical violence present. (It would be interesting, although outside of the scope of this thesis, to explore whether spiritual threats and the threat of eternal annihilation is as powerful a coercive agent as physical threats). Schein proposed the concept of 'coercive persuasion' for the phenomenon he described, as an alternative to 'brainwashing' and Keiser and Keiser (1987) maintain that to meet the coercive criterion the presence of confinement, threat and/or violence is clearly required.

What Keiser and Keiser (1987) assert is that any persuasion which does not involve some level of physical restraint cannot be correctly identified as coercive and that the application of the description coercive persuasion to any form of indoctrination in which an individual is not physically confined is a misuse of the concept. Physical abuse, confinement or threat of such must be present and they maintain that Schien (1961) did not extend the meaning of coercive persuasion to include the use of psychological pressures alone. However, Zablocki (2001b) argues that this assertion is actually based on a misreading of Schien and Lifton's (1961) early work and that both Lifton and Schien have gone on public record saying that there is nothing in their work which suggests that their theories require the use or threat of force. As coercion did not emerge as a salient category within the first research study in this thesis it seems more likely that the groups studied here are using techniques which could be described as enticement or inducement by promising

that the member can be a Special Person in a Special Group. This will be explored further when discussing members experiences (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Galanter (1990) has suggested that although there is no physical coercion within these groups, there are psychological forces at work which enable new meanings and values to be attributed to members' experiences by means of social reinforcement of compliance. Enroth would maintain that in many of these groups the leaders; *"...foster an unhealthy form of dependency, spiritually and otherwise, by focusing on themes of submission and obedience to those in authority"* (Enroth, 1979 p. 25) which as stated before does map fairly directly onto the Categories of Obedience and Conformity. Langone (1993) says that a group, which he would call a cult:

> *"…to a significant degree, (a) exhibits great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea or thing, (b) uses a thought-reform program to persuade, control, and socialize members (i.e.., to integrate them into the group's unique pattern of relationships, beliefs, values, and practices) (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 families, and the community* (Langone, p5).

However, this is based on his understanding of a thought reform programme as being "*a behavioural change technology applied to cause the learning and adoption of an ideology or set of behaviors under certain conditions*" (Singer & Ofshe, 1990 p189 cited in Langone, 1993)

Langone suggests that thought reform programmes are different from other forms of social learning in that they create this effect by:

- "*Obtaining substantial control over an individual's time and thought content, typically by gaining control over major elements of the person's social and physical environment*
- *Systematically creating a sense of powerlessness in the person*

- *Manipulating a system of rewards, punishment, and experiences in such a way as to promote new learning of an ideology or belief system (or behaviour) advocated by management (i.e., leadership)*
- *Maintaining a closed system of logic and an authoritarian structure in the organisation*
- *Maintaining a noninformed (sic) state existing in the subject"* (Langone, 1993 p3)

Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that obedience and conforming behaviour is shown in the analysis in Chapter 3 to be instrumental in achieving *both* individual and group aims. Langone (1993) however, maintains that *"cults make extensive use of unethically manipulative techniques of persuasion and control to advance the leader's goals"* p5. There is no mention of what has been identified in Chapter 3 as the interaction between the adoption of the groups' mission by the members and their use of, and compliance with psychosocial processes such as Control, Indoctrination and Deception.

3.2 The Internally Derived Developmental Model

Although there are internal debates about the details, it is clear that one body of recent thinking and theorising about these types of experiences is broadly psychological in nature. It takes as its starting point a central idea about persuasion through an improper or questionable limitation of the freedom of thought of potential converts and group members, which is probably detrimental to them. However there has also been a significantly different discourse about this issue drawn from a more sociological perspective.

Indeed much of the research into those groups studied here has been carried out within a sociological framework and has been critical of the notion of what is described in this literature as coercive persuasion, thought reform or brainwashing. These criticisms ascribe such labelling of this behaviour as related to three related issues. Firstly it is connected to the medicalization of all deviance from the norm, thereby redefining intense religious commitment as a mental aberration and reducing religious behaviour to psychiatric or psychopathological causes (Robbin's

terminology) (Robbins, 1984). Secondly such ascription is due to an anti-collectivist position drawn from the culturally derived anti-communist stance exhibited during the ‘cold war’ (Richardson & Kilbourne, 1983). Thirdly such ascription arises when there is unwillingness to recognise that individuals may be making informed choices to join, participate in and leave these groups of their own volition (Anthony & Robbins, 2004).

Eileen Barker (1989) is a British sociologist who has been a leading proponent of the concept of what she describes as new religious movements as (in general) relatively harmless new religions and is also critical of the coercive persuasion perspective. She proposes that the somewhat radical personality 'changes', which parents or people close to new members of new religious movements believe that they perceive, arise because the parents are frightened by sensational media reports, or have been otherwise persuaded that their child is now a brainwashed robot who is incapable of independent thought. Parents then start to see what they expect to see: signs that their children are indeed not themselves. Barker maintains that it is unlikely that the converts will have been drastically manipulated by sinister techniques of mind control, and extremely unlikely that they will be suffering from any lasting (or even temporary) physiological damage; however, she cites no medical or psychological data to substantiate this assertion.

Nevertheless, Barker’s position is congruent with what Melton and Moore (1982) suggested. They believe that the apparently radical personality changes which have been attributed to deception and brainwashing techniques and procedures within new religious movements could simply be part of a young person’s normal development. The ‘changes’ are a demonstration of a young person’s wish to be honest about his or her real feelings, changes in values and their commitment to a group or lifestyle that causes parental disapproval, concern and (in may cases) pressure to disengage from the group. Within this view the young person who joins a new religious movement could be said to be taking a significant step towards independence from the primary family. There is some evidence that suggests that involvement in such groups can sometimes help those who come from over-enmeshed families to strengthen their abilities to function as more autonomous individuals (Schwartz & Kaslow, 1979, Walsh & Bor, 1995).

In a review of current ideas on membership of new religious movements Anthony and Robbins (1998) characterise the brainwashing/coercive persuasion approach as a model in which personal change is attributed to externally enforced (extrinsic) processes rather than to psychological development that is internally derived within the individual member (an intrinsic process). They understand the extrinsic position to be one where psychological coercion is viewed as the equivalent of physical constraint, conceptualising the 'psychologically coerced' individual as in a state of 'captivity' which is as confining as any physical restraint.

Anthony and Robbins (1996) interpret the extrinsic (externally enforced) model as being one in which there is:

- *"a notion of total subjugation of victim who loses the ability to exercise free will* (authors' emphasis throughout)
- *a rejection of the idea that converts are attracted to cults by virtue of motivations and orientations that render them predisposed to be attracted to a particular type of movement an emphasis on alleged hypnotic processes and induced trance states and their consequences in terms of suggestibility, dissociation and disorientation*
- *an assertion with regard to the processes of conditioning or other allegedly deterministic influence processes . . . which supposedly overwhelm free will*
- *a specification of impaired cognition or patterns of defective thought that allegedly result from conditioning, hyper-emotionality and or trance states*
- *the hypnotic conditioning-indoctrination process is seen as operating to implant false ideas in a victim's mind*
- *finally, brainwashing is seen as producing a false self or cultic identity which is superimposed on one's authentic identity"* (Anthony & Robbins, 1996 p11)

Anthony and Robbins (2004) propose an intrinsic model of the process of joining a new religious movement. The decision to join or remain in such a group is to be

understood as the result of conversion/commitment in which there are intrinsic self-related forces leading to authentic religious choices, rather than as the result of psychosocial processes involving overwhelming extrinsic or external forces. They assert that the model espoused by those who view the process as coercive explains committing to a new religion as essentially irrational and based on an emotional, instinctual response which is the result of unconscious conditioning and is debilitating rather than driven by reason and conscious consideration, which might be developmental in nature.

There is a third way of viewing commitment to such groups, as has been demonstrated by the analysis in Chapter 3; one in which the individual makes a choice to allow themselves to participate in what could be described as psychosocial processes or procedures, for an internally driven, but group constructed reason, which may be religious, but may also be driven by elements within the individual, leading to compliance. The Categories of Obedience, Conformity and Indoctrination, which where discussed in the Meta-Category Ascendancy in Chapter 3 give support to this idea. The continued commitment of the members to such groups, whilst undertaking what could be seen as strange or unusual behaviour such as becoming a prostitute for the cause or giving all their possessions to a group, could be seen to give weight to the argument that strong psychological and psychosocial elements are in play.

4 A Third Approach to Explaining the Psychosocial Processes Experienced by Cult Members

It is interesting that although there are some conceptualizations and processes in common between Lifton's work and the results of the analysis in Chapter 3 only 6 Categories out of the 19 that were drawn from the data in the Classical Grounded Theory analysis could be mapped fairly directly onto Lifton's typology. These are firstly the Core Category of Fulfilling a Mission and then No Way Out, Group First, Special Knowledge, Control and Separation and it must be noted that the mapping onto these Categories is not exact.

A further 7 Categories have also been mapped in some ways to subsequent work**,** but it still seems likely to be the case that the models of group practices reviewed so far do not give a sufficient account of the processes operating within such groups and that something more is needed if we are to account adequately for the full range of concepts emergent from the analysis in Chapter 3.

One possible contender for providing the additional insights required is to be found in the work of Zablocki (1997, 1998, 2001a). At first sight Zablocki's model of brainwashing (authors term, for a discussion on his use of this phrase see Chapter 6, section 6) in charismatic groups (the name he gives them) appears to be following in the conceptual pathway initiated by Lifton and elaborated by Enroth and the others cited in section 3.1 above. However, a fuller analysis of Zablocki's work, which is psychologically more sophisticated and evidential than most of the authors considered in section 3, indicates that he is opening up a third perspective on this material. For this reason it is intended to explore his work in some detail here, critiquing it in terms of the foregoing arguments and also linking it to the analysis from Chapter 3.

4.1 Zablocki's Model of Brainwashing

The model has three central elements related to why and how "charismatic groups" operate to gain and retain members.

4.1.1 Charisma

The first construct is the idea of charisma itself. Zablocki describes charisma as a reciprocal relationship between the leader and the led that is predicated on *"devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person, (and) of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him",* (Weber, 1947 p328 cited in Zablocki, 2001a). Zablocki further characterises charisma as leading to a network of relationships in which authority is justified in terms of this devotional position.

This links to the analysis carried out in Chapter 3 where the Category Leadership identifies how, within the groups studied, there is an extremely focussed leadership who believe in what they do and are authoritarian, powerful and charismatic. The

approach to leadership is experienced as one of power, privilege and success (within the group's definition of success), which is why members strive to obtain positions of leadership. It should be noted though, that since the leaders are dependant on the membership for their position; this is a reciprocal relationship.

4.1.2 Ideological Totalism

The next feature of the Zablocki model is that of ideological totalism. This is described as a socio-cultural system placing a high value on the total control of both the outer and inner lives of participants to enable the achievement of the groups' goals specified within their ideology.

Although seemingly this is analogous to the Categories within the Meta-Category Ascendancy (for discussion of Separation see below), overall it maps more closely onto the Category of Fulfilling a Mission, identified in Chapter 3 as the Core Category within the emergent theory. This Category refers to the centrality that the tasks, which are necessary for the groups to function, have in the configuring of such a group. It proposes that there are specific tasks that are within the remit of any mission focussed group which are fundamental to its existence. Thus, these groups have specific tasks to accomplish; a mission to fulfil. The notion of 'mission' operationalises the belief system of the group: this mission is focussed on the beliefs of the group and it dictates the practice of the group. It also gives rise to the characteristics of the group and its structure.

As suggested above there are elements of the Category Separation and in addition some aspects of the Category Special Knowledge, which link to this concept as there is a belief within these groups in a knowledge that is reserved for only those considered to be worthy of it. The special knowledge separates those 'in the know' from those who do not understand. It promotes separation from those outside of the group, as well as stratification within the group giving rise to meticulous obedience to group practices and beliefs in the hope of achieving the status of 'one who knows'. As the group's goals are overridingly important this means that outsiders who are not party to group knowledge or its mission, are not considered worthy of consideration and at times will be seen as enemies who are trying to stop the

accomplishment of the defining imperatives of the group. Elements of these Categories combine together to echo what Zablocki's sees as the ways in which the charismatic groups obtain total control of both the outer and inner lives of participants to facilitate the achievement of the goals specified within their group's ideology.

4.1.3 Surveillance

The third feature of the model is the phenomenon that Zablocki calls surveillance. Surveillance is a technique considered to be customary within charismatic groups and he defines it as keeping watch over a person's behaviour and attitudes to enable the creation and utilization of a 'deployable agent', in this case a group member, who is uncritically obedient to orders perceived as charismatically legitimate. The more a member can be relied upon to comply with the demands of the group the less surveillance is needed. Within such a group the costs and benefits of surveillance are monitored and balanced so that when the cost of surveillance outweighs its benefit in producing the deployable agent that part of the system tends to change away from one that necessitates surveillance.

This concept was not identified as one of the Categories that emerged from the analysis in Chapter 3, although it does resonate with the Category Each One Teach One which is described as an interdependency between group members. Members are given the task of mentoring and teaching both new and failing members. However, this differs in detail from that of Zablocki's concept of surveillance for the purpose of creating and maintaining a deployable agent. It seems focussed on the conversion of the individual to this position, rather than the continued education of new members and re-education of those who are failing.

Findings from the present research suggest that the purpose of Each One Teach One is to assure the progress and development within the group of the mentor (and the mentored) which is assessed by the level of success of the mentored. Thus, the success of the group member is often reliant on the behaviour of others. This all rests within the hierarchical organization, which is supported by a 'buddy system' which has a reciprocal nature in that members are expected to show by example, and thus if the more junior group member is not succeeding this is because of the

failure of the more senior member to be a good example. This does tend to work towards ensuring the utilization of what Zablocki calls a deployable agent. However, Zablocki suggests that when the cost outweighs the gain the system adapts to make surveillance unnecessary. This does not appear in the results of the analysis in Chapter 3, as the over-riding driver for the experience within a mission focussed group is that of fulfilling the group's mission, this analysis suggests that rather than change, such a group would seek to maintain the status quo and eject the problematic member(s) rather than change its mission or how it functions.

5 Comparing the Core of Zablocki's Model with the Model in this Study

Zablocki would consider his core process; brainwashing, to be a cluster of observable transactions, between a charismatically-structured group and a member of the group. These transactions have the objective of transforming the member into someone who will work towards achieving the group's goals in an uncritically obedient manner. Brainwashing in Zablocki's terms can be conceptualized as a process carried out under a charismatic authority with the purpose of ideological resocialization within a charismatic group and, it might be suggested, of *fulfilling the group's mission*.

This is consonant to a great extent with the results in Chapter 3, which say that the Core Category which has emerged from the grounded research can primarily be described as the use of psychosocial techniques for achieving the systematic development of a fundamental personal sense of responsibility for accomplishing the group's mission (or culpability for failing to do so) in the group member. However, Zablocki's model does not emphasise the development of this fundamental personal sense of responsibility and culpability that was shown in the Chapter 3 analysis to be developed in the group member.

Additionally, the Core Category in this study characterizes the fundamental nature of such a group as being enacted by a reciprocal relationship between the group: formed to fulfil a mission and its changeable elements; whether these are beliefs, members or structure. This drive to fulfil a mission enables the establishment of the function and functioning of these groups. Nevertheless, the results of the analysis in

Chapter 3 are not contradictory or at odds with Zablocki's model, they may instead be seen as expanding it and engaging with further dimensions which have yet to be addressed by Zablocki or others; dimensions such as that of the individual's motivation for participating in what Zablocki calls brainwashing, as well the motivation of the group for these practices.

5.1 Relating Zablocki's Model to Previously Discussed Models

The model that Zablocki describes is similar in some aspects to those which are held by those researchers such as Hassan (1989) and Singer, Temerlin, and Langone (1990). However, it does seem to have more in common with that of Collins (1991) and Keiser and Keiser (1987) although they espouse a model which incorporates Schein's (1961) as asserting that physical imprisonment is a vital element of communist psychological coercion, which Zablocki does not accept. Also, like Schein's theory which modelled the production of ideological and behavioural changes in a fully conscious, intact individual (Schein 1959) these authors do not include a role for hypnotic trance disorientation and dissociative states in coercive persuasion as described by Hassan (1989), Singer, Temerlin, and Langone (1990).

Keiser and Keiser (1987) do nevertheless employ the notion of what they have called destructive persuasion saying that this rests heavily on the two strategies of the manipulation of needs and information control, which fits with Zablocki's concept of surveillance. However, Keiser and Keiser place groups they describe as cults within the sphere of ordinary human activities and see them as an example of an attempt to satisfy human needs. This way of understanding these groups does not seem to be present in Zablocki's reasoning.

5.2 A Further Development in line with Zablocki's Work

Janja Lalich, a sociologist, has developed a model which she describes as one which "*sets forth a useful, more comprehensive approach to cults as complex and often confounding systems*" (Lalich, 2004 p7). Her Bounded Choice Model, which was developed initially with help and support from Zablocki (Lalich, 2004), is one

which Lalich describes as taking *"…an integrated view of cult life by looking intently at leaders, members, group structure and social interaction"* (Lalich, 2004 p4). In constructing this model she deliberately attempts to integrate both sides of the debate concerning the nature of the psychological processes present in cults and focuses on *"the transformative demand that requires at least some devotees to become true believers, who in turn become agents of the cult and its leader"* (Lalich, 2004 p4).

Lalich's model is one in which she proposes that four components: a transcendent belief system, a system of structural controls interlocking with social controls to create an all encompassing system and a highly charged charismatic relationship between one or more leaders and followers. These four components produce an overall structure that is self sealing and which commands an extreme commitment from its core members. This, Lalich suggests, is a closed system which allows no consideration of disconfirming evidence or differing points of view. This is consonant with the Categories of Separation and Special People in a Special Group and Special Knowledge derived from the analysis in Chapter 3.

Lalich describes her theory as resting on the interaction of the four components, which produces the enmeshment necessary for the formation of the group. The self sealing nature of these groups' ideologies leaves no room for alternatives and life outside of the cult becomes impossible to contemplate; there is No Way Out of the group.

The fusion of what Lalich calls charisma and the resultant social-psychological state, which she calls Bounded Choice, (choices members make are bounded by the structure and ideology of the group) is, she suggests, what keeps members committed to relationships, groups and situations which are often viewed by those outside of the groups as incomprehensible.

There are clear links between Zablocki's work, Lalich's analysis and the concepts emerging from the first study, so there will be a need for further exploration of these ideas later in this research.

6 The Third Approach to Understanding the Psychosocial Processes within Mission Focussed Groups

Lifton's work is often given as the gold standard when trying to account for what happens to the membership in groups conceptualised as cults by those who believe that the practice of thought reform, coercive persuasion or brainwashing is taking place within them. However, what became evident when working towards an integration of the results of the analysis in Chapter 3 with Lifton's work on totalism and thought reform, is that although there are some processes and conceptualisations in common, the focus of the information that comes from these two pieces of research are different.

The approaches that developed Lifton's early ideas (or were developed in opposition to them within broadly the same discourse) have all been shown above to fall short of accounting for the phenomena identified in the Categories and Meta-Categories of the Classical Grounded Theory analysis presented in Chapter 3

However, during the course of this review of related research it has also become apparent that there may be third way to understand the experiences that members have within these groups. The work of Zablocki (1997, 1998, 2001a) and then Lalich (2004) as shown above, leads towards such a third perspective despite using language that seems to fit elsewhere, and this present study is firmly located within the third approach. It identifies the components found within an emergent explanatory psychological theory of the mechanisms mediating the interaction between the purposes and structure and function of those groups in which a proportion of members emerge with self-identified long term difficulties in living. It also begins to explain the processes and meaning of what is happening in these groups. Whilst seeing that there are intense psychosocial processes at work within these organisations this third approach does not speak, as many earlier writers do, in terms of coercion, or thought reform. It accepts the possibility that group involvement may be, for some at least, beneficial or neutral steps in individual development, even though for others the experience will prove extremely difficult in the short term and create lasting harm in the longer term.

6.1 Why this Difference is Important

The third approach to understanding the psychology of these groups is particularly required when trying to understand what is happening within them as an aid to thinking about the outcomes of membership. This is especially so when considering the long term difficulties in living which some members describe experiencing on emerging from such groups. This is because the *reason* for the processes being present in the groups has an impact on the psychological functioning of the individual mission focussed group member and on the functioning of the group itself. In addition, the meanings attributed to these experiences, and importantly the causes of these experiences, can have a huge impact on how they are processed by those who have been, or are, involved with the groups. It could also be suggested that making the assumption that group processes are constructed and carried out with the principal aim of recruiting and indoctrinating innocent bystanders to turn them into thought reformed members, over-constrains how those studying the groups conceptualise and understand them.

However, what also needs to be considered is that as there *are* processes and conceptualisations in common between the three approaches as has been described in this chapter. These commonalities may give the lie both to the notion that involvement in the groups is just a harmless phase that some young people go through when separating from their families of origin *and* that all group members are brainwashed into being unable to think for themselves. If these commonalities are accepted, then such polarised explanations can be viewed as giving too simplistic an account of the psychological and psychosocial processes and their meanings for those involved. By taking either of these polarised positions researchers may be denying a reality for those involved with the groups, which undermines the confidence of members and ex-members in their own ability to comprehend their world and their relationship to it.

7 Summary of Chapter

A third approach to understanding the experience of the processes within the groups studied here is now evident (Keiser & Keiser, 1987, Lalich, 2004, Walsh & Bor 1996, Walsh et al., 1995 and Zablocki, 2001) and the model that is being developed within this research fits with this approach.

This third approach differs from that of early researchers who have come to be seen as anti-cult (Ash, 1985, Clarke, 1976, 1977, 1978, Hassan, 1989, Langone, 1993, Singer & Ofshe, 1986) in that rather than viewing the relationship between such groups and their members as unidirectional it views it as reciprocal. It also does not rely on the concept of dissociation or hypnosis for the development of an individual's group 'persona'. Or on what Anthony and Robbins (2004) describe as a pseudo-conversion which involves an unthinking participation in group activities.

The third approach also differs from the more sociological approach of authors such as Coleman (1984), Melton and Moore (1982), Robbins and Anthony (2004) who would see this process both as a transitional experience; a natural progression from the primary family into independence, and as part of a conversion experience that involves non-rational factors such as emotion, intuition or ineffable mystical experiences (Anthony & Robbins, 2004).

This third approach is one in which a number of studies including: Keiser and Keiser (1987), Lalich (2004), Walsh and Bor (1996), Walsh et al., (1995), Zablocki (2001) and this thesis, see a structured systematic approach to attitude and behaviour change that has common features and which is used throughout many such groups. This thesis takes the approach further than previous researchers in that not only has it given a structured explanation of the psychosocial processes present in mission focussed groups, it has also identified that it is insufficient to explain only *what* is happening in the groups; it is essential to understand *why* these processes are happening, and how they interact with particular member's needs. Further, it suggests that this understanding must come from those who have been a part of such an experience.

To further extend this understanding the next study in this thesis will develop a grounded theory which identifies at a conceptual level (1) underlying common features identified by participants studied here (who described experiencing long-term difficulties in living on exiting their mission focussed cult) as being present in their way of relating to the world from before they joined their cult and (2) the effects of the interaction between the psychosocial processes individuals experience on

joining, during their membership and on leaving their cult and these underlying features and 3) the psychological sequelae of leaving such a group.

Chapter 5 Ex-Members Experiences

1 The Second Study

This study seeks to build a grounded theory from the testimonies of those who identify themselves as having long term difficulties in living, which they attribute to their membership of mission focused cults. By doing this it aims to produce a potentially generalisable theoretical model of the common elements that contribute to these problems. It was therefore decided to carryout a second Classical Grounded Theory analysis (Glaser, 1992, 2001, 2002, Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of relevant texts (see section 2, p128 below).

As in the first study in this thesis, the second study also used the Classical Grounded Theory method of analysis (Glaser, 1992, 2001, 2002, Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Discussion in Chapter 2 has shown that the design of grounded theory makes it ideal for the study of psychosocial processes and their development (Charmaz, 1995). The use of this method permits the systematic, objective and qualitative analysis of rich verbal data, enabling research questions to be addressed without compromising the richness of the texts being analysed (Pauli & Bray, 1998).

The research material for this analysis was divided into units of meaning which were coded systematically. This was done predominately manually, with only limited use of the Microsoft Word software package, as within grounded theory it is thought that the closer the researcher is to the data, the more immersed in the data, the closer the fit between the data and the emergent theory (Glaser, 1998). The painstaking iterative process of drawing out of meaning through repeated comparison of data, codes, classifications or themes and categories was completed only when the broad sampling of appropriate texts enabled the achievement of saturation; that is to say no more classifications, themes or categories emerged. The categories that emerged from this process were then used to generate a theoretical understanding of the psychological and psychosocial processes under investigation finally leading to the emergence of a Core Category. This core variable analysis organizes the multiple perspectives from different participants enabling the

potential confusion of this multiplicity of perspectives to be integrated in a way that allows the emergence of a theory grounded in the data. The Core Category is an abstract level of conceptualization which addresses the underlying or latent pattern discovered by the researcher's immersion in the data (Glaser, 2002).

1.1 A Glossarial Note

The definition of the term cult that is used in this second study is that which was begun in Chapter 1 that is to say that within this study the word cult denotes a group that is a new religious movement, or in Collins (1991) terminology a new religion, which also has the characteristics of a separate culture. Many, but possibly not all, new religions are also Mission Focussed Groups.

2 Data Used In this Study

The study analysed 21 texts in total. The majority of the material was auto-biographical. It was a pre-requisite that all those considered in this part of the research had self-identified as experiencing long term difficulties in living subsequent to cult involvement: The first texts used were the personal testimonies of 10 ex-members (30,000 words approximately) which were posted on the net as a discussion concerning cult members' experiences, how these experiences affected them psychologically and how personal issues such as alcoholism, depression and so forth were either overcome or could be overcome. This discussion was treated in some respects as one text as each participant's contribution was posted on the same source and was written for the same purpose; to enable participants to explore overcoming their long term difficulties in living experienced after leaving a cult. However, although they were analysed at the same stage of the research, they were analysed individually and the multiple posts from each person telling their stories were grouped to make a chronological narrative before analysis. The site that these were drawn from was set up to assist members from one particular cult to adjust back into their lives outside of the cult, although ex-members of other cults (and some members of the cult in question) also use this site for this purpose. In line with the BPS's guidelines for using internet sites and sources for data the site is being used anonymously (BPS, 2007) please see discussion of this in section 2.1.

Other textual material from ex-members who were self-identified as having long term difficulties in living was then theoretically sampled. This comprised of 4 sets of case notes from assessment and therapy sessions carried out by the researcher (a Consultant Counselling Psychologist) and used with permission of the clients, and semi-structured interviews with 6 ex-members who had identified themselves as having long term difficulties in living, thus fulfilling the key criterion for inclusion in this study. These interviews were carried out over a period of three years. In line with Glaser's thinking (Dick, 2003, Glaser, 1998) field notes were constructed subsequent to the interviews. This enables the researcher to listen more accurately and to focus not only on what is being said, but also on the emphasis that participants place on what they are saying and to note the salience of what is being said for the participants. This practice also reflects the researcher's custom over many years when interviewing clients in a range of settings and is a way of working that she is extremely familiar with; that of holding salient information until an appropriate time to make notes. (See Appendix 3 for prompt questions and Appendix 2 for field notes from both case notes and interviews). The last text theoretically sampled within this study was an open letter from an ex-member of a cult to his friends explaining why he left the cult he was a member of for many years (29,000 words approximately).

Aside from all data being drawn from participants who were self-identified as having long term difficulties in living subsequent to cultic membership, the choice of which texts to use was governed by the development of the emergent theory, since this is not predetermined in research using Classical Grounded Theory. If this research had been carried out within a hypothetico-deductive paradigm the data used could be interpreted as a sample collected by the 'snowballing technique' or thought of as a convenience sample. However, because the material considered in the theoretical sampling stage of the Classical Grounded theory approach is carefully selected (as likely to produce new codes, classifications or themes or to indicate the achievement of saturation), this contradicts any notion of convenience sampling because selection is dictated by the emergent theory and is made during the process of analysis rather than before the analysis is carried out.

As the categories emerged comparison groups were chosen to help generate as many properties of the categories as possible (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This is why it could appear that a higher number of texts than usual for qualitative research were analysed. Additionally, the researcher found that it proved to be extremely interesting to explore, within the reiterative nature of the task of analysing the various types of texts, the commonalities and differences that were becoming apparent and to build the categories, whilst conceptualising the underlying patterns. For this reason she may have continued beyond the number of texts that might otherwise have been considered sufficient.

It should be noted that when carrying out a Classical Grounded Theory analysis the unit of analysis is the incident, (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) this is an indicator of what is happening in the data at that particular line, sentence or paragraph and what emerges is a conceptualization of what the incident indicates rather than a description of what is happening (Glaser, 1978, 1998). The number of incidents can potentially be large, as every participant could theoretically report many incidents. Although the researcher will be addressing the textual material in a line by line manner, the aim in this stage is to get a sense of what is being indicated by reported incidents, rather than coding every possible concept .

Within a Classical Grounded Theory analysis the research process begins with open coding. After a tentative Core Category has emerged, selective coding begins; this is when the researcher returns to previously coded data (and goes on to code new data) with a tentative core variable in mind. When selectively coding, any data that are too remote from the core variable are discarded. This means that a large amount of data can be handled in a relatively quick manner once the selective coding begins, in that the researcher is not overwhelmed with extraneous codes which bear no relevance to the problem that is being addressed by the participants.

2.1 Ethical Considerations Concerning Data Selection

As in the previous study many of the texts used in this second analysis were accounts which had been written specifically to inform ‘the other’ of data and opinions that the authors thought important enough to put into the public arena. Those texts which are personal testimonies, were created as a demonstration of the

authors' own experiences within cults and were written as an aid to developing their own and others understanding of their experiences. Quotes from these testimonies have been paraphrased where necessary to conceal identifying information in line with the recommendations from the BPS's (2007) *Guidelines for ethical practice in psychological research online.* Additionally, these guidelines say that*:*

> *" the address of the website or discussion forum from which any data is gathered should not be published alongside any analysis of communication sourced from that same site".*p4

It should also be noted that 'quotes' are not given to authenticate the emergent theory, but to illustrate it – as an aid to understanding, not for the purpose of validation. Specifically, the accurate description of the 'story' that is being told is not what is sought here; a conceptualization of the underlying patterns that the 'story' reveals is the outcome of the endeavour within Classical Grounded theory. Thus, anonymity and paraphrasing are not at odds with this paradigm (BPS, 2007, Glaser, 2002).

It is clear that the testimonies used were written by authors of their own volition; at a time when they felt ready to do so and were written to offer others information that the authors felt would be valuable to them. They were also written to assist the authors and others in understanding an experience that they described as having left them with long term difficulties in living. Authentic accounts of this nature have much face validity. Since these accounts were created as a result of the free choices of the authors concerned, when they felt ready to so, and were posted in the public domain it is clear that there was no additional risk of harm to them in taking this material into this study. Nevertheless to further protect participants' identity pseudonyms or anonymous initials have been used in place of names.

All material that was not put into the public domain to be used to inform 'the other' was used with the permission of participants. All participants had to specifically agree to take part in this research, and state that they understood that they could withdraw at any time (see Appendix 4). Participants completed a consent form that informed them in writing that: the research would be totally anonymous, unless they

chose otherwise, that they had the right to withdraw from this study at any time and that they could request at any time that any information they had given for the research would be destroyed. In addition, participants were assured that any information used will be rendered anonymous (unless they specifically gave permission for information not to be anonymised) by changing particulars such as dates, names and locations and that there was no intention for any information to be used that could identify individuals or families. Participants were also told that if they wished even their consent form to be anonymous that they could just use their initials or tick the form to indicate agreement.

The reason behind this careful emphasis on anonymity for material not previously placed in the public domain is that all of these sources contain extremely personal material so that the researcher has to be constantly aware of the potential for harm to those who have been members of mission focussed cults and whose previously relatively private story is now being made more public. The sensitive nature of information about cultic experiences can also trigger old traumas or deepen psychological distress in other ways. If participants were to be identified from this material, this could be damaging to relationships with loved ones still in the cult that they have now left, or to their standing within society. Many ordinary members of society find the actions of mission focussed cult members incomprehensible. They can, understandably, react in a manner which could be seen as excluding or ostracising of ex-members when they find out that their friend, colleague or neighbour has been involved in cultic practises which they find hard to comprehend and they can be judgemental and unsympathetic about the current dilemmas that ex-members often have to face.

Without this attention to confidentiality amongst ex-members who have not already chosen to write publicly about their experiences it would be very hard to gain their agreement to participate in the study to enable them to feel safe and to ensure that their help will not further injure them in any way. Research, unlike therapy, is not generally undertaken for the benefit of the individual participant and therefore when working with these participants one must be sensitive to the potential outcome of any such encounters with researchers.

It will be clear that some of the text analysed has been provided by individuals who have specifically agreed to participate in this study, and the rest comes from testimony already in the public domain. Apart from this discussion of the ethical issues, this study is not seeking to distinguish between the accounts of ex-members and so from now on the term participants will be used to refer to all those whose experiences have formed an element of this study.

3 The Five Stages of Transition experienced by Cult Members who Emerge from their Cultic Experience with Long Term Difficulties in Living

The emergent theory derived from the Classical Grounded Theory Analysis (Glaser, 1978, 1998) of these texts proposes that there are five stages of transition experienced by those who have come out of a mission focussed cult with self-identified enduring difficulties in living. These stages emerge from the analysis as Meta-Categories marking steps on a journey from before entry to a mission focussed cult through to adjustment after leaving. The steps are; (1) the pre cult experience, (2) experiences around the time of joining a cult, (3) experiences whilst being in the cult, (4) experiences that lead to their leaving the cult and lastly, (5) post cult adjustment experiences.

A Core Category of 'The Need to Belong' has also emerged from this analysis. This Category will be considered briefly in relation to Stage Three; (members experiences whilst in their cult) because it would be hard to make sense of this period without some discussion of this category at that point, but the main discussion of this Core Category will take place after the account of the other emergent Categories, in order to more fully develop the theorising emergent from them.

The initial exploration and discussion of the Categories will take place within the Meta-Categories or stages as identified in Table 3.

The Categories within the Five Stages
The Pre- Cult Experience ▪ The Anomic Outsider ▪ Unwelcome Change
Joining the Cult ▪ Carrots – and a Stick ▪ Answers
The Stage of Membership ▪ Constant Change ▪ Separation ▪ Training and Re-training ▪ The Illusion of Unconditional Belonging ▪ Deterioration
Leaving the Cult ▪ Doubt and Deception ▪ Desperation ▪ Fear and Rejection
After Leaving the Cult ▪ Day to Day Survival ▪ Autonomy ▪ Isolation and Anxiety

Table 2 The Categories within the Five Stages

3.1 The First Stage: The Pre- Cult Experience

Participants who go on to report experiencing difficulties in living subsequent to their cultic involvement draw a picture of themselves at the time they are moving towards membership of a cult which seems to have two clear dimensions. These individuals have a sense of themselves as outsiders and their lives are characterised by significant or repeated experiences of unwelcome change.

3.1.1 The Anomic Outsider

The first Category has been given the label 'The Anomic Outsider, and will be seen as the driver behind the development of the Core Category which is that of 'The Need to Belong'. The people in this study who have emerged from the cultic experience reporting themselves as having enduring difficulties in living described their lives before they join the cult as ones in which there is a feeling of a lack of commitment to anything, of vulnerability and disillusionment, of lives that felt purposeless.

The stories participants tell, when describing their lives in the period preceding their joining a cult and in their formative years, are narratives in which there is a pervasive feeling of being on the outside. This sense may arise from a number of sources for example not fitting in to the family unit – being the unwanted child, being physically disadvantaged, being the 'wrong sex' or being adopted - or not fitting in because of cultural dislocation or not fitting into educational institutions or a peer group. An illustration of not fitting in to family expectations comes from the personal testimony of one participant who was part of his cult for over 15 years: he remembers how:

> *I was the runt of the family, all my brothers were physically strong, they would follow my father into the building trade, with my physical disability I couldn't keep up and my father made it very clear that I was not part of how his plan for his family was going to be. He often physically abused me and made me a focus for bullying within the family.* Craig

Another way this sense of being an outsider develops is when participants' families themselves did not fit into their society's norms. In such families parents may come from mixed religious backgrounds or may be from a religious background which is significantly different from the society they find themselves a part of so that the family's rules and norms differ from those around them. This causes conflict; either within the family belief system itself or between the family and the outside world and participants experience this difference as making them an outsider.

Helen, who had been brought up in a fundamentalist Christian family, describes how her parents taught her that her role in life was to do God's will and to be a 'good girl'. She was taught to keep herself apart from the world 'In the world but not of the world' a basic fundamentalist Christian tenet. This meant she could not make secular friends and that she felt very isolated in school. When, as a child, she did find a friend who was not 'Christian' and went without her parent's permission to this boy's house, she experienced being severely reprimanded and told the boy was not a suitable companion.

> *I felt like a stranger in a strange land, I found the beliefs and practices of my parents restrictive and my inability to find happiness within these rules I reflected back on myself. If I was not happy this was because of something I had done wrong, because if you did what God had told you to do he would bless you and you would be happy.* Helen

Sexual or physical abuse also lay at the root of some participant's experience of being an outsider. An example of this type of existence (which also indicates a number of the other features already mentioned) comes from an ex-member, Frieda, who was in a cult for over twelve years.

> *I had been a loner for the most of my life; I did not build up friendships like many children do. As I had often moved house and had attended a number of schools. In addition I was shy this was probably due to physical and other kinds of abuses which tend to make a child withdrawn…*

Both my parents had mental health problems: It was easier to hate my mother than my father even though I was beaten quite frequently and told by both parents that I was slow. When I begged to leave home they threaten me with imprisonment until I was an adult.

Another factor that can lead to a lack of social rootedness and the sense of being on the outside is that of a significant family member having died at a pivotal point in their lives. Julie describes how the death of her dearly loved mother contributed to the disintegration of her stable family base.

Then when I was a teenager my life changed from 2.5 children and the Dulux dog, as my mum died. My mum was still young with children to bring up. I had loved my mum to distraction. She was a mother figure to everyone and the strength and core of love in our family. When mummy died there was a great cloud of grief over our family. When I left home a little while later I was easily recruited into a cult as I was looking for something to belong to and feel loved. Julie

This lack of social rootedness leads to a sense of not belonging, of having something missing in their lives which can often lead to a general feeling of pointlessness and emptiness. One could describe many of these people in this stage as being world weary and disillusioned, with an element of spiritual/emotional poverty in evidence. What is of particular significance to this study is that in all of these instances the individuals described here have experienced their not fitting in as problematic; they wanted somewhere or something to belong to.

I know I was very scared, inwardly, before being recruited. I masked my wanting a sense of belonging by seeking good causes and having high ideals. But I felt pretty hopeless as the high ideals part was something I came to the conclusion was just not possible (before joining the cult). Frieda

3.1.2 Unwelcome Change

The second Category is that of Unwelcome Change. Those who are about to become new members of mission focussed cults are often in transition; between jobs, homes, careers, relationships and movement and change is a constant within their lives. They have a feeling that something is missing in their lives. This is eloquently expressed by Maria as she describes her life in the year before she joined her cult.

> *If I chose one word to describe the year before I joined the cult, it would be moving. I was in my third year at University, I moved from the house I was living in and settled into a small room near the sea. I moved away from the relationship I'd had for over a year. Our last drugs trip had temporarily made it impossible to think clearly, much less study for classes. Shortly after, I dropped out of University, taking a series of temp jobs to support myself. I'd changed my subject and was tired of studying. Friends offered me storage space for my personal effects so I could be mobile, staying with whomever, wherever. Then I impulsively went on a countrywide hitch-hiking trip with a friend. I was restless and looking for something that would engage my energy and creativity and I was looking for a place to belong.* Maria

Another participant identifies relational changes immediately prior to her cult involvement:

> *I was kind of in turmoil because of breaking up with my boyfriend after being together for four years. I still went to class but was feeling despondent as I had nothing to do.* Lesley

> *I think that actually in society there are more loners than is often realized. I certainly felt a loner because I was very individualistic. The cult thrives on attracting this kind of person and then squashes all the individualism out of them. And the loner goes along with it. Is it because this is the first time they have 'conformed' and been accepted?* JA

I was always worried about dying young and was suffering from a lot of anxiety. I kept dreaming that someone was trying to kidnap me or murder me. I was brought up as a Christian, then in my college years, having abandoned my faith I was always worried about rotting in hell. I felt the sword of Damocles hanging over my head. I needed to find a mother, a place called 'Family' and Love with a capital 'L'. Frieda

3.2 The Second Stage: Joining the Cult

Whatever the particular circumstances that the person who is going to join a mission focussed cult and then emerge with enduring difficulties in living experiences, it appears to lead to a feeling of ennui and a state of anomie and rootlessness and they describe a loss of ideals and a lack of social rootedness. There is a sense of something missing or lacking in their lives. They feel incomplete and are searching for something to make their lives more meaningful. Something they can belong to.

However, these individuals are not so disillusioned that they have yet given up, there is a drive within them to find somewhere to belong, a place where they can have the feeling of being outsiders transformed into one of being special, to develop a sense of purpose and have meaning in their lives. This need to belong is what then makes individuals vulnerable to wanting to become one of a group of 'special people in a special group' with their difference transformed into exclusivity.

Personally, I was looking for purpose in life and also to escape from my family of origin. I was not well equipped in my late teens to survive in the real world… As I entered my twenties, I felt world-weary - as if there were no point in further searching and took a stable fulltime job. I was dissatisfied and restless and still hoping for a more satisfying life. Maria

3.2.1 Carrots – and a Stick

The third Category that emerged has been labelled Carrots – and a Stick and this is first manifest within the second stage, which is that of joining the cult. Having lived a

life that lead these particular 'outsiders' to become seekers of somewhere to belong, they then meet with members of a mission focussed cult. The outsiders need to belong is met when they find they are in a position with this new group of people to have instant relationships - they feel wanted, and also needed, as the cults' mission gives them a purpose and meaning for their lives

> *Cults recruit in places where youth hang out and they latch on to the more vulnerable; those who are seeking answers or meaning in their lives or those who have had youthful ideals dashed or those that they believe these ideals will be fulfilled in a group which appears to have all the answers.* JD

Those who are recruiting are attractive people; they seem kind and tell the new member they belong to a select few with a higher purpose and calling in life (which is to fulfil the group's mission).

Frieda describes her first encounter with the cult she joined

> *…the people I met seemed to love and care about each other so much and I had always dreamed of being in such a group, a team, a family, somewhere I could belong. Because of my upbringing I had never seen something like this before.* Frieda

> *I had never seen so many good looking men in one room in my life and they all told me that they loved me. They all hugged me and kissed me, even the girls did, which was an extremely strange experience to a young girl from a very working class background in the seventies. I can remember wondering if the girls were all 'bent' – we'd call it 'gay' nowadays. There is something very seductive about being surrounded by young attractive people who all tell you how important you are and how much they all love you. It is a powerful hook and I returned to visit the group again because of this – and the gorgeous young man who made me the centre of his attention.* Susan
> *The lifestyle sounded just like one that I had been looking for, that is to say a place where I could belong whole heartedly. The community, the inspiration, the excitement, the love....was really amazing….Feeling that I was part of a*

unique and idealistic group of my peers who were also living an exciting and different kind of life had a tremendous appeal for me as a young adult. I desperately wanted a loving family to belong to. I was a Christian who had never believed in church, I loved music and craved adventure. Communal living intrigued me and being idealistic I believed that one person could make a big difference in the world and was willing to give it a try. Julie

These people appear kind and caring, but there is also a contradiction in that they use their ideology to make the outsiders feel threatened. They do this both to get them to commit to the group and then to get them to conform. The threats will not generally be direct physical threats, but they will illustrate what they believe to be the consequences of not becoming a part of fulfilling the cults' mission. This can range from eternal damnation, whatever that means to each particular cult, depending on its mission, to ill health and to a vague but fundamental 'judgement' in which whatever it is that the outsider fears most will be the consequence of not joining with the group to fulfil it's mission.

These threats are at odds with the caring message the mission focussed cult member is conveying and this can lead to confusion in the outsider. However this confusion has the effect of making them mistrust themselves and so rely on the cult members who describe having access to the special knowledge held within the mission focussed cult.

3.2.2 Answers

The fourth Category is that of Answers. This Category refers to the answers to life's problems, both practical and existential. Mission focussed cults are offering these potential new members salvation; this is not solely salvation in the sense of a 'life after death' salvation or a salvation from 'sin'. They offer salvation from purposelessness, loneliness, ennui and anomie. They offer a solution to the outsider's desperation about their world, their lack of belonging and the purposeless in being that they feel, proffering a sense of belonging, of being part of an elite, with a focus and purpose in life.

At this point there develops a sense of desperation as the contrast between life outside of the mission focussed cult and what is offered inside is so great and potential members are told that they must choose and choose now.

> *I had my doubts, but because I had been told before by the leaders in the group to expect this, I said to my family that I was doing the will of God and following him. That I have found the truth and I didn't want to stay with them. Although I said this I was not convinced of this inside.* Maisie

So the potential members make a commitment and begin a period of training and indoctrination into the group's mores and way of existing, and to learn about what these people have to offer and what they believe in. They adopt the group's mission and through both wanting to belong and indoctrination internalise it as their own. Once they have made a commitment to the cult the outsider is no longer an outsider, they are now a new cult member and they belong.

3.3 The Third Stage: The Stage of Membership

3.3.1 Constant Change

This fifth Category has some similarities with material that was considered to be part of the first stage since it reflects the destabilising effects of change. Members of mission focussed cults are subject to constant change and uncertainty; this change is intrinsic to the mission focussed cult lifestyle and is part of the modus operandi of the cult, helping to maintain the structures necessary to carryout the cult's mission. Repeated change ensures that there is no time or security for reflection, which would enable the membership to develop alternative views or structures which might transform the cult and move it away from the leadership's definition of the mission, which is central to the cult's existence. Then the mission would not take the necessary precedence over other fundamental human drivers such as the need for self-fulfilment or kinship. As was shown in the first Grounded Theory analysis the membership of such a mission focussed cult is expected to be willing to sacrifice and be sacrificed for the mission.

The experience of constant change can be seen here in the accounts of their early experience in cults of two former members:

> *When first joining a cult the group seems so different and the timings of how day to day things happen are at first seem to be new and therefore different. But after a while in spite of the constant changes, things fall into patterns which echo the uncertainty of life before joining and in a strange way offers a sort of comfort even though this 'new' life is meant to be 'radical' and 'different', it soon becomes wearing, but, at least it is in a 'good cause' and can be endured under this heading.* Don

> *One thing that provides an adrenaline rush is moving - especially to another country with a different culture, economy, countryside and so on. But that is exhausting and sooner or later a person can't keep up with it anymore and then what? I don't have the security I would like to have in my life due to living a gypsy lifestyle in the cult without any of the lifetime support a gypsy would have. At least gypsies take care of their sick and young and live nomadic cycles which give them a sense of stability.* GC

And here, Maisie talks about the lifestyle of some of those members she knew.

> *I felt so sorry for those people whose job it was to live constantly on the road raising funds for some centre, rewarded by having someone to wash their clothes and cook them a few meals and then crashing in the commune in sleeping bags on the floor.* Maisie

Many mission focussed cults develop a strong hierarchical structure and demotions and promotions are another form of change which serves to maintain control within them; this lack of individual stability requires the member to rely on group stability for a focus for their lives.

> *But then there was one of those mini-waves of reform and the local tyrants got the sack and I found myself as the local leader of a cult commune. Then*

in order to re-establish control they made my home an area office and they appointed an area leader to move in and take over control. Colum

3.3.2 Separation

The sixth Category is that of Separation and this refers to separation from significant relationships within the cult. Relationships within mission focussed cults are primarily with the group as a whole and for the good of the group even to the extent that individual relationships may be arranged or rearranged by the group e.g. marriages, relationships with children, childcare responsibilities and so forth.

The nature of the cult was to separate people and I was often separated from people I cared about. There were times that I was with people I cared a lot about and that I felt close to them and very alive. I know not everybody experienced as much separation - some experienced much more. Maisie

Then they forced me to go to another commune as co-leader of an outreach home, leaving my son at the cult school. Colum

KO a former top leader in one of the cults describes how monogamous relationships were not favoured within his cult.

Lots of sex with multiple partners was considered to be good. Monogamous relationships were considered to be bad.

The effect of this separation can be very distressing and debilitating, Julie remembers the sadness and confusion it brought.

They split up a commune that was successful and happy. We were getting new disciples on a regular basis; in fact many had joined since I arrived. We were making lots of money for the cult, and above all we were happy. I didn't know what had happened to my fiancé and they wouldn't tell me, the place where I was sent was very nice but I couldn't see past my sadness, I think I cried for a month. Julie

3.3.3 Training and Re-Training

The seventh Category is that of Training and Re-Training. Within mission focussed cults there is a constant training and retraining in the group's beliefs to maintain focus on the mission of the group and to destabilise any certainties about self and power that the individual might have. Additionally the training patterns extend the issue of change already discussed: training seems to be used more or less deliberately as a further destabilising force. JD talks about how this began for her very shortly after making a commitment to the group she joined.

> *I had to participate in memorization, classes, purging sessions, trials of obedience, exhortations, group inspirational sessions. Going on witnessing trips to the seaside, beach baptisms and group attraction via singing and dancing being taught that 'God is not democratic, he is a dictator', and having to pray that God would kill me if I ever left.*
>
> *After a few months I was loaded on the bus and had to go to another place for basic training. Whist there we had: Work, exercise, classes, purging sessions, inspirations, persecution sketches, scant food at times, stomach upsets from drinking stagnant water, trials of endurance and tests of loyalty.*

Don who was a member of his cult for nearly five years describes elements of his training which were a part of his everyday life.

> *You always had somebody you reported to and they ensured that you made the time for your bible study or studying of the group's literature. This included having to have memorized a portion of scripture or the groups teaching which you would have to recite back to everybody present before being allowed to eat at meal times. I always felt that due to my lack of education that I was disadvantaged in doing this because other people found it easier to read and assimilate information quicker and easier than I could. But I never had to miss a meal because of this, so the cult's incentive system obviously worked!* Don

We had to learn Bible verses, having them hung around our necks, while doing the chores. Then instead of talking about the past we had to repeat them while doing different activities. Lesley

3.3.4 The Illusion of Unconditional Belonging

The Core Category within the grounded theory that emerged from the data (which will be discussed further in section 4) is that of The Need to Belong and it is at this stage of cult membership that belonging is experienced with its most positive effects. Members enjoy times of great unity, and joy and within the mission focussed cults there is often the experience of genuine concern, closeness, love and friendship. Members often feel camaraderie and the notion of a genuinely shared experience.

I came home from the first church meeting and wrote in my diary I have 400 new friends I just have to find out their names. I felt closer to them than I did to my family. JA

Yes. I do relate to looking for meaning and being attracted to a sense of what I believed to be a safe "family" and safe "love" and this was what I thought I had found when I encountered the cult. Frieda

But this sense of belonging and camaraderie is often fleeting and the warmth can also be conditional on being a 'good' cult member, then when this is not achieved the recurring feeling of being an outsider can lead to confusion and discomfort. This can be seen in KB and KO's descriptions of the conditionality of this belonging.

And always you have the spectre that if you leave or argue then this warmth will be withdrawn. KB

A lot has been written about the leaders' love and kindness. Most of it by themselves! However, you can see that there is a measure of truth in this whilst the individual is perceived to be a loyal, unquestioning follower. But if

any hint of disloyalty is detected, the leadership turns and things often get horrible very quickly. The leaders are inclined to shoot their wounded and throw the bodies off the back of the wagon. KO

3.3.5 Deterioration

As these last contributions suggest the positive experience of belonging just does not last. The ninth Category is that of Deterioration. Even in the phase where members experience the sense of belonging the most and when initial misgivings might be expected to have been quelled, it is evident, as indicated above, that doubts and a sense of stress may be present, and for many this gets worse, leading to the stage of deterioration. By this point in the process members are frequently experiencing hardship and there is often decline in many areas of their lives; in their health, their relationships, and their overall well-being. Over time these members experience a deterioration of their physical abilities and well-being. They can no longer take the pressure or burden of performing.

Paradoxically mission focussed cult membership can take a heavy toll on an individual's ability to function at the high level that is necessary within such organizations. In many cases physical deterioration and exhaustion are linked to a diminution of zeal and belief in the cult and/or its leaders and eventually these members can experience deterioration in their commitment to the group.

An example of deterioration in the quality of life and of the poverty cult members often experienced is given by JD the mother of young children.

Every day was living on the edge. We could not get back home across land because of the wars going on and we couldn't afford to fly. When our visa was up in one country we had to take a boat to another to renew it. The story is a tale in its own right, but to sum it up: The only boat was cancelled and I had to perform for top immigration officials in this country because we did not have any money to extend our visas until the next boat.

It was a crowded and filthy boat- so crowded that people had to pack together in order to get through the crowds. As the boat pulled out I could feel panic whilst I kept it together for the children. We had a couple of litres of fizzy drink which I had to ration as the meals included in the price were in rotted oil drums which were filled with rice and fish heads and lots of insects. The drink was also in a rusted oil drum and people dipped their dirty hands in to scoop the food and drink.

By this time members are experiencing the huge weight of responsibility for fulfilling the group's mission, having been taught (and accepted) that there were dire consequences of failing to do this; for friends, families, themselves and the world. They feel they have no choice but to continue to struggle on although often suffering as we have seen, from illness and living in poverty. Outside a mission focussed cult the state brought about by all this change, losses and separations, constant training and retraining alongside poverty might be called burnout. In a mission focussed cult this state is coupled with a belief that there is no way out of the group (as shown in the findings of the first Classical Grounded Theory analysis) which increases the fears that members have to live with. As things deteriorate there is increased pressure put on the member to perform and to live up to the ideal that the beliefs of the cult teach them. To paraphrase what Helen was taught by her family before she joined the cult 'if you do what God tells you, you will be happy' so both the individuals themselves and other more senior members of the cult see the exhausted and disillusioned member as the source of their own problem. This results in self and other condemnation and the consequences of this are as KO describes below.

I realised that all of us have probably been trampled, belittled, harangued, and spiritually mistreated during our time in the cult. KO

3.4 The Fourth Stage: Leaving the Cult

3.4.1 Doubt and Deception

The tenth Category is that of Doubt and Deception and this is both the deception of self and of others. Being a member of a mission focussed cult means that you have no time alone; you are constantly busy and involved with fulfilling the cult's mission. At first this is inspirational but after a while it can become onerous and tedious. Susan describes how she became so desperate for some time alone that she snuck off whilst out selling the group's literature on the streets.

> *"I just wanted some space for myself and whilst nobody was looking I crept away to the local library and found a book to read, I can't even remember which one it was, but it was such a joy to be able to read something that wasn't cult originated and that was 'entertainment'. But, oh did I feel guilty, and I wondered if I was going to be punished by God for wasting His time. We were continually told to 'redeem the time', which meant to use it to 'win the world for Jesus'. Anything else was a sin. But, oh did I relish that small time - less than half an hour, in which I could rest my brain and body from trying so hard to be a good cult member.*

Julie also describes how she endeavoured to make space for herself and how she had to do this in a manner that would be seen as a legitimate activity: shopping, rather than one which could be seen as self-serving.

> *Near to our house was a small shop. I used to slip out to go there for shopping and for some time alone. There were so many people in the house that the only way I could be alone was to go outside.*

As has been shown such a cult has a mission to fulfil, and because of its central importance this overriding mission means that members have no time or psychological space for themselves. Although the needs cited above may in some cases appear insignificant, they can be invidious, and add to an over-burdening of the mission focussed cult member as their wants and needs are sublimated to the demands of the mission. Eventually, when the compensations of belonging and

being a special person in a special group cease to outweigh the costs of membership, the cult member has to find ways to cope with the pressure of remaining a member.

Much of what starts to happen in these circumstances is based on deception: members who are starting to realise that they cannot 'make it' within the mission focussed cult feel they have to deceive those around them so that they can continue in the group to which they have dedicated a significant part of their lives. Part of the mission focussed cult experience, as has been shown, is that there is no escape (apart from anything else the member is often aware that there is nothing for them outside the cult, they have given up so much for the cult: time, money, educational opportunities, career prospects and relationships) they have to find a way to stay in, even if that means deception.

And of course self-deception too is part of this process, deceiving oneself that the requirements of the cult which are made to fulfil its mission are acceptable or at least manageable because that is what is perceived as necessary and is expected of cult members. It must appear that the mission continues to have primacy over the individual's wants or needs and to make that possible many will find it easier to deceive themselves.

This is illustrated in the excerpt below where JD is taking about the practice of prostitution and group marriage which evolved within one cult as a way of achieving its mission. This practice served many purposes, but the intention that was expressed by the cult when it was instigated was to find an innovative method for reaching out with God's love to those lost souls who would not, in their view, be reached in any other way. This practice was also at times extremely financially rewarding and had the effect of binding members who participate in the practice to the group, because when described to outsiders such practices are commonly met with disbelief, condemnation and ostracism.

Even for those who carryout mission focussed cult practices or instructions reluctantly there is often a time when cognitive dissonance sets in and they internally rationalise what they have done by saying to themselves 'it is a good thing

to do as I did as I wouldn't have done it if it wasn't good'. This tautological thinking can be used to justify many acts – especially those which would be seen as extreme or bizarre in the world out side of the cult. However, the litany of 'I did it so I must believe in it' can wear thin over time. This is especially so if the demands of the mission give rise to activities that are actually beyond what the individual can tolerate with a reasonable amount of physical or psychological comfort so that she can reasonably justify them to herself

> *I was repeatedly used sexually in the cult and in many cases was not a willing participant. The notion of rape did not even exist in the cult and I didn't realise that this was what had happened until after I had left. I didn't know that it was an option; so I was feeling wrong and not stopping what someone else had decided it was okay to take, although I was saying and meaning no, in fact, saying no was wrong in the cult.* JD

The excerpt from Susan is an illustration of how the mission takes precedence over the individual and their needs and an example of the type of pressure that members' experience and which can eventually lead to conflict between their own internalised sense of self and commitment to the cult. This can eventually lead to burnout and the need to flee these demands which engender anxiety and stress in the individual cult member.

> *I remember when one girl who I really admired told me that they way she appeared to sell so much group literature was that every time she got a large donation she put a handful into the nearest rubbish bin, I couldn't believe she would do such a thing. But as time went by I too started to do things that I wouldn't have dreamt of at the beginning, I would do things to keep me sane like taking time that I should have used for cult tasks to do little things that gave me pleasure and I stole time from memorising, I said it took longer than it did, to get some rest – I was working 18 hours a day at times and just couldn't cope. Eventually I didn't agree with what the cult was telling me I had to do and so I consciously paid lip service to it, saying what a great idea, but knowing full well I had no intention of ever doing it. Susan*

I guess that is how it is for lots of us. You can't put your finger on a point or thing but suddenly you realise you have a lot of little doubts which are growing into one big one. I was lucky I got validation from my husband, another cult member. Others struggle with the doubts thinking themselves 'bad.' JA

3.4.3 Desperation

The eleventh Category is that of Desperation. It is never easy leaving a mission focussed cult and leaving is not often a structured, planned decision. The decision to leave is frequently taken in desperation, with such members thinking either that they cannot tolerate their existence within the cult any longer or that they no longer 'fit' within the group of which they have been such dedicated members. For these individuals there is a real dilemma in their beliefs about themselves, whether this is belief about their worthiness to belong; to be a special person in a special group or belief about the group's core values and its practices. All this leads towards burnout and the growing acknowledgement of their need to evade the pressure.

I found myself losing the ability to produce any more, I had been a top sales person for the cult for over a year before coming to a country where I did not speak the language or was able to use my sales pitch which had previously been so successful. So I applied myself to even more hours on the street trying to sell and raise my game. The net result was that after about 7 months of this I was totally exhausted and unable to cope. This of course was my own fault and I could not overcome it. I was caught between not being able to go on and no way back…

There was also pressure being put on me to get sexually involved with a female member of the group and my fundamental upbringing was at odds with this as it was not a wholesome union, as it was based on trying to fit with the dictates of the cult, rather than a mutual attraction. After much heart searching after 5 years of living this life I eventually decided to not go on, but to look for another way…not back of course, as you can never go back… Don

3.4.4 Fear and Rejection

The twelfth Category is that of Fear and Rejection. During this period the mission focussed cult member lives in fear, the fear that they may have chosen wrongly when they joined their cult and that all of their sacrifices may have been in vain. The beliefs of the cult have taught them that there is only one legitimate way to live one's life and they are contemplating not being able to do this: they fear that they will be punished by a vengeful god; They fear that they have nowhere and nothing to go to, as they burnt their bridges when they joined the cult; there is no way out for them and they also fear that they may be making a huge mistake for themselves their friends and family - and even for the world.

> *No one wanted to leave and suffer the torment of condemnation, everlasting shame and contempt, being the least in the kingdom of heaven, having a millstone hung around their neck, weeping and gnashing of teeth, God's angry judgements, murder, suicide, insanity, no one wanted to suffer the shame of being a betrayer, a traitor, this was all very strong and very successful indoctrination that kept and still keeps people in. C*

This state of fear is exhausting; many experience vacillation between believing and not believing, leading to a position where often the mission focussed cult member is unable to choose. They have become used to following the rules of the cult and having decisions made for them by those who they believe have responsibility for them and now they are asking themselves to step outside of the safety zone of the beliefs of the cult, to step outside of the one place that they felt they belonged and to step outside of the certainty of salvation. When this state of tension becomes so exhausting that it is intolerable the member *has* to act and so they leave, although this means relinquishing the benefits as well as losing the pressures of being a mission focussed cult member.

> *I am also realizing that the process of leaving can take time. I don't mean "getting the cult out of the ex-member". I think to some extent that much was abandoned at the moment of decision which enabled me to leave, despite what remained. I had that sort of magical thinking that comes with the family fallout when leaving. I had seen people suffering from panic attacks before*

they became a problem that I experienced. I remember shortly before I broke away feeling panic creeping in as I teetered between the fantasy world of the cult and the long separated world. Frieda

There is no evidence cited in the literature that people leave mission focussed cults because they have succeeded in fulfilling the task or mission of the group. They leave because they acknowledge they can't succeed, they have failed and those people who had such a need to belong at the beginning of this process know, fundamentally know, that they have failed and that they don't belong; they are not special people in a special group. Such a profound sense of failure, for individuals who came into mission focussed cults with the kinds of difficulties that were indicated in the Categories that emerged concerning the pre-cult experiences of these participants, seems likely to be devastating and to have long-term effects.

Whether the failure is that they could not 'make the grade' or whether it is a failure in discernment back when they joined the group, at this stage in their lives members have come to a point where they can no longer continue to function in the hope of succeeding as a cult member. They cannot tolerate the experience any longer and they have to get out.

I prayed that it would become so bad that I would have no choice except to leave. I was on the edge of insanity and I had to escape and so I made an impulsive decision. Fortunately I was together with all my children and I had money saved for going to a foreign mission field and I was burnt out, numb and ready to crack. I just had to go and get us all out. JD

This does not imply that all members who leave are choosing to move to an alternative way of life, rather that they see no alternative; but feel they have no choice. Some rationalize the decision to themselves by saying this is only a temporary respite; a sabbatical, and promise themselves and others that they will return. Some may describe their move in terms of becoming a supporter of the group rather than in the central cadre of the group. For many though it seems, that they have depleted their resources to such an extent that they simply cannot fight anymore and they just give up in a state of exhaustion.

For some members though, the fact that they are in a process of leaving may become obvious to the leadership of the mission focussed cult who may see, before the member themselves does, that being a member of the cult is no longer a viable option. The mission focussed cult may decide to reject the member and ask them to leave.

> *I had been looking for a route out of the cult long before the beginning of my last year as a member. My opposition to a lot of things had caused me to be continually in and out of trouble.* Colum

> *But when I was asked to 'return to my parents', I did so in the belief that I had failed God. I had also burnt my bridges as far as education was concerned… but this was not important, as the world was going to end within the next twenty years. My place in the kingdom of heaven was forfeit and I was in physical danger as I had lost God's protection and I carried a burden of guilt for failing.* Susan

> *Of all the ways of leaving a cult I'd say that the MOST destructive is to be kicked out or told to leave, especially after having your personal belongings that were important emotionally to you taken away You were taken for everything and condemned for what was HEALTHY in you and you then were ejected. In addition we often came from places where we had had huge losses or were previously abused and this was for some, an attractant to what appeared to be a loving group that seemed so wholesome.* Frieda

And they leave.

They may leave by rejecting all that the cult represents, they may leave by rejecting themselves for not being worthy to stay in the mission focussed cult or they may leave by rejecting where they perceive the cult as having moved from the original mission. But they leave, and they have to cope with the consequences.

3.5 The Fifth Stage: After Leaving the Cult

If leaving the cult was difficult the subsequent adjustments required (which are identified in the last three Categories) are experienced as no less a struggle.

3.5.1 Day to Day Survival

The thirteenth Category is about the struggle for Day to Day Survival outside the cult. The reality of living outside of the mission focussed cult as an ex-member is often very different to the feared fantasy; it is really much more mundane, with the stresses, in the first instance, being to do with the very basic needs of every day life. Additionally, in many cases ex-members have responsibility for others - children or partners, but they are without the resources which non-members would generally have built up over the years that they have spent living within the cult. Ex-members are unequipped for life in the outside world. After a period when one has lived communally with all money and provisions being organised centrally, obtaining the day to day needs of life can take all of ones energy and inventiveness. Especially when life previous to joining a mission focussed cult was one that left the individual feeling they had nowhere to belong, when perhaps years later they leave the they are often even more isolated and thrown back on their own (often meagre) resources.

> *I had never held a job in my home country, having been involved in the cult from my youth and now I was an adult with a family of my own. I had no viable references. At every job I applied for I was told I was either over or under qualified and I did not even know what a CV was. I had to get a temporary National Insurance number as I have never even had one of these.* JD

> *We had to take jobs which paid minimum wage as we had no skills, and very low self-esteem. We couldn't make friends as when they asked us about our past and our cult-derived belief systems we dropped them. It was completely devastating - and I almost had a nervous breakdown. I thought I had really failed God.* Greta

It was so hard to get out because I had family responsibilities and no resources to meet these responsibilities. I could only get crap jobs as I had no 'official work experience' and no CV or references. I had no bank account, cheque book or credit card, no Social Security Card and no driving licence. This meant that I couldn't get a bank account as I had no established credit and no credit card. I couldn't get a credit card as I had no bank account! I finally was given an account in the bank that the same company I was working for banked with. The neighbourhood I lived in was poor and dangerous. I had no furniture and no social support system. Frieda

This lack of life skills and resources underscores the ex-members sense of not fitting in. But they also have to cope with the realization that they did not 'fit in' to their cult and this can be devastating. They are 'outsiders' again. They are outsiders twice over.

3.5.2 Autonomy

The fourteenth Category is that of Autonomy, which ex-members have to develop or redevelop. In addition to lacking resources and becoming an outsider again, former cult members do not find it easy to be responsible for decisions and choices that are part of everyday life. This is because they have moved away from a way of being which has been regulated by group decisions and dictates from leaders who had of necessity to put the mission first. The freedom to choose has, in itself, the potential for harm; with decision making comes responsibility for choices and the possibility of making a decision which could be wrong. The need to weigh up the evidence, even for which brand of coffee to drink, save alone what school to put your children into, when they may never have attended a mainstream school, can be enormously threatening. Frieda describes this experience.

It was a challenge to have to make choices and this was a process – one where I first had to learn that I could make choices and that there were choices to be made. This was hard to do; making choices on a daily basis without anyone telling me what to do. This had to come from within me and being that my internal me was so pared down in that I didn't know what style

of clothing I liked, I couldn't chose what food to eat as I didn't know what I liked, or what music I liked. I had to discover in my third decade what my peers had already established over time. Frieda

Because I was so scared of making mistakes I was almost incapable of making decisions. We had not been allowed to make important decisions for years (except the one that got us thrown out, Ha Ha). Greta

3.5.3 Isolation and Anxiety

The fifteenth and final Category in this analysis is that of Isolation and Anxiety. For some time before leaving these members have lived lives of fear – fear of failure, fear of making the wrong decision, fear of being found out by the others in the mission focussed cult. These foci for anxiety continue after leaving the cult, but are often added to by the fear of God's judgement, fear of the world outside and fear of being exposed to the evil in the world without the protection of 'being in God's will'. Now too there is also the fear of being discovered to be ex-members; how can such previous lives be explained to others? Experiences which translate outside the mission focussed cult (without the protection of being a special person in a special group who lives by special rules) into things such as prostitution, begging, exploiting child labour, child abuse, benefit and tax fraud do not make for an easy transition from one culture to another. These difficulties breed anxiety and feelings of isolation, and it becomes evident that the psychological processing of experience in ways such as these, in those whose early life inculcated a sense of being an outsider, but one with an enduring need to belong, is likely to promote the development of long term psychological problems (Beck, 1967, 1976,1983, Padesky, 1994).

The excerpts below describe this isolation and anxiety and its consequences from a range of different perspectives.

I began my first year out of the cult with extreme anxiety. My plan that I told people was that I was going to have a sabbatical from the group and that I

would return after this. I felt in the wrong and that any bad things that happened to those around me were caused by this. Frieda

I thought dreadful things would happen to me or my family if I stopped contributing to the cult. I was scared stiff. However, I had two conflicting emotions in me; when those of us who lived outside of the cult discussed things like whether the leader was the prophet of God it felt like blasphemy, but I wanted to hear it, I wanted it proclaimed but I was mortally afraid.

This is when my whole world came crashing down around me: all that I had believed in and practiced for two decades was untrue. The things I had done such as the unconventional sexual behaviour, swapping partners and giving sexually explicit reading material to my children, all of it was wrong. Everything I had done, not wanting to, but believing that this was the way to be a radical cult member and that it would help my children, it wouldn't: in fact just the opposite was the case. I wished that it was a nightmare and had never happened. I couldn't to join in with more conventional practises - I tried but the damage was too profound and it hurt too much to keep reliving it in this way and I would just sit there and cry and then walk away in a fog. Amanda

I can quite honestly say that I was suicidal and for quite some months I would not allow myself to think, because if I followed the thoughts through to the realisation that I had completely failed in my purpose in this world I would've drawn the conclusion that there was no reason for my continued existence and that if I had to face God I should get it over with sooner rather than later. Susan

I remember it as a journey through darkness. Day after day I sank deeper and deeper. I realised I had been betrayed. I saw the whole thing as a monstrous lie. Everything I had built my life and personality on was false! Nothing was left. Only darkness, everywhere darkness. At the same time I was feeling so guilty for leaving, all the training I had had about the "backsliders" and going back to the system was killing me. I even lost my

faith in God. There was nothing I could hold on to. I think my baby to come saved me from becoming insane. SL

The constant changes that were part of these individuals life both before and during their cultic experiences can often stay with them; they find it hard to put down roots, often in response to the fears they experience.

One of the most powerful fears that people experience is that of settling down and setting down roots. I nearly bought a house one time and greatly regret that I didn't. if I had done so I would've had a home that was mine and that I could make into what I wanted and I wouldn't have wasted all those years paying rent. I could've sold it too had I wanted to. But my fear stopped me from doing so, fear of permanence and settling. Rental contracts lock people into leases for years at a time, but if you own a house you have a place to call your home and that is a great feeling. I have no pension, no roots and I have drifted around for years, raising a family and trying to survive. It was the fear of taking root in the community and participating to whatever degree that I choose which stopped me. It has been a real struggle these last few months and I have been very depressed. Struggling just to go through the motions. GC

Ex-members can feel inadequate, unskilled and full of self-distrust and self-recrimination because of their previous choices. This can be exacerbated by the recriminations many have to face from those friends and family when they try to reconnect with them, and the situation is especially hard for those whose families were not able to provide a positive developmental structure and experience for them in the first place. Ex-members anxiety and consequent isolation does not enable a rapid development of the social and age related skills that would in general be part of the developmental processes that happened in the societies that they now find themselves trying to function within.

4 A Core Category: The Need to Belong

As mentioned earlier a Core Category emerged from this analysis which is centred firmly on the concept of 'The Need to Belong'. The analysis of the participants' accounts indicates that a lack of social rootedness has led to an initial sense of not belonging, of there being something missing in potential mission focussed cult members lives. What is of particular significance to this study is that all participants experienced this as problematic. They actively felt themselves to be 'outsiders' and they wanted somewhere or something to belong to.

This Core Category indicates how those 'outsiders' who have been exposed to constant changes within their lives before they join a cult have an overriding need to belong. The relationship between the Core Category and the other Categories in their stages can be seen in Diagram 2.

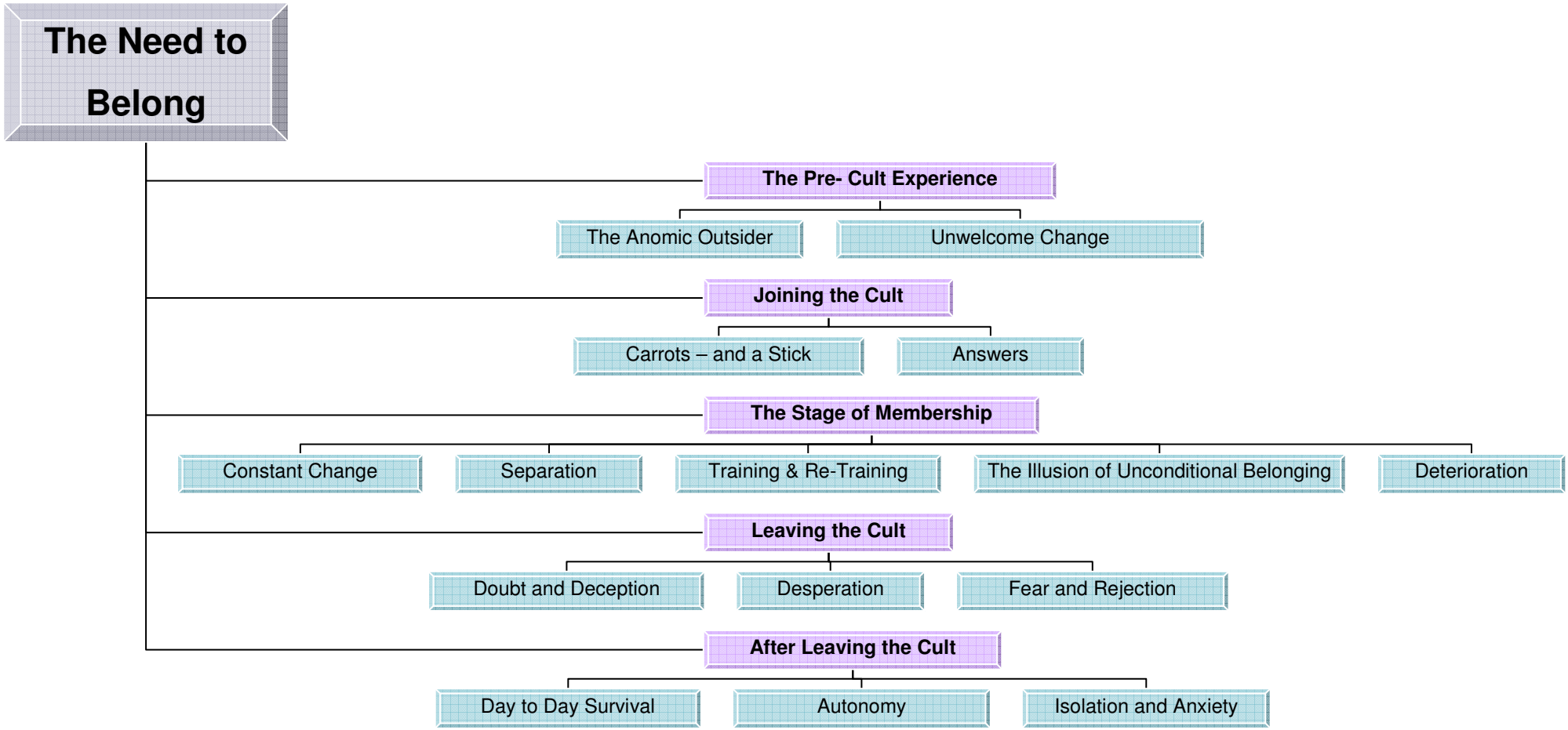

Diagram 2 The Relationship between the Core Category and the Categories within the Different Stages

This extreme need to belong is what first enables the mission focussed cult member to find what the cult appears to offer as attractive and then to accept that the answers that they are given by the mission focussed cult do indeed resolve all of their problems and give meaning to their lives.

Having their need to belong met by the group and having a mission makes the life of constant pressure and change initially acceptable or tolerable. However, the stress of separation, fatigue and other pressures that they experience in their day to day lives begins the process of deterioration (even their commitment to the cult may eventually begin to deteriorate) which the mission focussed cult tries to counter by training and re-training. Gradually the experience of belonging becomes interspersed with a sense of exhaustion and the beginnings of desperation.

As many elements of their lives begin to deteriorate members are prompted to enter into to a process of deception; this is both a deception of themselves and a deception of others. However deception gradually leads to desperation, as it indicates that the individual does not really belong, and eventually the mission focussed cult member is living in fear, with high levels of ambient anxiety.

The individual eventually decides to leave the mission focussed cult or is asked to leave and for someone who continues to have a driving need to belong this is extremely destructive. Their sense of themselves as a failure, either to be a good member of the cult or to have chosen correctly when they decided to join, compounds their understanding of themselves as one who has no place, who cannot belong, as neither the mission focussed cult or their previous life will accept them, in fact they may even reject themselves for failing in their commitment to the mission.

Outside of the organisation that the cult provides, ex-members move into a life where day to day survival is their priority. The now ex-cult member has to develop or redevelop their own autonomy; they experience isolation and have to cope with either having failed to meet cherished goals or of having lived a life that now seems to them to have been a lie. They also have to cope with the consequences of having lived a mission focussed cultic life outside the norms of the culture they are

currently trying to operate in. The consequences for these cult members is a life in which not only do they have to cope with a sense of not belonging because of their primary reasons for experiencing such dislocation (as discussed in 3.1.1) they also have to cope with the potential for exclusion that comes with being an ex-member. This exclusion is both from the mission focussed cult and those outside of the cult as the lifestyle and the actions of cult members who have lived by Special Rules as Special People in a Special Group to Fulfil the Cults Mission, can when viewed retrospectively, be very isolating.

All of this is very problematic for those ex-members who started as Anomic Outsiders who had a Need to Belong. When they became members of their new way of life, culture, religion and, in many cases, what they come to perceive as their new family, they experienced a sense of meeting their goals, but ultimately they find they have failed in this even more profoundly than they did in their pre-cult life. This downward spiral at the end of their cult and immediate post cut experience puts these people at the same place they were in before they met the cult; as outsiders. Only now their situation is worse, as they have repeated the failure to fulfil their need to belong and in finding some authentic purpose in life.

These ex-members fundamental driver; the need to belong (which has been exacerbated by their failure to maintain being a special person in a special group) is confounded by the distrust that both the deception within the mission focussed cult and the self-deception that they practiced, has engendered. They have no faith in their own abilities to make successful judgements as to whom, if anyone, is to be trusted and so they are even more isolated and anxious. It is these ex-members who have described having long term difficulties in living as sequelae of their cultic experiences.

5 Responses to the Emergent Theory from Experts-by-Experience

As with the results of the first Classical Grounded Theory analysis the emergent theory was tested against the perceptions of experts-by-experience in this field; four first generation ex-members (those who had joined a cult as adults) gave their

responses to the Categories. Such responses are reported here as they will either tend to validate the grounded theory or to call it into question. (See Chapter 8 section 2 for a description of Glaser's criteria for assessing the effectiveness of studies using Classical Grounded Theory). These responses are given verbatim to allow these contributors to have their own 'voice' in this feedback.

> *"Brilliant, it's all good, but parts of this say it so well and so clearly, especially the bit where it captures the need to belong – but it is the mission that says it all. When you feel that you are going to achieve this it is such a lift, but you can't achieve the mission – how can you 'save the world'? And that is such a hard thing to bear, because if you don't save it and you burn out how can you live with yourself? You've failed and then some!"* First generation ex-member

> *"Yes, it made sense but can anything capture the experience? The heady excitement that you had found the 'truth', the desire to spread it, the love and acceptance and then the niggling doubts, the unexplained inconsistencies, the hurt, the pain, the disillusionment, the disappointment, the denial, the final acceptance and realisation that it was all just a con. You remember the later (sic), they cut the deepest but I also remember that wild wonderful first joy."* First generation ex-member

> *"I wish it was all that simple, it takes an awful long time to get over this and reading about it brings it back – your Categories are too close to home for comfort."* First generation ex-member

> *"I think it goes a long way towards explaining the why of cults. I was particularly interested in the loner aspect of potential recruits. I had not come across that before and it certainly related to me.*

> *I didn't read anything I disagreed with or thought odd. Other peoples experiences weren't mine but could have been.*

> *The only thing that possibly you missed is that many of these people really believe. Your quotes were all from ex-members who tinged their comments with cynicism but current members are like someone newly in love, it is all they think about, all they talk about, and all the want. It is easy to say in retrospect but at the time you are evangelistic because you do feel you have just received the good news and want to pass it on."* First generation ex-member

These ex-members have expressed in their own words how they identify with the Categories and how they are moved in some cases by them to reflect on their own experiences. It seems that there is quite a degree of 'fit' in the Categories as there has not been any responses, as yet, to these (or the Categories from the previous study) which have either been critical or have found the Categories lacking in any major way. There also seems to be a reasonable level of 'relevance' in that they resonate with the experiences of those ex-members who have agreed to comment on them. However, this is a limited set of responses and it would not be wise to draw any firm conclusions based on such a small sample of respondents.

Nevertheless, this exercise has served a useful purpose in that it has helped to begin to weigh whether there is any utility in the emergent theory for those who have had the experience of being a member of a mission focussed cult and whether it resonates with their understanding of what it means to have been a mission focussed cult member. Each of these ex-members has had long term difficulties in living and has had to take time and assistance in dealing with what they describe as the consequences of their involvement in a cult. The fact that they find the Categories both fit with their experiences, and that they work together as an emergent theory for making sense of what these ex-members have experienced, begins the process of establishing the utility of the emergent theory in a very practical way.

6 Summary of Chapter

In this chapter a second Classical Grounded Theory analysis of a number of selected texts was reported. From this a theory has emerged that potentially has explanatory power regarding (1) the common features identified by participants studied here as being present in their way of relating to the world from before they joined their cult, (2) the effects of the psychosocial processes individuals undergo on joining and during their membership, and (3) the psychological sequelae of leaving such a group.

No definitive claim is made as to how any participants have developed the self-identified long term difficulties in living that they describe experiencing after leaving their mission focussed cults. However, a theory has emerged from the Classical Grounded Theory analysis (which will need testing in future research) that proposes that it is participants experiences during the five stages of experience, identified in Study 2, combined with an extreme need to belong, which has lead to them experiencing these self-identified long term difficulties in living. As stated clearly elsewhere; the use of Classical Grounded Theory research is not to 'prove' or 'claim' to know the answers to questions, but to allow an explanatory theory to emerge which can then be tested in further research. To reiterate, theory development rather than hypothesis testing is the aim of this research.

It is the effect of these experiences on those ex-members who have described having long term difficulties in living as sequelae of their mission focussed cultic experiences that will be discussed in Chapter 6. As this thesis has identified the groups that are analysed within this study as religions, the effect of religion on mental health will firstly be discussed and then integrated with the findings from the Classical Grounded Theory analyses in this research. This will then be related to the literature concerning the debate on the effect of the mission focussed group membership experience on the individuals' mental health.

Chapter 6 An Integration of the Classical Grounded Theory Analyses carried out within this thesis with the Literature on Religion and Mental Health, and Mission Focussed Groups and Mental Health

1 Integrating the Classical Grounded Theory Analyses with the Literature on Religion and Mental Health

The focus of this research is on the development of a psychological theory concerning the psychosocial processes present in mission focussed cults (as defined in this thesis) in which a proportion of those who have been members will emerge from this membership experiencing themselves as having long term difficulties in living. As well as considering features of the mission focussed cults themselves, the theory incorporates both the common features identified by participants studied here as being present in their way of relating to the world from before they joined their cult and the psychological sequelae of leaving such a group. As this thesis has identified the mission focussed cults that are studied here as religions, the effect of religion on mental health will be discussed in this chapter and then integrated with the findings from Chapters 3 and 5. This will then be integrated with the literature relating to the debate on the effect of the mission focussed cultic experience on the individuals' mental health.

2 The Research into the Effect of Religion on Mental Health

Within the research into religion and mental health, two contradictory views about the effect of religion on mental health have often been advanced. On the one hand the view that participation in a religion enhances the individuals' well-being and mental health, on the other the position that participation in a religion has a detrimental effect on both an individuals' well-being and their mental health.

2.1 A Positive View of the Effect of Religion on Mental Health

In almost half (47%) of the 24 studies that Bergin reviewed in 1983, in a Meta-Analysis on mental health and religion, he found a positive relationship between religiosity (defined as interest in religion or religious mindedness) and mental

health. However, it must be noted that most of the effects across all the studies reviewed were small and statistically insignificant. Bergin concluded from this positive relationship that the claim that religion exerted a negative effect on mental health could not be upheld, noting the difficulties of assessing the relationship clearly, given the diversity in the measures of religion and mental health involved.

In a subsequent study Bergin, Masters and Richards (1987) found an intrinsic religious orientation to be negatively correlated with anxiety and positively correlated with self-control and personal adjustment. They posited the idea that significant religious involvement can correlate positively with normal personal functioning. Bergin then went on to carryout a qualitative study with Stinchfield, Gaskin, Masters, & Sullivan (1988) in which they found that there was no evidence for religiosity to correlate negatively with mental health and that there was evidence for suggesting that those participants whose religion was integrated positively into their lifestyle were better adjusted and thus less likely to have mental health problems (Bergin, Stinchfield & Gaskin, 1988).

Pressman, Lyons, Larson and Strain (1990) carried out a combined prospective cohort/cross-sectional study of 30 women age 65 years or over who were hospitalized with a hip fracture in the Chicago area. What they found was that greater religiousness (assessed at discharge by three items: church attendance, perceived religiousness, and the perception of religion as a source of strength and comfort) was unrelated to pre-surgery depression score, but was positively associated with less depression and longer walking distances at discharge: this finding persisted after controlling for severity of medical illness. The item 'Degree to which religion/God was a comfort and source of strength' was correlated negatively with both pre-surgery and discharge depression scores.

Pfeifer and Waelty in 1995 studied the effect of religious commitment on psychopathology. To do this they carried out a case-control study from a religiously-oriented psychiatric clinic in Basel, Switzerland. The study contrasted a mixed group of 44 psychiatric patients from the clinic with a matched group drawn from local students, a Bible study group and a choir. They used a range of standardised measures to allow comparison between the two groups. There was no difference

between the groups' scores on the Ross and Allport Intrinsic/Extrinsic Scale or on Eysenck's Extroversion Scale. However, 77% of psychiatric patients and 78% of controls had high religious scores; religiosity among psychiatric patients was positively correlated with life satisfaction. Among the control group neuroticism was correlated positively with religious education and childhood fear of God. Pfeifer and Waelty (1995) concluded that patients with mental illness derive comfort, meaning and hope from religion, helping them to cope with their limitations.

In their review of the research on religious commitment and health status Matthews, McCullough, Larson, Koenig, Swyers, Greenwold and Milano (1998) found that religious commitment has been associated with a decreased prevalence of depression and that in addition to protecting against depression, higher levels of religious commitment may afford protection against one of the most severe outcomes of depression: suicide. Similarly, religious commitment was inversely related to suicide in 13 (81%) of 16 studies in a review of empirical studies on the relationship between religious commitment and mental health carried out by Gartner, Larson and Allen (1991).

Research that concludes that religion is beneficial to mental health suggests that religion can provide a positive belief in the future. It can also give meaning and therefore, a sense of emotional well-being. Religion from this viewpoint can be said to reduce anxiety by furnishing a cognitive structure within which 'rational' explanations and properties order a chaotic world (Pressman, Lyons, Larson & Gartner, 1992).

Those whose work has led in this direction maintain that religion provides solutions to a broad selection of life's dilemmas and emotional conflicts, the Category Answers, which emerged from the second study would suggest that those members who have originally accepted these answers to life's dilemmas given by the cult, but have then begun to question them, would in their questioning suffer anxiety. Their positive view of the future, based on the cult's belief system (Special Knowledge), which they would have originally adopted, would become less confident and less likely to provide a sense of emotional well-being. It has also been posited that individuals' mental health benefit from religion, as it partially answers the disturbing

problem of mortality, with a belief in an after-life (Pressman et al., 1992). Those members who left their cult would (1) if they rejected their belief system regarding mortality, experience these existential questions again, perhaps with less resources to cope with them and (2) if they did not reject the belief system, but were rejected by their cult, suffer from anxiety and fear engendered by the cult's belief system regarding leavers, which has taught them that there was No Way Out. In addition, those who have a positive view of the effect of religion on mental health maintain that religion promotes social cohesion as a result of the establishment of moral guidelines, which can benefit both self and others, whilst moderating self-destructive practices and lifestyles. Significantly for this thesis Shafranske in 1992 has said that religion offers a well-focused social identity, satisfying the need to belong by uniting people around shared ideology. The individual who has an overwhelming Need to Belong would benefit from this whilst a member of their cult as they would be a Special Person in a Special Group. However, on leaving or the group they would suffer from the consequences of not only leaving a socially cohesive setting, but also of re-experiencing their overwhelming Need to Belong. This resonates with what Beck et al., in 1983 identified as a Sociotrophic mode of psychological functioning. Beck et al., (1983) describe how for individuals who are socially dependent (or in their terms Sociotrophic) attachment and concern about separation are the predominant elements in their psychological functioning, with the loss of social rootedness having significant negative effects on their psychological well-being (this argument is developed further in Chapter 7).

2.2 A Negative View of the Effect of Religion on Mental Health

A negative view of the role of religion which was dominant in the early stages of research into this area, takes the position that religion fosters self-castigation and a low self-esteem via a belief system that denigrates our fundamental nature, or facets of it (Hood, 1992). This view maintains that religion has the potential to encourage over-reliance, conformity and suggestibility, resulting in too much dependency on external forces or groups. This argument contends that religion can engender harmful levels of guilt and create a foundation for the damaging repression of anger.

However, there is little empirical research published since Ellis (1962) first made his assertion about the negative effects of religion on mental health to support this claim. What little research there is tends to operationalise religiosity in the form of behaviours that researchers suggest might result in a negative effect rather than actually measuring whether being religious in its self has a negative effect. Studies such as that by Ellison and Levin (1998) have posited the potentially negative effects of religion such as adopting a coping style that leaves the responsibility for resolving health problems to divine intervention only or engaging in potentially dangerous religious practices such as snake handling. But this is not addressing the notion of religiosity and its impact on mental health, unless one defines religiosity as religious beliefs that elicit these behaviours and there is little or no research evidence to warrant this.

What these studies do suggest is that religious practices which engender guilt and shame, or condone withdrawal of community support following a perceived transgression could potentially produce a negative health impact. Additionally, Ellison and Levin (1998) suggest that the experience of conflicts within congregations, or being exposed to judgmental attitudes among parishioners (sic) could also have this consequence. They also say that demands for investment of money and time can take a psychological toll among members of a religious community and this too could result in a negative mental health impact (Ellison & Levin, 1998).

It could be suggested that the experience of the processes of withdrawal of community support and being exposed to judgmental attitudes (on leaving their mission focussed cult) which Ellison and Levin have described would take a considerable psychological toll on those cult members who have an elevated Need to Belong, and this experience would therefore have a detrimental effect on their psychological well-being (Ellison & Levin, 1998). This would be especially so for those who had not chosen to leave their mission focussed cult, but had been asked to leave by the leadership. This experience was identified as a particularly problematic experience for ex-members in the research carried out in 1994 by Walsh and Bor.

Exline, Yali and Sandersen (2000) too have raised the possibility of a harmful or negative effect of religiousness in some individuals. They studied the association between psychological distress and what they termed 'religious strain' in 54 individuals seeking outpatient psychotherapy and in a non-clinical sample of 200 college students using the 20-item religious comfort and strain questionnaire that they developed. Examples of religious strain items that they used are; feeling that God is far away, a belief that sin has caused your problems and feeling abandoned by God. In both of the samples religious strain was associated with depression and in the clinical sample religious strain was associated with suicidality. The item with the strongest correlation in this regard was belief in having committed a sin too big to be forgiven.

If it can be accepted that, as Ellison and Levin (1998) have suggested, that the effect of withdrawal of community support, being exposed to judgmental attitudes, and demands for investment of money and time has a negative impact on mental health. Then, as these experiences have been identified in the first analysis in Chapter 3 as being present in the Category No Way Out, as consequences of leaving cults, their impact needs to be considered in relation to those ex-members identified in the second analysis in Chapter 5 who have a strong Need to Belong.

Those who conclude that religion has a negative effect on mental health also suggest that religion creates anxiety and fear by instilling the beliefs of divine retribution and of punishment for our evil ways (Ellis, 1980). Religion, they would suggest, encourages exclusivity with the view that the world is divided into 'us' and 'them', thereby increasing hostility and lowering acceptance of others, this exclusivity resonates with the Meta-Category; Ascendancy, in the first analysis and the Category Separation found within the Meta-Category; The Stage of Membership, identified in the second analysis (with a slightly different meaning). They also assert that it instils paranoia about malevolent powers that jeopardise moral integrity and contend that religion hinders self-regulation and autonomy whilst obstructing personal growth. Shaumaker in 1992 has also offered the view that religion could be seen as inhibiting the expression of sexuality, thereby creating a predisposition to sexual maladjustment. It could be suggested that religion viewed

from this position interferes with both rational and critical thought. Ellis (1962) an early proponent of this stance asserts in his essay *The Case Against Religion* that:

> *"If we had time to review all the other major irrational ideas that lead humans to become and to remain emotionally disturbed, we could quickly find that they are coextensive with, or are strongly encouraged by, religious tenets…..the conclusion seems inescapable that religion is, on almost every conceivable count, directly opposed to the goals of mental health—since it basically consists of masochism, other-directness, intolerance, refusal to accept uncertainty, unscientific thinking, needless inhibition, and self-abasement. In the one area where religion has some advantages in terms of emotional hygiene—that of encouraging hearty commitment to a cause or project in which the person may vitally absorbed—it even tends to sabotage this advantage in two important ways: (a) it drives most of its adherents to commit themselves to its tenets for the wrong reasons—that is, to cover up instead of to face and rid themselves of their basic insecurities; and (b) it encourages a fanatic, obsessive-compulsive kind of commitment that is, in its own right, a form of mental illness"* Ellis (1980 p6).

However, this extremely negative view which Ellis holds is not supported by the research cited in section 2.1 which examines the effect of religion on mental health and supports the idea that being religious can often have a positive effect on mental health and well-being for the individual. Research cited above seems to suggest that a more sophisticated approach to understanding the effect of religion on mental health must be used.

3 Extrinsic or Intrinsic Religiosity

When discussing the effect of religion on mental health there is a further development in the conceptualisation that needs to be taken into consideration this is drawn from the work of Allport (1966) and Allport and Ross (1967) who distinguish between extrinsic and intrinsic orientation in the individual's approach to their religion.

3.1 Extrinsic Religiosity

The extrinsic orientation is fundamentally practical. This is a more self-interested approach. Therefore, those whose orientation is extrinsic may practice their religion as a means, for example, of achieving more or to relieve anxiety. The item 'I go to church mainly because I enjoy seeing people I know there', best measures extrinsic orientation (The Religious Orientation Scale Allport and Ross (1967) cited in Masters & Bergin, 1992). Extrinsically oriented individuals conceivably perceive their religion as a way to a successful life; those who are extrinsically motivated use their religion to obtain status, security, self-vindication and their place in society. *"A person with an extrinsic religious orientation is using his religious views to provide security, comfort status, or social support for himself."* (Allport, 1960 p441). This resonates soundly with the Core Category; The Need to Belong, derived from the Classical Grounded Theory analysis carried out in Chapter 5. Thus, the religiosity experienced in these mission focussed cult members would appear to be fundamentally extrinsic; its purpose is to fulfil a need; that of obtaining a place to belong, even if this need is not fully in awareness. It also accomplishes the task of transforming the Anomic Outsider into a Special Person in a Special Group. By belonging to the religion of the cult these mission focussed cult members initially obtain status, security, self-vindication and a place in society.

Donahue in 1985 reviewed a wide range of studies which were examining extrinsic and intrinsic religiousness and although his review was not directly linked to mental health and well-being, Donahue reported that extrinsicness was positively correlated with prejudice and dogmatism, whilst intrinsicness was not correlated with either of these two traits. Also extrinsicness was positively correlated with anxiety (high levels of anxiety have been identified as having been experienced within mission focussed cults by participants in the study reported in Chapter 5).

Kirkpatrick (1989) suggested the extrinsic approach may indeed involve two orientations these are extrinsic/social i.e. using religion to achieve social gain and extrinsic/personal thereby using religion as a means of gaining comfort, security and protection, again this is reflective of the motivation in joining a mission focussed cult from the Core Category of the Need to Belong.

3.2 Intrinsic Religiosity

The intrinsic orientation denotes a sincere commitment to a belief system operating as the controlling impetus in the individual's life. Those who are intrinsically motivated have internalised beliefs and are living in accordance with them, regardless of the consequences. An example of this would be a person who was intrinsically committed to the idea of honesty, refusing to participate in buying stolen goods at a reduced price, whilst their work mates do so. A more extreme version of this would be those whose commitment to their religious beliefs leads to their martyrdom. Gorsuch and McPherson (1989) reported that the principal item from the Religious Orientation Scale (ROS. Allport & Ross, 1967) which measures intrinsic religion is 'My whole approach to life is based upon my religion'. These findings can lead to the conjecture that those who do not have mental health problems on leaving mission focussed cults will have had an intrinsic orientation towards their religion within the cult and that this internalised religiosity remains with them on leaving the cult, bolstering their ability to cope with their experiences. However, this has not been explored within this thesis or elsewhere.

There appears to be a link between depression and religiosity in that many authors have investigated intrinsic religiosity and found that it correlated negatively with depression scales, with extrinsic religiosity being positively correlated with these scales (see research cited previously). Since this research is often short term and correlational inferences about causality must be drawn with care (Masters & Bergin, 1992). In the study mentioned above Donahue (1985) also found that intrinsicness was negatively correlated with anxiety. Many studies have found a positive correlation between intrinsic religiosity and mental health (see for example Bergin et al., 1988, Petersen & Roy, 1985, Pollner, 1989). This supports the notion discussed above, that is to say; that those ex-members emerging from the mission focussed cultic experience with long term difficulties in living have an extrinsic approach to religiosity and this makes sense of those who have a Need to Belong, when not being able to continue in their belonging to the cult, having a more negative outcome on leaving their cult.

The mechanisms through which religion might exert positive effects on well-being have not been explored extensively, although some ideas have been suggested.

Pollner in 1989 proposed three processes through which religion may have a positive effect on mental health. The first is that of providing a basis to resolve and clarify life's problems, this appears to happen when cult members join a mission focussed cult; they are given and accept the answers to life's dilemmas. Secondly, the positive effect of religion on mental health comes from the religion enhancing a person's sense of meaning, direction and personal identity versus group identity. However, within a mission focussed cult the development of an identity is focussed on the group, as the purpose of the cult is to fulfil the cult's mission or purpose, not that of the individual; although members may also have adopted this identity as their own, at least for a time. Thirdly, religion serves to invest potentially alienating events with meaning by giving an overarching interpretative schema that allows individuals to make sense of their existence and give meaning and purposeful direction in their life. In a mission focussed cult this sense of meaning is derived from the notion that cult members exist to fulfil the cult's mission, with the consequences discussed in previous chapters.

4 A Suggestion that Religious Meanings may have a Role in the Religious Individuals Mental Health

Religion appears to have an important role in the development of systems of meanings and this is significant, as meaning can mediate between religion and mental health. If your religion leads you to develop a positive sense of meaning in life you will then demonstrate more psychological well-being, (Chamberlain & Zika, 1992). It is interesting to note here that Beck (1976), Gilbert (1992) and other cognitive theorists have suggested that it is irrational thoughts and beliefs which construct much psychopathology and that Masters and Bergin (1992) maintain that intrinsic religiosity is not related to irrational thinking; extrinsic religiosity tends to exhibit a positive relationship to irrational thoughts.

As previously discussed a person's religious belief may be based on either an internalised, and personal meaningful construction of faith or it may be based on holding religious beliefs as a result of social conventions or because of extrinsic motivations. As Masters and Bergin (1992) have suggested it is the intrinsic religious affiliation which appears to be associated with positive mental health

variables. Thus, intrinsic religious affiliation and participation can be said to contribute positively to mental health. It may well be that it is this intrinsic commitment to a mission focussed cult which produces the positive results for members that are reported by researchers such as Anthony and Robbins (1992), Galanter et al., (1979) and Levine (1984) whose research is cited in Aronoff et al., (2000). But this can only be speculation at this point as establishing the validity of this proposition is beyond the scope of this thesis.

However, religious representations, beliefs and attributes can be powerful agents when developing ones sense of self and others, behavioural norms and coping resources (as described previously). This then suggests that religion holds the potential to serve a damaging role as well as the potential for an affirming role. Representations of a powerful god who is punitive may serve to wound a developing and developed self. Moreover, belief in a god that offers no tolerance for the vicissitudes of life can shape a person's understanding of their experience and condemn them to self-doubt and self-recrimination, with the consequential result of anxiety, guilt and self-blame. Thus, it could therefore be suggested that these potentially negative features of religion, when given credence by a religious body and enforced through social influence, hold the potential to have a negative impact on mental health. It may well be that it is this aspect of the mission focussed cultic experience (reinforcement of group beliefs through social influence processes) which makes those members of mission focussed cults that are vulnerable (because of their particular need to belong) even more likely to use the cult as an authoritative reference group for developing their view of their god. If the cult's view of their god is one which is both powerful and punitive this representation would have the potential for the resultant negative consequences described above.

Religion is an integral experience in the lives of many people and the empirical research serves to show that it is *how* one is religious, rather than *if* one is religious which has important consequences for mental health and well-being. An intrinsic approach to religion has been demonstrated to enable individuals to cope with adversity and to enable them to lead a happier and more fulfilled life, (Bateson & Ventis, 1982, Shafranske, 1992) whilst an extrinsic orientation may sometimes contribute to some of the negative effects hypothesised by Ellis (1980).

5 The Debate Concerning the Effect of the Mission Focussed Cultic Experience on Members Mental Health

Since the early seventies there has been a debate concerning whether the membership of religious groups variously called cults, charismatic groups and high demand groups can have a negative effect on an individual's mental health (see for example Ash, 1985, Aronoff et al., 2000, Clarke, 1977, Singer et al., 1990, West & Langone, 1986 and Wright, 1991).[10] Despite the research evidence (as discussed previously in this chapter) which suggests that religion can promote mental health, the majority of the literature which has reflected negatively on such groups has tended to view membership of these religious groups as solely having a negative effect on mental health. This may be in part because the earlier writers on these groups did not believe they were real religions and therefore could only understand attachment to them as fitting the extrinsic analysis (although that will have been intuitive because their work predates some aspects of that analysis).

5.1 Those Who Believe that 'Cult' Membership is Psychologically Harmful

It has been suggested that the utilisation of psychosocial techniques, used predominately to socialise individuals into the cultural milieu of such groups can engender feelings of guilt, dependency, low self-esteem, worthlessness, anxiety and hopelessness in some members (Martin, Langone, Dole & Wiltrout, 1992, Ofshe & Singer, 1986, Singer et al., 1990 and Walsh & Bor, 1996).

Schwartz and Kaslow in 1982 maintained that within the groups there is a controlled environment, with deprivation of sleep and normal diets which affects the functioning of the central nervous system. This combined with group pressure to conform, they suggested, blunts the ability of the potential convert to retain his capacity to think for himself or maintain his identity, (Schwartz & Kaslow, 1982).
The procedures and techniques that these previous authors have described have been viewed by Zablocki (2001a) as a cluster of transactions having the objective of transforming the member into someone who will work towards achieving the cult's

[10] These groups have been identified in this research as mission focussed groups, but in this discussion will be referred to by the term the authors cited have used.

goals in an uncritically obedient manner. He has conceptualized this as a process carried out under a charismatic authority with the purpose of ideological resocialization within what he calls a charismatic group. Zablocki maintains that it is the experience of this process which leads to a state within which a charismatic group member is willing to accept uncritically all 'charismatically-ordained' beliefs; this is a stable conversion involving such beliefs becoming deeply held convictions. It is these processes which are the ones that many authors have described as leading to what have been interchangeably described by them as psychological problems and mental health issues.

5.2 Evidence of Psychological Harm

Available evidence indicates that although a greater number of cult members report a previous history of psychopathology than the normal population, the majority of persons entering a cult do not report any previous psychopathology (Martin et al., 1992, Spero, 1982). Unfortunately, these findings are not definitive, in that studies of pre-cult adjustment are marred by the lack of comparison groups (Martin et al., 1992, Spero, 1982) and the reliance on retrospective reporting of pre-cult adjustment makes it impossible to generalise from much of this research.

Nevertheless, Aronoff et al., (2000) in a review of much of the psychological literature available at that time, found that cult members appear generally well-adjusted psychologically and do not necessarily demonstrate symptoms of psychopathology. However, they suggest the possibility that it may be masked by conformity pressures and demand characteristics that some researchers have associated with the cultic milieu (Hassan, 1988, Singer & Ofshe 1986, Singer et al., 1990 inter alia). They conclude that "*a small but growing body of research indicates that at least a substantial minority of former cult members experience significant adjustment difficulties. There also are indications that these difficulties cannot be ascribed to demand characteristics"* (Aronoff et al., p. 91).

Moreover, many people who have expressed concern over these types of groups (particularly those who approach the subject of such groups from a mental health

perspective) would consider that being a member is problematic because they see such groups as having a suppressive effect on self-regulation and autonomy whilst obstructing personal growth (Aronoff et al., 2000, Ash, 1985, Singer et al., 1990 and West & Langone, 1986 inter alia).

This is supported by a growing body of evidence which suggests that these groups as harmful by suggesting that membership *can* be psychologically damaging to at least some individuals (Aronoff et al., 2000, Tylden, 1995, Walsh et al., 1995, Walsh & Bor, 1996 inter alia). In addition it cannot be denied that a group of people do exist who describe how their experiences in or around such groups has harmed them and left them with long term negative psychological consequences (Davis, 1984, Hassan, 1988, Kerns, 1979 and the participants in this research).

Elizabeth Tylden (1995), a British psychiatrist, discusses some 152 cases that were referred to her by psychiatrists from throughout the United Kingdom (it should be noted that these cases were referred with mental health problems from orthodox psychiatry, not the anti-cult field). Of these, 104 cases came from cults (they fitted the definition of cults used in this thesis) and 48 had been involved in groups that specialised in self-improvement techniques. All of these cases had necessitated admission to a psychiatric hospital: whilst 13% needed no further psychiatric treatment, 33% were treated for psychotic states as inpatients and 54% were treated as outpatients for dissociated states.

Walsh et al., in 1995 demonstrated a correlation between membership of groups that participants described as cults and high levels of neuroticism, sociotrophy and autonomy as measured by the short Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck, Eysenck & Bartlett, 1985) and the Sociotrophy-Autonomy Scale Beck, 1983, Beck, et al, 1983) These elevated neuroticism scores increasingly approached the norm as a function of time out of the group. Interestingly, ex-members in contact with support groups showed reduced levels of neuroticism and sociotrophy compared to those who were not in contact with support groups, (Walsh et al., 1995).

Further research reported by Walsh and Bor in 1996 demonstrated that ex-members who expressed negative feelings about their involvement in a cult were

more socially dependent than those who did not express negative feelings about their involvement. This research also showed that the younger ex-members were when they joined their cult, the more they were concerned about disapproval, the more they were worried about separation and the more important attachment was to them. However, there appears to be a definite connection to ex-members experiences within the cult, as when they left, their dependency on others grew less the longer they were out of the cult (Walsh et al., 1996). Additionally, the longer these ex-members were out of the group the lower they scored on neuroticism and psychoticism scales (Walsh et al., 1996). As in Walsh's earlier research, there were also significantly lower scores on the personality measures of neuroticism and sociotrophy for ex-members who had been in contact with a support group.

Martin et al., (1992) administered the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (MCMI) (Millon, 1983), Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961), Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL) (Derogatis, Lipman, Rickels, Uhlenhuth, & Covi, 1974), and the Staff Burnout Scale (SBS-HP) (Maslach & Jackson, 1979) to 111 participants at admission to a therapeutic community providing out-patient psychotherapy for what Martin et al., describe as cults. They found that 95% of participants' achieved scores with clinical significance on at least one MCMI scale. The mean score of those who also completed the HSCL was 102, indicating the need for psychiatric care and participants' scores on the SBS-HP indicated that they were suffering from what this measure describes as burnout and acute stress. Finally, the mean score on the BDI was 14, which although not clinically significant, was outside of the normal population range.

All participants had been referred (or self-referred) for psychotherapy and so one would expect them to exhibit psychological distress which could, as in this case, be described within a diagnostic paradigm. However, this could lead to accusations of a skewed sample and limit generalisations. Interestingly, a sub-group within this research were excluded from completing the research as they were members of an ex-members support group, rather being individuals seeking psychotherapy (there is no information on how many of these participants were in psychotherapy outside of this research). However, there were no significant differences between the two groups' scores on the battery of tests administered.

5.3 Suggestions that the 'Problems' with Cults are Constructed by the 'Anti Cult' Field

There is no question that the processes involved in the experiences of both membership and of leaving these groups have been seen in some quarters as potentially problematic, nevertheless, such a view is not unanimous.

Much of the sociological research in this area tends to maintain that membership is not, as a rule, seen as a problem by the individual until contact with 'the anti-cult' field is made (Colman, 1984, Melton & Moore, 1982, Wright, 1987). It is this contact with the anti-cult movement which these researchers suggest fosters the individual's view of their membership of such organisations as having been dangerous or harmful.

Additionally, there have been claims that mental health professionals who support the idea of the negative results of membership of these groups, have relied overwhelmingly on biased sampling methods. Coleman (1984) asserts that researchers have seldom spoken to current members of cults (or other such groups) or the high percentage of voluntary leavers. He goes on to say that instead of doing this the critics of these groups have engaged in what he says is euphemistically called 'exit counselling', and talked only with those ex-members who had been removed by force by their parents. Whilst this method of research may have been the case prior to 1984, at least some of the subsequent research that has been carried out in this area has focused on a wide range of 'cult' leavers, many of whom have had no contact with those practising deprogramming or those who would recognise themselves as being part of the 'anti-cult' sector. Moreover, research by Walsh and Bor carried out in 1995 had current members as one of the groups of participants (see for example Tylden, 1995, Walsh & Bor, 1996 and Walsh et al., 1995).

Coleman (1984) then suggests that it is the process that these people are put through to 'de-programme' them which he believes puts great pressure on them (particularly through the manipulation of guilt) to adopt the mind control claims of

both those who carryout the de-programming and of their parents. Because of the imprisonment that Coleman describes as being involved in de-programming, he believes that this leads to these ex-members becoming true apostates who are anxious to vindicate themselves in their parents and others eyes and so they buy into the mind control and thought reform way of thinking advocated by the deprogrammers and their parents (this process could be thought of as dissonance reduction (Festinger, 1957), but this idea has not been tested within the literature).

Additionally, various people; some personally involved and some academics, who are studying what they view as new religious movements, would maintain that the groups themselves do no harm and that it is the use the person who is involved with them puts them to that can be damaging, (Barker, 1989, Coleman, 1984, Melton & Moore, 1982). They would maintain that hundreds of thousands of people go through what they call new religious movements over the years and the majority of people who do this will do so with no lasting physical or psychological harm. To some extent this view is supported by the research into the effects of religion on mental health cited in section 2 in this chapter. However, this present research has found that the outcome of mission focussed cult membership is fashioned firstly by the psychosocial processes experienced within such a cult, and then by the psychological processes used by the cult member to make sense of this experience, in addition to their experiences prior to joining the cult. (Nonetheless, the assertion that the majority of people who join these groups suffer no long term physical or psychological harm has not been scientifically tested: it is therefore possible that those who slip in and slip out of cults, apparently unharmed, may nevertheless have on-going issues which come to light much later).

Much of the sociological work in this area has been critical of the notion of coercive persuasion, thought reform or brainwashing, ascribing this labelling of behaviour to four things; the development of an anti collectivist stance which originated during the ‘cold war’ (Richardson & Kilbourne, 1983); redefining intense religious commitment and religious behaviour to psychiatric or psychological causes (Robbins, 1984); not allowing or recognising that individuals may be making informed choices to willingly join, participate in and leave cults (Barker, 1989) or lack of the belief in a conversion/commitment to the cults in which there are intrinsic

or authentic self-related forces (Anthony & Robbins, 2004). (See Chapter 4 for a fuller discussion of this).

Galanter (1982) has addressed this dichotomous approach to the effect of such organisations on the mental health of their members. He said that those who have addressed the groups from the 'ill effects of membership' position are viewing groups he calls cults from a different perspective from those who do not view them in such a manner. Galanter maintained that by establishing a positive working relationship with the cults, and with their members, researchers are more likely to perceive cult membership as being benign. He suggested that this demonstrates how the subject's own expectations have an influence on the psychiatric phenomena that are observed and that the observers assumed objectivity may not be sufficient to ensure an accurate clinical perspective. This is analogous to what is described as 'experimenter effect or bias' within experimental psychology and this occurs when participants struggle to anticipate the results that experimenter hopes to find and then on discovering what they think is the hoped for outcome try to enable the experimenter to find these results. The experimenter too can often find what they want to find because of their preconceived ideas, (Rosenthal, 1966). This criticism is also made in the review paper written by Aronoff et al., (2000) in which they say that:

> *(the) "use of semistructured interviews, allowing for considerable interviewer latitude, implies that these results may be biased by experimenter effects and must be interpreted with caution."* p104

If, as indicated in Chapters 3 and 4, it is not brainwashing that is happening within these groups, this leaves the question as to what is the function of the psychosocial processes identified by the participants in this research as being present within mission focussed cults (see Chapters 3 and 4 for a discussion of this). Moreover, as there are powerful psychosocial processes and techniques which are described as existing within 'cults' by academics and ex-members, the effect that these processes and techniques have on the psychological functioning of their members needs to be understood (see for example Collins, 1991, Delgardo, 1977, Hassan,

1988, Keiser & Keiser, 1987, Ofshe & Singer, 1986 and Zablocki, 2001a and ex-members Davis, 1984, Freed, 1980 and Williams, 1987).

5.4 A Continuum on which Claims are Clustered

The effects noted or claimed by the authors reviewed above may be seen, in the main, to cluster at opposite ends of a continuum. One group of authors maintains that membership of what they describe as cults is psychologically harmful, and that these cults are environments in which the psychosocial processes and techniques that are used to coerce and control members lead to long term psychological problems. The other group of authors believe that what they describe as membership of a new religious movement is not harmful, but an expression of religious conviction, and that behaviour and practices observed within new religious movements are solely a matter of religious expression, with no resultant long term psychological harm arising from these practices.

Given the research findings from this thesis and other research cited concerning the effect of religion and mental health (see section 2 of this chapter) it seems obvious that neither extreme position is tenable. There is evidence in the literature, that there *are* some people who emerge with long term psychological problems subsequent to their membership of mission focussed groups. (This research is both formal and anecdotal; the psychological problems are both externally diagnosed as well as simply self reported). However, there are thousands of ex-members who do not appear to exhibit long term psychological problems subsequent to their involvement in such groups (see for example Aronoff et al., 2000, Baker, 1989, Coleman, 1984, Tylden, 1995, Walsh & Bor, 1996, and Walsh et al., 1995).

5.5 An Alternative Explanation for 'Cult' Members Experiencing Long Term Difficulties in Living

Clarke (1976, 1977, 1978) has suggested that approximately 60% of members of cults had serious psychological problems before joining. He asserted that the membership of such organisations is made up of two distinct types of individuals, the first he described as chronic schizophrenics or borderline personalities. Clarke

maintained that these individuals involve themselves in the groups to improve their mental state, because they are ill at ease with themselves and the outside world. He went on to suggest that the remaining members could be thought of as involved in a troubled transition from child to adult and that often they are suffering from a covert depression brought about by their not having adequately made the transition from childhood dependence to adult autonomy. Thus, when this belief in their own autonomous functioning was tested out in the world of adulthood they could not cope and thus became depressed (Clark, 1976, 1977, 1978).

However, Clark's assertion that membership of these organisations is made up of either psychotic or neurotic individuals is not borne out by research into the personalities of ex-members carried out by Walsh et al., (1995) which showed no evidence that ex-members scored significantly higher on psychoticism as defined by Eysenck and Eysenck (1975) than the population norm. The research by Walsh et al. also indicated that the significantly high levels of neuroticism ex-members exhibited diminished over time after leaving their cults and with attendance at support groups, suggesting that these neuroticism scores were a response to the group experience, not pre-disposing factors. These findings would not uphold Clark's (1976, 1977, 1978) contention that 60% of all cult members have serious mental health problems and the other 40% are suffering from depression brought on by difficulties in transition from adolescent dependency to adult autonomy.

There has been a suggestion within the literature (and now within this study) that some members do carry the seeds of any negative results of membership of such groups into the organisations from their life before joining them. Singer et al., in 1987 claimed that many recruits are from intact families and that they are well-adjusted, high achieving individuals. However, they went on to say that there are also recruits that have varying degrees of psychological impairment. Singer et al., suggest that if there are predisposing factors to these problems they could be categorised as: naive idealism, (this variable was not present in either of Classical Grounded Theory analyses) situational stress, (ex-members reported frequent Unwelcomed Change) dependency (this resonates strongly with the Core Category in Study 2; The Need to Belong), disillusionment, (which resonates with the both the Anomic Outsider and Deterioration from study 2) and excessive trust or an

ignorance of how groups can manipulate individuals (neither of these two appear in this research in exactly this form although they appear to have some links with the Core Category of Study 2). Although supporting the notion that damaging psychological techniques are used within cults Schwartz and Kaslow (1982) maintained that cult members are students from an upper-middle class background who are suffering from post adolescent angst, unsure of themselves and searching for something outside of them to relieve this. This idea is consonant with the finding that those ex-members studied here were Anomic Outsiders previous to their joining their mission focussed cults, and it also resonates with the Core Category of The Need to Belong identified by the Classical Grounded Theory analysis in Chapter 5.

6 Continuing the Development of an Explanation for the Psychological Processes Present in Mission Focussed Groups

In Chapter 4 we saw that there is a third approach to understanding the experiences that members have within mission focussed groups. Zablocki's work (2001a), leads towards such a third perspective (despite using language that seems to fit in with the first approach). He does this by starting to identify the components found within an emergent explanatory psychological theory of the mechanisms mediating the interaction between the purposes, structure and function of what he calls charismatic groups in which a proportion of members emerge with what they experience as long term difficulties in living.

Zablocki (1998) emphasises the importance of an influence process (which he calls brainwashing) that comprises of a systematic sequence of events devised by the charismatic group to create 'a deployable agent'. This process, according to Zablocki, features the alternation of psychological assault and leniency in the form of *"periodic cycles of confession, rejection of confession, and reconfession; and ritualized rehearsals of taboo activities meant to desensitize the subject to their actual importance"* p223. However, confession and the subsequent activities Zablocki describes were not identified as salient categories in either of the studies carried out in this thesis.

Whilst seeing that there are intense psychosocial processes at work within charismatic groups, this third approach does not tend to speak (as many earlier writers do) in terms of coercion, thought reform or brainwashing. Even Zablocki (Personal Communication 1st May 2008) is willing to consider whether his robust defence of the term 'brainwashing' actually hinders communication (1997, 1998, 2001a) and would perhaps be willing to substitute another term, if an appropriate one could be found. The third approach accepts the possibility that involvement in such groups may be (at least for some) beneficial or neutral steps in their development, even though for others the experience will prove extremely difficult in the short term and create lasting harm in the longer term.

It should be noted that the theory which has emerged within this present study has developed this third approach further. It has proposed that the interaction between the psychosocial processes within these mission focussed cults and the extremely strong 'need to belong' in some members produces negative effects, *and* furthermore the effects of this interaction are compounded by the way in which these members process this interaction.

Although Zablocki's (2001a) work is a sophisticated account of psychosocial processes that he suggests are happening within charismatic groups, it provides only a partial explanation. When reviewed in the light of this current research the concepts he uses only partly tally with what the Classical Grounded Theory analyses tell us is actually happening within these groups. For example Zablocki (2001a) does not appear to see the relationship between the cult and the individual as a reciprocal relationship in which *both* the member and the group are continually making cost benefit analyses (as indicated in the Category No Way Out and in part the Core Category of Fulfilling a Mission) in which the group must decide whether it is 'cost effective' to maintain individuals as members *and* members must decide whether it is cost effective to remain as members. In addition, Zablocki pays insufficient attention to the common features identified by participants studied here as being present in their way of relating to the world from before they joined their cult, which affect the individuals' experience: he acknowledges members' anomie, but only in passing and not as part of a Core Category (the Need to Belong), which

is pivotal to the process of mission focussed cult membership for those studied here who emerge from cult membership with self-identified long term difficulties in living.

Furthermore, much of what is contained within the processes that are described by Zablocki is not identified in the first analysis of this thesis as being significant. It could be (as was discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to Lifton's work) that these practices Zablocki describes are techniques used to produce elements within the Categories (which emerged within the first analysis in Chapter 3) of Obedience or Conformity, for example. As such, the processes Zablocki delineates (which this research strongly suggests are both done *to* and done *with* members) would have utility in describing techniques 'done to' group members, rather than as components of a reciprocal model. However, Zablocki's model can be seen as an accurate, but limited description, rather than an explanation, as it does not fully explicate why the experience of these processes results in some members emerging from their cultic experience reporting long term difficulties in living.

6.1 Members Need To Belong

The second analysis (reported in Chapter 5) would suggest that there are other, stronger things at play, with more relevance and meaning for those whose experiences this thesis is studying, than those Zablocki describes. Accordingly, these hold more salience for explaining the effect of the psychosocial processes experienced within mission focussed groups by these members, with The Need to Belong emerging as the main driver for their engagement in these processes.

Zablocki (2001a) described how within his theory of a brainwashing system there is a constant interchange between assault and leniency and a continual process of confession, re-education, and refinement of confession which lead to a state of hyper credulity within which a cult member is willing to accept uncritically all charismatically-ordained beliefs. This hyper-credulity, he suggested, is present when an occasional and transitory suspension of disbelief is transformed into a stable characteristic and is a combination of hyper-suggestibility and a stable conversion of belief to deeply held convictions. His approach however, does not explain what it is about certain members that make them open to this change from a

transitory suspension of disbelief to a stable characteristic, in contrast to other members who encounter mission focussed groups, but do not finally succumb to them.

Zablocki (2001a) proposed that those charismatic group members who become brainwashed are caught up in a relational enmeshment in which their self-esteem depends upon belonging to their group (he doesn't however, explain why this is not the case for all members) and suggests that this dependency necessitates immersion in a relational network having the following characteristics; exclusivity or elitism, interchangeability of affective ties, dependency with a reluctance to sever or weaken ties to the cult. Each of these can be discussed in the light of concepts emerging from this study.

- *Exclusivity or elitism*: This has emerged from the first analysis in this thesis as the Category of Special People in a Special Group. The strength of need to belong exhibited within the texts and stories analysed within the second analysis also demonstrates how those who experienced themselves as outsiders developed a powerful need to belong and to have their difference transformed from one which made them an outsider to one which made them into a Special Person and that this was enacted within a Special Group.

- *Interchangeability of affective ties*: In this research the Category of Constant Change, which emerged from within the first analysis as a invariable process present throughout much of the structure and functioning of a mission focussed group and within much of the cultic experience of those studied in the second analysis, meant that in practice all relational ties were transitional, except those to the cult. This was brought about either through geography, members moved frequently, or by realignment of affective ties by the cults' mores. The Category of Separation which emerged from the second analysis focuses on the mission focussed cult instigated disruption of relational ties which also supports this idea.
- *Dependency with a reluctance to sever or weaken ties to the cult* **-** the overriding driver 'The Need to Belong' which was identified as a Core

Category by the second analysis explains why those studied here would be reluctant to sever emotionally laden ties to the cult. This is also demonstrated by the Category No Way Out that was identified in the first analysis, which has been shown to be of great importance in limiting the mission focussed cult members' ability to conceptualise any alternative to a cultic life.

When a mission focussed group member contemplates leaving their group there are subjective exit costs that they realize that they will experience. The higher they perceive these exit costs to be, the greater will be their reluctance to leave. Zablocki (2001a) claims that within most charismatic groups, the exit costs are (in the main) spiritual and emotional ones rather than material. This notion however, is extended by the Category No Way Out which identifies how mission focussed group members have in effect 'burnt their bridges' by abandoning relationships outside of the group, their careers and/or education and how they are often very financially disadvantaged compared to their age related peers who have not been in such a mission focussed group. Moreover, what has emerged from the second analysis in this thesis are the extreme psychological and social costs that present for the individual on both contemplating leaving a mission focussed cult and in the actuality of leaving such a cult (see Chapters 3 and 5 for a fuller discussion of these costs).

6.2 A Challenge to the 'Traditional' Notion of Brainwashing or Coercion

Zablocki's (1997, 1998, 2001a) 'brainwashing' model began with the assumption that charismatic leaders can and do create organizations that are straightforward and attractive to join and that there is always a plentiful pool of potential recruits available. He proposed that initially these charismatic leaders gather around them a group of disciples sufficient for the creation of an attractive group. Then, he suggested, it is simple for these disciples to attract new members from the mass of anomic seekers that can easily be found within the population of an urbanized mobile society; those that this present research has identified as seeking a place/group where they can belong.

The findings in Study 2 have shown that new members are often induced by the initial attractiveness of the mission focussed group; its vision of the future and/or its apparent capacity to confer a boundless measure of love and appreciation, to voluntarily undergo the difficult and painful process of resocialization. Undertaking this process might seem (superficially) to the new group member to be an easy price to pay for the reward of belonging. This is because The Need to Belong, which empowers the new member to endure and even welcome the difficult and often painful process of resocialization, is a powerful motivator.

This process differs in enactment between different mission focussed groups (as discussed in Chapter 4) and in some ways reflects the resocialization processes that were observed by Robert Lifton and Edgar Schein when studying the Communist re-education centres in the 1950s (Lifton, 1961, Schein, 1961). The process is simultaneously carried out on two distinct but parallel pathways relating to cognitive functioning and emotional entanglement (The Need to Belong) and leads the group member to develop both the condition of hyper-credulity and relational enmeshment (Zablocki, 1997, 1998, 2001a). The description of one of these pathways echoes what Enroth (1984) described when he said that the notion *of "brainwashing"* entails *"a useful though scientifically imprecise concept which refers to an array of complex phenomena resulting in the impairment of the individual's cognitive and social functioning"* (Enroth, 1984, p141). Zablocki (1997, 1998, 2001a) then stated that as a result of involvement in these processes charismatic group members learn (or perhaps choose) to suspend their critical judgment and accept the continually changing ideologies and beliefs promulgated by the charismatic leader. All the time becoming more strongly attached to and emotionally dependent upon the leader and developing emotional attachments to the other group members and an inability to tolerate isolation from them. It is interesting that the participants in the analysis in Chapter 5 did not identify having an emotional dependency on a charismatic leader; their dependency was on the group as a whole.

However, this thesis would suggest that this is not 'brainwashing' as has been commonly interpreted; a process which has been deliberately chosen to create a

deficit of free will or the ability to make choices, within the individual (Clark, 1976, 1977, 1978, Ofshe & Singer, 1986, Singer, 1986 inter alia). Rather it is the interplay of the individuals need for belonging and a purpose in life (a mission to fulfil) with the psychosocial processes that are present in mission focussed cults simply to enable them to fulfil their mission. These are not extraordinary processes that are outside of the remit of everyday psychology, but are (possibly exaggerated) forms of normal psychosocial processes that are present in everyday societal frames. See for example the classical social psychological work on conformity and obedience (Asch, 1956, Milgram, 1963 and Haney, Banks & Zimbardo, 1973, Sherif 1935). However, when these processes are in interplay with the individuals' fundamental need to belong they prove a strong motivator for obedience and conformity to group ideals and identification.

What also needs to be added to the work of Zablocki (1997, 1998, 2001a) and the other authors whose work adds to the third approach to understanding the these experiences (Collins, 1991, Keiser & Keiser, 1987, Lalich, 2004 inter alia) is the emphasis placed on the commitment to the groups' mission, and the need for these participants to find somewhere or something to belong to. These Core Categories have emerged from the results of the two Classical Grounded Theory analyses in this thesis as the primary motivators and drivers for both the existence of the mission focussed group and the group member.

Interestingly, Zablocki (1997, 1998, 2001a) suggested that when the cost of 'surveillance' outweighs the benefit of having what he describes as a 'deployable agent' the cultic system is changed away from one that necessitates surveillance (see Chapter 4, section 4.1.3). Whereas, this emergent grounded theory has found that it is not that the cult system changes, but that the non functioning member is discarded. (This rejection will be discussed further in Chapter 7, along with the other findings from the Classical Grounded Theory analysis in Chapter 5).

Mission focussed cult members believe that there is no other way to live their lives once they become members of the cult other than by striving to fulfil the cult's mission. Thus, when these cult members begin to move psychologically towards leaving their cult, they live in fear and (as identified in Chapter 3 and 5): they suffer

from high levels of anxiety. They are anxious that they may have chosen wrongly when joining their cult, which has taught them that there is only one legitimate way to live one's life, and they are at the stage of contemplating not being able to do this and are anxious about this too. They may also fear that they will be punished by a vengeful god. These cult members fear that they have nowhere and nothing to go to, as they have burnt their bridges when they joined the cult. There is No Way Out for them and they fear they may be making a huge mistake for themselves, their friends and family and for the world.

Perhaps the sense that by leaving the cult members are abandoning God could be added here; especially if it is taken into consideration that the item in the study by Exline et al., (2000) with the strongest correlation associated with depression and suicidality was belief in having committed a sin too big to be forgiven. This life of fear certainly resonates with the religious strain that these authors have described; a belief that sin has caused your problems, feeling that God is far away and feeling abandoned by Him.

7 Summary of Chapter

In this chapter the results of the Classical Grounded Theory analysis in Chapters 3 and 5 have been explored in relation to the literature on the effect of religion on mental health. What has been argued here is that it would not be wise to view being religious as having the same effect on different individuals and so an alternative way of viewing religion and its effects to that generally held within the two opposite poles cited in the literature have been posited here. This is that religion should be viewed as a multidimensional form of behaviour and belief, with more than one possible way of expression, manifestation and experiencing. Accordingly, there can then be a different position, which says that religion has the potential to either promote or hinder mental health dependant on the individuals experience and conceptualisation of their religion.

Additionally, the results from Chapters 3 and 5 have been integrated with the literature relating to the debate on the effect of the cultic or new religious experience on the individuals mental health. The emergent theory in this present research

proposes that although the participants in this research (who exited from mission focussed cults experiencing self-identified difficulties in living such as substance misuse, depression, suicidality, anxiety, attacks, low self esteem and so forth) describe experiencing themselves as outsiders with a very strong need to belong. It is the cult structures and mores with the dominance of the mission, leading to personally destabilising processes, which undoubtedly increase that need to belong.

With this in mind suggestions have been made in this chapter as to how the Core Categories from both the first study in this thesis (reported in Chapters 3 and 4) and the second study (reported in Chapter 5 and this chapter) interact, and potentially have a role to play in explaining how those cult members studied here, who emerge from their cultic experience with long term difficulties in living, arrive at that position.

In discussion of the socialisation processes operating within mission focussed cults this chapter paid attention to three possible positions. One group of authors believe that behaviour and practices observed within new religious movements are solely a matter of religious expression, with no resultant long term psychological harm arising from them. The alternative position is that these cults are environments in which the psychosocial processes and techniques that are used to coerce and control members lead to long term psychological problems. The third approach seems closest to the second position, but makes a more subtle analysis of the psychosocial processes which sees the processes as more interactive and in some ways chosen. This position is illustrated by Zablocki whose work has been explored in some detail here. This position has been further developed in the light of findings of the Classical Grounded Theory analyses in this study.

This will be explored further in the next chapter and the emergent model will be formulated more formally in juxtaposition with the literature on psychotherapeutic modelling of the development of psychological problems. Suggestions will then be made as to how psychotherapists can work therapeutically with the long term difficulties in living that ex-cult members describe experiencing.

Chapter 7 The Emergent Grounded Theory and Modelling this Theory

1 Overview

The aim of this research (as set out in Chapter 1) was fourfold; it was intended that this research would; (1) Give rise to a coherent and overarching conceptual model of the structure and function of groups that are now defined within this research as mission focussed. (2) Produce a potentially generalisable theoretical model of how the common elements present in the way that participants relate to the world, (who describe emerging from their cultic experience with self-identified long term difficulties in living) contribute to these difficulties. (3) Develop a theory which could be used to explain in what ways the structure and functioning of such groups interact with the common features referred to in (2), to contribute to these difficulties. (4) Explore which main stream psychological paradigms might lend themselves to an understanding of the interaction between the findings of the two analyses carried out in Chapters 3 and 5. Identifying (and modelling) which of these would be the most useful in enabling psychotherapists who undertake work with this client group to have a sound conceptual framework underlying their interventions. How well these aims were fulfilled will be reported in this chapter.

In the Classical Grounded Theory analysis of a number of texts (reported in Chapter 3) five Meta-Categories and nineteen Categories were identified as the components of the Core Category: Fulfilling a Mission. This Core Category explains how and why psychosocial processes and techniques found in such groups provide a system of experiences which develop, in both the individual and the group, a powerful sense of (individual and communal) responsibility for fulfilling (or culpability for failing) the mission of the group, which in turn is the driver for the continued use of these psychosocial techniques.

This first analysis established that the purpose, structure and functioning of the type of group which was analysed in Chapter 3, is shaped by the Core Category of Fulfilling a Mission. It is this which gives rise to both the reason for the groups' existence and the reason for them existing in the manner they do; it produces both the groups' purpose and modus operandi; their function and functioning. Moreover, to fulfil their mission these mission focussed groups need a willing

workforce/membership. In practice this means that the mission focussed group has to have ascendancy over the individual group member, over how the individual member relates to their world and the world outside of the group, and over how the groups' members understand these worlds as impacting on them.

The theory derived from the first analysis explains how this Core Category characterizes the nature of a mission focussed group as being embodied in a reciprocal relationship between the organisation as a whole, and its changeable elements; whether these are its beliefs, members or structure. This was described in Chapter 3 as a reciprocal feedback loop where the changes at one end of the loop are 'fed back' to the beginning of the loop, and which then cause a corresponding change. The more the psychosocial techniques are used the stronger the commitment to fulfilling the mission and the more this then necessitates the use of these techniques (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 A Reciprocal Feedback Loop

The second study within the thesis (reported in Chapter 5) developed a potentially explanatory psychological theory of how this can be understood by constructing a psychological model which includes (1) the common features identified by participants studied here as being present in their way of relating to the world from before they joined their cult, (2) the psychosocial processes individuals undergo on joining and during their membership, and (3) the psychological sequelae of leaving such a group. It has identified five stages comprising fifteen Categories which make up a Core Category grounded firmly on 'The Need to Belong'. This second analysis

demonstrated that one sub-group of mission focussed cult members who have emerged from their cult experience with long term difficulties in living have, in their life before joining a cult, experienced themselves as being Anomic Outsiders. What this Core Category shows is that this lack of social rootedness and the experience of being an outsider have led to there being an unusually strong need to belong in these individuals and that this is likely to be as a consequence of their lacking a sufficient sense of belonging in their pre-cult life.

Such potential members appear to have experienced an extremely strong need centred on this sense of not belonging and of having something missing in their lives. What is particularly noteworthy in this element of the study is that all those individuals whose accounts have been used here have considered their experience of not fitting in and their sense of purposelessness as problematic. They felt themselves to be ‘outsiders’ and they actively experienced a desire or even a need for somewhere or something to belong to.

This understanding that at least a sub-section of potential mission focussed cult members experience themselves as outsiders leads to the question of what happens when members of a cult, who, as has been shown, have an overriding need to fulfil a mission, encounter those individuals who have an overriding need to belong to something and/or somebody. The question is whether this is indeed the ideal arrangement that it seems to be for accomplishing both the goals of the individual member and that of the cult?

The Core Category which emerged from the second study explains how those ‘Anomic Outsiders' who have been exposed to unwelcome changes within their lives before they joined a cult, have an overriding need to belong. This need to belong is what firstly enables the cult members to accept the inducements which come from the cults and then to accept the answers to all of their problems that they are given by the cults and it is this that then gives meaning to their lives.

However, as has been demonstrated in Chapter 5, this need to belong and the need to fulfil a mission combine to produce a situation where the end justifies the means for the cult and the individual is subsumed into a system in which they

become (at first) willing cogs in a ‘machine’ constructed to carryout a task, rather than meet the personal or developmental needs of the individual members.

The promise of transcending the norm and becoming a ‘Special Person in a Special Group’, who lives by ‘Special Rules’ and has the ‘Special Powers’ to be gained within the group by accessing the group’s ‘Special Knowledge’ enables the new cult members at first to welcome, then embrace (and in turn) use the psychosocial processes used to make and keep them a cult member. To facilitate this process the cult promises to fulfil the individual’s wants and needs and in return the individual submits to these psychosocial processes which are the price for belonging to the cult and having a purpose in life.

These psychosocial processes are those which give the mission focussed cult ascendancy over the individual, and through a process of training and socialization and through the deception which is practiced on them (and by them) the cult member develops an attitude and practice of both obedience and conformity to the group’s mores and rules. Members are taught that if they conform to these special rules they will, in time and through effort, gain a special knowledge. This will empower them as individuals to achieve whatever it is that has been identified with them, and for them, as desirable goals and that they will also gain the special power which will enable them to do this. The inducements and the promise of answers to the problematic existential questions that they are experiencing reassure the mission focussed cult member that what they are doing is the right thing. They are taught (and accept) that the achievement of these goals will enable the fulfilment of their cult’s mission, which has by this time become paramount in their lives.

As stated earlier a reciprocal relationship develops between the cult and the members, which is based on the high levels of responsibility to the cult (and for the cult) and its mission, which the use of these psychosocial techniques engenders. There is a striving to attain a place within the leadership hierarchy and then to retain that position once (if) it is attained (not all members become leaders). Even if the members do not achieve this status as they become more en-cultured into the cult they will be given responsibility for teaching both those who are newly joined

members and those who are failing as members. This is done both as a reward and to bind the cult members further into the cult.

There is also at times a great sense of belonging experienced by the cult members and this sense of belonging also helps to keep them in the cult and ensures that they continue to strive to be a successful cult member. It appears as if their individual developmental needs are being met. However, as their mission focussed cult 'career' progresses the cult members not only experience times of extreme fulfilment, warmth and belonging, but paradoxically may also start to deteriorate both psychologically and physically. This is because the very processes which bind them into the cult, for example the constant changes characteristic of these structures, the lack of enduring interpersonal relationships and the other hardships that they encounter, are intrinsically wearing and unfulfilling.

It is as they start to deteriorate that the overwhelming sense of responsibility that mission focussed cult members have had inculcated into their psyche acts as a reinforcer both through the promise of reward and the threat of punishment. If they do not succeed in the cult's mission the consequences will be dire for themselves, their loved ones and ultimately the world. Their spiritual existence is at stake, as is that of significant others, the outcome of which the cult members perceive as entirely resting on their shoulders. This experience of both the responsibility and the hope of fulfilling this responsibility and obtaining the just rewards from the endeavour also engender fear in the cult members. This fear is the fear of not achieving the mission focussed cult-designated tasks and goals and the fear of the consequence of this failure.

As time progresses the demands of the cult can become more pressing, and in consequence some members begin to fear that they lack the ability to cope. This intensifies their fear of failure and the consequential loss, whether initiated by themselves or the cult, of their way of life; because they can no longer continue as a fully functioning, committed and productive cult member. The mission is all and if the member cannot produce, after a period of training and retraining they will be ejected from the cult with all of the negative consequences this will bring. As many elements of their lives begin to deteriorate the failing member will be tempted to

enter into to a process of deception; this is both an unconscious deception of themselves and a conscious deception of others. This life of deception and the subsequent further deterioration experienced at this stage of membership leads to desperation and doubts. Eventually these cult members are living in a state of almost constant fear, with high levels of anxiety. This leads to even greater desperation, self-deception and the deception of others, whilst the failing member struggles to pay the price for belonging, as a special person, to a special group. Ultimately this life of fear takes its toll and they eventually decide to leave the cult or are asked to leave and thus they suffer the ultimate rejection or abandonment. They are no longer special people in a special group, who 'belong'; the group has not fulfilled their need merely exploited it. They will eventually no longer have any relevance to the mission focussed cult and for someone who continues to have a driving need to belong this outcome can be extremely destructive.

As discussed in Chapter 4 this conceptualisation of the function and the functioning of a mission focussed group moves the understanding of the experience from the two main approaches that are generally espoused within the literature. In that it does not suggest externally and coercively imposed obedience over which the individual has no control (Ash, 1985, Clarke, 1976, 1977, 1978, Hassan, 1988, Singer & Ofshe, 1986, West & Langone, 1986) involving what has been described by Anthony and Robbins (2004) as a pseudo-conversion which involves an unthinking participation in group activities. It also differs from the more sociological approach which comes from authors such as Anthony and Robbins (2004), Coleman (1984b), Melton and Moore (1982) amongst others, who see this phenomenon as a conversion experience that involves non-rational factors such as emotion, intuition or ineffable mystical experiences and as developmental, transitional process (Anthony & Robbins, 2004). What this research demonstrates is that the relationship between these mission focussed cult members and their cult is a reciprocal relationship with benefits to both sides i.e. the cult gains compliant members to carryout its mission and the anomic outsider gains a place to belong and a purpose in being.

A subsequent analysis in Chapter 6 that brought together some of the literature on religious belief and psychological functioning with that on the effects of mission

focussed cult experiences and the findings of the second Grounded Theory analysis suggested the view that religion should be seen as a multidimensional form of behaviour, with religious beliefs having the potential to either promote or hinder mental health depending of the type of belief; intrinsic or extrinsic.

A better understanding of what the two analyses have posited can be had if the results derived from them are considered as the warp and weft of the psychological process of mission focussed cult membership for these individuals. The first analysis (reported in Chapter 3) both identified, and developed a potential theoretical explanation for the psychosocial processes present in the functioning of a mission focussed group and the second (reported in Chapter 5) identified and developed a potential theoretical explanation for the common elements that participants in this research (who have emerged from mission focussed cults with self-identified long term difficulties in living, outlined previously), described as being present both in their lives before joining their cult, and in their experience of cult membership. It can be suggested that these findings, in combination, are the fabric of what results in these long term difficulties in living for those ex-mission focussed cult members studied here. This can be understood as meaning that although separate processes are described, function and experience, these are intrinsically interlinked, and the one: function, (which is dictated by the need to fulfil the cults' mission) provides the structure from which the other: experience, is drawn.

2 The Theory

The grounded theory constructed from combining together the two strands that have emerged from the analyses in this thesis rests on the view that the mission focussed cults studied in this thesis are new religions, rather than break away sects, and are that they are cultures in their own right. In simple terms an explicit statement of this theory proposes that:

- The nature of a mission focussed group is embodied in a reciprocal relationship between the organisation, and its changeable elements; such as its beliefs, members or structure.

- These groups are formed for the purpose of carrying out a mission; it is this mission that both structures the group and its way of functioning and day to day practices.

- The sole reason for the continued existence of such a group is to fulfil a mission and its members, beliefs and practices exist to service that mission.

- The psychosocial processes which are found within mission focussed groups are there to create a willing and able workforce/membership to fulfil this overriding mission.

- Both the individual and the group exist in a state of (personal and group) responsibility for fulfilling (or culpability for failing) the mission of the group.

- The highly developed sense of responsibility and culpability within the membership is honed by the exposure of the mission focussed group member to both the systematic experience of, *and* the use of psychosocial techniques.

- It is the highly developed sense of responsibility and culpability within the membership which is the driver for the use of these psychosocial techniques.

- The more the techniques are used the stronger the commitment to fulfilling the mission and the more this then necessitates the use of these techniques.

- Being subject to these processes is exhausting.

- There is at least a sub-section of the membership of mission focussed cults who join because of an overriding need for someone or somewhere to belong.

- This need to belong has arisen as a consequence of having developmentally significant experiences of being an outsider and of having no purpose in life.

- This feeling of being an anomic outsider is problematic for this sub-section of potential mission focussed cult members.

- The need to belong enables this sub-section to firstly embrace and then to tolerate the vicissitudes of being an expendable component within a system which exists to fulfil a mission.

- The cost of being a member of the mission focussed cult will eventually outweigh the apparent benefits of belonging for this sub-section (amongst others) leading to the deterioration of the members' ability to function within the cult.

- This leads to either the member or the leadership of the mission focussed cult deciding that the cult member can no longer remain as a member.

- The member who has joined a mission focussed cult seeking somewhere and/or something to belong to leaves the cult having had their need to belong compounded by exhaustion and further rejection, either by the cult, from the cult, and/or of themselves because they could not remain in the cult.

Thus, the overriding purpose of a cult, which is to fulfil a mission, directs the psychosocial processes found within the cult (for the purpose of achieving a membership which is committed to fulfilling this mission). Some members overriding need for belonging maintains this group of members commitment to the cult, so that the value the individual member puts on belonging outweighs the cost of membership of the group. However, since membership only *appears* to resolve the problems of the anomic outsider and is exhausting, remaining in membership gradually becomes impossible and the individual leaves more depleted than they were when they joined their mission focussed cult. It is this experience, combined

with the negative life experiences (which have lead to this sub-section of the cults' membership experiencing themselves as outsiders), which leads to the long term difficulties in living that they experience either as they begin to leave their cult or on exiting from their cult.

These ex-members have the experience of believing themselves to be a special person belonging to a special group with a mission to fulfil. They then suffer the type of rejection identified above, compounded with the negative experiences that they had before joining the group and their experiences on leaving the cult. This, the emergent theory proposes, can lead to long term difficulties in living such as depression, anxiety disorders, drug and/or alcohol abuse, suicidality etc.

3 Previous Theories Which Help Explicate the Emergent Theory

3.1 Rational Choice Theory

The notion that these cult members choose to commit to a mission focussed cultic lifestyle, maintaining that commitment over time seems hard to comprehend. It is often easier to 'blame' the cult for 'making' the member do the often seemingly bizarre things that cult members do, than to make sense of this through more mainstream scientific means. One approach to developing a further understanding of these processes which fits well with the emergent theory within this thesis is drawn from the work of early sociologists such as George Homans (1961) (one of the first social theorists to talk about what is now known in general terms as cost benefit analysis). Homans set out a basic framework of exchange theory, which he grounded in behaviourist psychology. This has been elaborated by other theorists such as Blau (1964) and Coleman (1990), but it is Homans' formulation of exchange theory which remains the basis of these subsequent elaborations.

In rational choice theories individuals are held to function in a reasoned manner whereby they seek to balance their preferences, motivated by their wants or goals, with the constraints of their situation and circumstances as they currently comprehend them. In simple terms the relationship between preferences and constraints is that of a means to achieve an end. Individuals anticipate the

outcomes of differing courses of action and calculate which will produce the best result for them. Deciding which choice will give them the best outcome for the least cost. These choices are predicated on the experiences and social learning that the individual has gained over time and on how these experiences have caused the individuals needs to be expressed (Scott, 2000). This notion has resonances with the Bounded Choice Theory in which Lalich (2004) has elaborated Zablocki's use of Rational Choice theory (with regards to what he calls brainwashing) to describe how a Rational Choice perspective conceives of this process as one of a fundamental restructuring of self through a reorganisation of preferences (Zablocki, 1998). Lalich adds to Zablocki's utilisation of Rational Choice Theory by saying that the choices that are open to cult members are bounded by the beliefs, mores and practices of the new cultures (the mission focussed groups) that they have become a part of (Lalich, 2004) (See section 5.2 in Chapter 4) .

This theory helps to explain how the cult members that are studied here were able not only to commit to a mission focussed cult and its beliefs and practices, but also how, for some time, a considerable amount in some cases, they were able to sustain their membership of the cult, whilst being in a state of anxiety or even fear. This was, in part, because when they had committed to the mission focussed cult they had subsequently burnt many of their bridges (which at the time was seen as a benefit, doing away with the old life and embracing the new) and had become out of step with the usual social developmental tasks which take place within the stage of life at which they joined the cult. In many cases they had abandoned career, financial stability and interpersonal relationships (often at great cost to themselves and others) that added value to a life outside of the cult, but were seen as a distraction from the task of fulfilling the mission of the cult. However, all of these things were only in addition to the potential cost of removing themselves from the elite cadre of special people in a special group who had a momentous mission to fulfil. They had found somewhere to belong, if they could only get things right!

3.2 Group Process Theories

Research within social psychology has generated theories concerning how individuals function within groups and how they affiliate with groups. These theories such as Self Categorisation Theory (Hogg & Haines, 1996, Turner, 1985) and Self Verification Theory (Pelham, 1991, Swann, 1983 onward, Swann & Ely, 1984, Swann, Politzer, Selye & Ko, 2004, Swann, Rentfrow & Guinn, 2002) are rooted in earlier theories such as Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978, Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

As with Rational Choice Theory these group process theories can also go some way towards developing an understanding of the psychosocial processes found within mission focussed cults. However, a word of caution must be voiced, as research into psychosocial processes within groups has frequently been carried out using either artificially created groups or work groups (see for example Tajfel, 1978, Tajfel & Turner, 1986, Swann, et al., 2004) and will not necessarily reflect the experience of being a member of a mission focussed group, as motivation and commitment to the group and other drivers may have an impact on individual's behaviour in groups. In fact Deutsch and Gerard's (1955) theory of normative and informational influence suggests that; "*normative social influences can be utilized to buttress as well as to undermine individual integrity"* p7. Additionally, it says that; "*normative social influence can be exerted to help make an individual be an individual and not merely a mirror or puppet of the group"* p7, which could be seen as challenging those theories which rest on understanding the processes present in mission focused groups as being in place to control and undermine self-determination.

Early research, from which Social Identity Theory is derived (Tajfel, 1978, Tajfel & Turner, 1986), maintained that people become members of a group as a means of increasing their self-esteem. However, this self-esteem theory has lost some support over time (see for example Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994, Turner, Hogg, Turner, & Smith, 1984 and Swann et al., 2004). Nevertheless, it is this theorising that formed the platform for later research.

Self Categorization theorists who follow Taijfel and Turner's theorizing, when examining how groups create cohesiveness (e.g., Hogg & Haines, 1996, Turner,

1985) propose that they do this by encouraging members to see themselves in terms of their membership in a group. Subsequently, Hogg and his colleagues (Hogg & Abrams, 1993; Hogg & Mullin, 1999) have suggested that people join groups to reduce uncertainty and to achieve meaning and clarity in social contexts. This resonates with Anomic Outsiders (identified in Study 2) joining mission focused cults to give meaning and social 'rootedness' to their lives. Theoretically, one consequence of this cohesiveness is the in-group bias, which could be expressed as the tendency to favour members of one's own group over members of other groups. Accordingly, this in-group bias would foster cohesiveness within groups, promoting cooperation and productivity – but could, in groups which are mission focused, lead to 'Separation' (from those outside of the group) and a heightened belief in the 'specialness' of the 'Special Group' promoting the fulfilment of the groups' mission.

However, this tendency for mission focussed group members to align themselves with the group comes at a cost. Michael Hogg (2002) has said that:

> *"We can see that social Categorization perceptually assimilates people to the relevant ingroup or outgroup prototype. A social field comprising multifaceted and unique individuals is perceptually transformed into a social field containing people who to varying degrees match the relevant group prototype – a process called "depersonalization" because the basis of perception is group prototypicality rather than idiosyncrasy or interpersonal relationships. Since prototypes capture any and all features that define Category membership (i.e. attitudes, feelings, and behaviors) "depersonalization" makes people in groups appear attitudinally, affectively, and behaviorally relatively homogenous…"* (Hogg, 2002 p61).

Thus, according to Self Categorization Theory, in adopting the mission focussed group identity, (even if only temporarily) the group member must relinquish their personal identities. To be a part of the mission focussed group they must comply with its *"attitudes, feelings, and behaviors"* (op cit) which explains to some degree the Category of Compliance that emerged from the first Classical Grounded Theory analysis. Self Categorization theorists hold that this reduction in the psychological

significance of a person's identity is crucial to group functioning (Swann et al., 2004).

In contrast, Self Verification Theory has its roots in the writings of the symbolic interactionists who maintained that an individual's self-view is a means of both predicting how others will respond to them, and of understanding the world. For example a mission focused cult member who sees herself as an 'end time warrior' fighting for a cause, would create a set of hypotheses about her role in the group and would for example predict that those outside of the group would be hostile to her (in fact she would probably act in ways that could provoke this response). Accordingly those within the group would 'join' with her and group cohesiveness would increase (Swann et al., 2004).

Consequently, it can be seen that self-views do not only have a role in how other people will react to individuals, they will also have a role in interpreting others responses and in shaping behaviour. Swann et al., (2004) have said that self-views represent the "lens" through which people perceive their worlds and organize their behaviour. They go on to say that it is critical that these "lenses" allow some degree of integrity and stability; as the alternative is a vision of reality which is shifting and unreliable.

Mission focussed groups' proffer a fertile source of self-verification, as cult membership provides support for two different types of self-views. First, in the course of interacting with other group members, people may receive validation for their personal self-views; self-views that refer to unique properties of individuals which do not necessarily bear any relation to group membership (for example viewing oneself as caring, committed, and giving). Secondly, being a member of such a group may validate self-views that are based on membership in particular social categories; as a Special Person in a Special Group for example (Swann et al., 2004).

Reicher and Haslam (2006) when discussing their replication of Zimbardo's prison experiment say that two findings were constant throughout their work. These were; firstly that shared social identity creates social power, enabling groups of individuals

to join together as effective social agents to forge change and shape their own worlds. Secondly, Reicher and Haslam found that where people are unable to shape their world because they lack shared identity (they don't belong) they are liable to become despondent and open to alternative belief systems, however extreme they might be. This resonates with the notion of Anomic Outsiders (lacking in a shared social identity and needing to belong) being despondent and open to alternative belief systems - even those that are as extreme as those found within the mission focussed groups they become members of. Reicher and Haslam (2006) go on to say that this is "*when people become more liable to accept extreme suggestions and thereby succumb to inequitable solutions to their social problems"* p150. They go on to suggest that "*All members of a group, from the highest to the lowest, play a part in determining what the group stands for and the type of world it seeks to create"* p150: They partake of a reciprocal relationship.

A note of caution must be sounded here in that both the rational choice theory and the group process theories considered briefly above may well contribute to a developing understanding of commitment to the membership of mission focussed cults. However, they can only be seen as hypotheses with explanatory value; they have not yet been directly tested in research concerning mission focussed groups and this is outside of the scope of this thesis.

Nevertheless what has emerged from the analyses in this thesis is that the overriding purpose of such a group is to fulfil a mission, this directs the psychosocial processes of group functioning, whilst the overriding need for belonging (along with lesser drivers such as those suggested above) maintain these individuals commitment to their mission focussed group. This continues all the time that the value the individual member puts on belonging to the group outweighs the cost of membership of such mission focussed groups and whilst the responses they get from the group match their expectations and needs; whether these are for self-verification or self-categorization.

Given that eventually those mission focussed cult members studied here did become ex-members, the costs must eventually have outweighed the benefits of being a member of their cult (Scott, 2000) and they no longer 'belonged'. For

someone who continues to have a driving need to belong it would be expected that this outcome could be extremely destructive.

These individuals have a sense of themselves as a failure – either lacking the ability to be a good member of the cult or being unable to choose correctly when they decided to join the cult. This compounds their understanding of themselves as either not good enough to belong or of not having anywhere to belong; as they now have evidence that there is no place for them either within the mission focussed cult or in life outside. Yet they must now try to make a life 'outside'.

They have to move into a life no longer structured by the group, where day-to-day survival is their priority. The now ex-cult member has to develop or redevelop their own autonomy; they experience isolation and have to cope with either having lived a life that now seems to them to have been a lie, or with having not being good enough to make it in their mission focussed cult. The results of this exclusion are further compounded; because it is exclusion both from the cult and those outside of the cult as the lifestyle and the actions of cult members, who have lived by Special Rules as Special People in a Special Group to fulfil the cult's mission, can be very isolating when viewed retrospectively.

The ex-mission focussed cult members whose experiences have been studied here all have described experiencing long term difficulties in living on exiting from their cults. These problems have ranged from alcoholism and drug dependency to clinical depression or even psychosis in one case.

4 A Developmental Psychological Model of the Development of Long Term Difficulties in Living in Ex-Mission Focussed Cult Members

The fourth aim of this thesis was to model the findings of the research within a mainstream psychological paradigm to enable psychotherapists who undertake work with this client group to be able to refer to it as a model on which to base their work. What is required is a model which incorporates a developmental theme that takes account of the experience of group members prior to contact with their

mission focussed cult, and explains how those individuals psychologically process their experience of the group, their recognition of their need to leave and their experiences after leaving; a model which also accounts for a sense of themselves that participants in this research have described as problematic.

Practically all psychotherapeutic paradigms and theories of human development within mainstream psychology emphasise the need for nurturing supportive relationships in the healthy development of an individual and they describe how an absence of such relationships can lead to psychological problems (see for example the work of Ainsworth, 1982, Beck, 1967, Bowlby, 1951, 1969, 1973, 1980, Rogers, 1951, Winnicott, 1965, Rutter & O'Connor, 1999 and Stern, 1977). It therefore seems appropriate to focus initially on the anomic outsider element of the experience of ex-members who participated in this research; which was present before their mission focussed cultic experience and arguably an element of the difficulties in living that they report experiencing after leaving.

There are a number of 'grand traditions' in psychology and particularly Counselling Psychology from which developmental and psychotherapeutic theories may be derived. These can be identified as Psychoanalytic Theory, Behaviourism, the Humanistic Tradition, Transpersonal Psychology and Cognitive Theories. For the purpose of this thesis those which have had the most impact on current psychotherapeutic practice within the UK, that is to say Psychoanalytic Theory, Humanistic and Cognitive approaches, will be explored in order to seek an explanatory model that meets the above requirements.

In the psychoanalytic tradition, specifically following Freudian thinking (1893 onwards) there is often a negative view of religion and religious affiliation since all religion is considered an illusion that is created by civilization to enable individuals to cope with feelings of infantile helplessness. Such a view tells us little about individual member's reasons for involvement with groups such as those studied here and their responses to them.

Given a problematic outcome of group involvement, such as that reported by participants in this research, a Freudian explanation would look back to both the

experience of the groups themselves and to developmental predisposition, seeking to understand the activity of the defence mechanisms acting to compensate for early deficits or trauma in the life of the individual concerned.

The most powerful driver that emerged from the Classical Grounded Theory analysis in Chapter 5 is summed within the Core Category of the 'Need to Belong' which may be attributed in Freudian terms to powerful events or trauma during the oral stage of psychosexual development. Trauma or deprivation at this time can be offered as an explanation for a trusting dependency with a commensurate gullibility ('they'll swallow anything'). Alternatively, trauma in later stages of development might also be seen as having their resolution in the membership of a potent group, specifically a failure to resolve conflicts in the Oedipal stage within ones family of origin could be seen as leading young people at a later stage in life towards the powerful masculine sense of drive within the ethos of a mission focussed organisation, or (for young women) the equally powerful development of the nurturant group common in mission focussed cults particularly in the early stages of recruitment. However, this alternative explanation although accounting for affiliation to a mission focussed group is not commensurate with the Category Anomic Outsider, a lack of resolution at this stage of psychosexual development does not lead to the ennui and anomie that was experienced by participants within this research.

Later writers in the tradition such as Erikson (1950 onward) would also see this affiliation to a mission focussed cult as arising from difficulties in the adolescent life task. Erikson (1950) describes how during the development of the individual there is a socialization process consisting of eight stages. Erikson regarded each stage as involving a psychosocial crisis, needing resolution before the next developmental stage can be successfully completed. The developing individual must learn from and resolve each psychosocial crisis to then be able to cope satisfactorily with the subsequent stages.

It is during the fifth psychosocial stage; adolescence (from age 13 or 14 years to approximately 20 years) that the developing individual addresses the question of 'Who am I?' and experiences role identity diffusion in the transition from childhood

givens towards individually chosen or negotiated roles in adulthood. This could be experienced as not knowing who you are, why you exist and where you belong. Erikson (1950) would maintain that most young people at this stage experience self -doubt, rebellion against social mores and parental control. He suggests that it is during early adolescence that the young person has the opportunity, if the life tasks in this stage are carried out successfully, of gaining self-confidence and surety rather than self-consciousness and self-doubt. As part of this process the young individual will try out different roles which are in general constructive, rather than those which would be viewed by society as being negative seeking to identify who they are and how to express this in their lives. Those who navigate this stage successfully could be said to have developed a sense of purpose and of where they 'belong' in the world.

A psychoanalytic approach to mission focussed cult membership would suggest that those that navigate Erikson's 5th stage successfully anticipate lives which embody achievement, and begin to work towards this. It is at this stage too that the adolescent seeks role models and leadership to follow – looking for inspiration and a way of being which will inspire her, and gradually develops a set of ideals. However, Erikson (1950) would suggest that it is those who do not pass through this stage successfully that develop ideals which are not socially congruent and desirable. They become at odds within the society they find themselves a part of, and, in the terms of this research become Anomic Outsiders, which in the case of the participants studied here would leave them vulnerable to joining a mission focussed cult, resulting ultimately in the negative psychological sequelae discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

This way of understanding the development of the individual resonates with the more sociological approach (as discussed in Chapter 4) from authors such as Anthony and Robbins (2004), Coleman (1984), Melton and Moore (1982) who see joining what they term a cult as a transitional experience; a natural progression from the primary family into independence (Anthony & Robbins, 2004).

It then becomes possible to suggest a psychoanalytic model in which individuals that have had problems resolving the life tasks of adolescence (possibly because of

difficulties in earlier stages of development) become anomic outsiders, lacking in self-confidence and surety concerning their self-identity. These individuals meet with a mission focussed cult, offering self-verification, self-validation and a place to belong and feel that they are accepted and have both a place to belong and a purpose in life. They then (working to a Freudian interpretation that such individuals would be vulnerable to suggestion, because of problems at the oral stage of psychosexual development) adopt the cult's mission and experience the psychosocial processes used within mission focussed groups. When eventually these anomic outsiders find that these structures and defences cannot be maintained because of the emotional costs it becomes impossible for them to remain in their cult. Their psychological processing of these experiences, in relation to their previous failure to resolve the psychosexual / stage-of-life tasks necessary for successful maturation, then compounds the difficulties in living this lack of resolution produces.

This may be a somewhat simplified and partial version of a combined Freudian and Eriksonian approach to the issues, but it gives a sense of how the processes that came to light in these studies might be modelled from a psychoanalytic perspective.

However, whilst it produces quite a satisfying picture in terms of balancing overview and specificity, it cannot be accepted as an altogether satisfactory model for a psychologist (or for the purpose of this thesis) because there is insufficient formal evidence from empirical studies to support the broad theoretical model. Neither Freud nor Erickson's theories were developed with a strong research evidence base, but were in the main derived from clinical experience and anecdotal evidence. This model therefore remains speculative and there is little evidence to date in relation to cult activities concerning the specific defence mechanisms explored above.

Many of the arguments put forward here cannot be falsified and hence cannot be tested empirically as in classical psychoanalytical thought the opposite of a condition advanced as causal may also be true. This can be illustrated by considering that if it is asserted that young people entering mission focussed cults have experienced a significant deficit or trauma in very early life (in the oral phase)

and that this gives rise to longings or behaviours or motivations that are fulfilled by dependence on a cult, we appear to be generating a model that gives rise to a testable hypothesis. However, if a study was set up and it was found that most or all of the young people entering these cults had very stable or even indulgent oral experiences this would not necessarily be taken to support the null hypothesis since it can be equally claimed within psychoanalytic thinking that a pattern of oral dependence can be set up by the reverse set of circumstances.

Additionally, although these are developmental theories they are limited to specific time periods in the individuals' lives and the developmental process is believed to be completed once these times have passed. Thus, for example, the oral stage takes place in the first 18 months of life and although problems associated with this stage (and all others) can be addressed through psychoanalysis, these problems are caused by an unsuccessful resolution of the stages Freud and others described, rather being generated later in life. Therefore, within this paradigm the roots of all psychological problems must lay within the developmental stages and processes of the young child and adolescent; they cannot be the result of adult experience. This would then suggest that in psychoanalytic terms any difficulties in living that ex-members of mission focussed groups describe experiencing *must* be rooted in maladjusted development with recent experiences serving only to bring out the original trauma by over-whelming the individual's ego-defences.

So, whilst the psychoanalytic position might be interesting (and could possibly give rise to some helpful avenues for psychotherapeutic interventions when applied to particular individuals) the model is not finally satisfying as it has limited room for the elaboration or development of psychological problems in adulthood. It is also unsatisfactory from a formal psychological perspective, as it is not falsifiable and so cannot be scientifically tested.

Although humanistic psychology has been sometimes perceived as having some difficulties in providing a strong formal evidential base for its theoretical formulations the Person-Centred Approach (Rogers, 1950 onwards) should also be explored with a view to providing a working model that accounts for the emergent data

reported in this thesis, as it has a research basis in Roger's own work and that of more recent advocates (see for example Bozarth, 1998)

Unlike Freud (1893 onwards) and Erikson (1950 onwards) Carl Rogers' (1951) theory of personality does not set out a stage theory of development involving complex personality structures; but develops a phenomenological approach emphasising the individual's subjective experiences as their frame of reference to the world. The theory centres on the idea that the human organism has an innate underlying actualizing tendency, which leads the organismic self to strive to develop all of its capacities and potentialities in ways that maintain or enhance the organism, so enabling it to develop towards autonomy and fulfilment. This tendency is understood to be directional, constructive and present in all living things. As the actualizing tendency is a fundamental drive within the organism it can be suppressed, but it cannot be destroyed without destroying the organism (Rogers, 1977). According to the classical tradition of the Person Centred Approach the concept of the actualizing tendency is the only motivational force in Rogers' theory. It encompasses all motivations; tension, need, or drive reductions; and creative as well as pleasure-seeking tendencies (Rogers, 1959).

Rogers described the 'Self Actualizing Tendency' as the psychological form of the actualizing tendency which functions in relation to the 'self' of the individual. This tendency motivates the process of actualization of what the individual experiences as the self or the self-concept (Rogers, 1959): it can be conceptualised as the tendency to develop (or actualise) all of the capacities and potentials of one's self and self-concept. The tendency towards actualisation when focussed on the developing self-concept creates a sub-system of secondary needs. Rogers has described these as firstly the 'need for positive regard from others' and subsequently an internalized version of this; 'the need for positive self-regard'. The drive to fulfil these secondary needs increases the likelihood that the individual will behave in a manner that is consistent with the conditions of worth of those who care for them and later will maintain their self-concept even in the face of contradictory experience.

The individual's self-concept then becomes based on their experience of others standards and expectations, rather than on how the untrammelled organismic self would evaluate its experience. In an unconditional environment the 'organismic valuing process' ensures that experiences (including how one reacts them i.e. how one behaves) are accurately symbolized and valued according to how the individual judges their assistance in moving towards optimal enhancement of the organism and self (Rogers, 1959). However, in a conditional environment the individual's need for positive self-regard tends to create selective perceptions of experience in terms of the externally derived conditions of worth and the perceptions of the experiences that are in accordance with these conditions being symbolized in awareness. Eventually, those experiences which are not in concordance with the conditions of worth that are now subsumed within the individual are distorted or denied and this leads to increasing incongruence between the perceived self and the actual experience of the organism, generating confusion, tension, and maladaptive behaviour.

In an ideal world the individual would only experience unconditional positive regard with no conditions of worth being imposed on them and their need for positive regard from others and positive self-regard would match their own organismic evaluation, resulting in congruence between self and experience. This then would produce an individual who is a fully functioning person open to experience and able to live existentially, trusting in her own organism and organismic way of valuing. This self actualised person would express feelings freely, act independently and creatively and live a richer fuller life; in Rogers (1950) terms they would be living the good life.

Modelling the experience of participants in this research within this paradigm begins with the notion that significant others have either failed to provide positive regard for the individual's organismic values or have imposed conditions of worth which have made them unusually socially dependent. These participants do not experience 'belonging', for a number of reasons; perhaps because they do not fit in to the family unit or they do not fit in because of cultural dislocation or they do not fit into educational institutions or a peer group. This has resulted in them experiencing themselves as Anomic Outsiders, believing that they need 'fit in' to self actualise

and have purpose. They have introjected a condition of worth which generates an unusually strong Need to Belong which goes beyond what their orgasmic self experiences and this lack of congruence engenders confusion, tension, and potentially maladaptive behaviour.

This state of being appears to lead to such individuals' acceptance of membership of a group (the mission based cult in this case) which gives them the sense in many ways that they do, in fact, belong. The condition of worth which led to the 'need to belong' experienced by these participants would in turn enable or even demand that the mission focussed cult member accept Indoctrination which would lead to Obedience and Conformity, believing that there was No Way Out of the cult as their condition of worth demanded that they find a place to belong.

Using this model we can tentatively give an account of how some of the Categories emergent from the Classical Grounded Theory analysis in Chapter 5 would come into play within participants, but like the first modelling of these processes, in psychoanalytic terms, there appear to be weaknesses in the research base to support the adoption of this model for this thesis. In particular there is no Person Centred research which directly addresses this area.

Without a satisfactory and comprehensive psychological model to help manage this material from either a Psychoanalytic or Humanistic perspective it seems appropriate to look towards the third paradigm that has had the most impact on psychotherapeutic endeavour; a Cognitive model. One approach that appears well suited to handle these issues, in terms which relate to the grounded theory which has emerged from the research in this thesis, is that which was developed by Aaron T Beck (1967 onwards).

4.1 Beck's Sociotrophic Mode of Functioning

As noted earlier in Chapter 5 and in this chapter, the stories participants tell when describing their lives in the period preceding their joining a mission focussed cult and in their formative years convey a pervasive feeling of being on the outside. This

sense arises from a number of sources; for example not fitting in to the family unit; being the unwanted child, being physically disadvantaged, being the 'wrong sex' or being adopted - or not fitting in because of cultural dislocation or not fitting into educational institutions or a peer group.

This lack of social rootedness leads to a sense of not belonging, of having something missing in their lives which can often lead to a general feeling of pointlessness and emptiness. At this stage many of these people could be described as being world weary and disillusioned, with an element of spiritual and/or emotional poverty in evidence. What is of particular significance to this study is that in all of these instances the individuals described here have experienced their not fitting in as problematic; they wanted somewhere or something to belong to.

This need for social rootedness and belonging has been identified as a significant variable in the processes experienced by these ex-members, which have lead to the development of self-identified long term difficulties in living (as reported in Chapter 5). It is this need for belonging and social rootedness which was addressed by Beck et al., in 1983 in his theory of modes (of psychological functioning) in which he describes the negative consequences of loss of social support in those individuals who function in what he called a sociotrophic mode. That is to say those who function in a way that is:

> ".... *Invested in positive interchange with others, focusing on acceptance, intimacy, support and guidance.* (The) *Interruption of these interpersonal "resources" is perceived as a major loss by such an individual*" (Beck, Epstein & Harrison, 1983 p3).

Beck's further development of his theory in 1996 allows for an elaboration of how the intense need for social rootedness and social dependency as a primary mode of functioning can, when activated, lead to psychological problems. It is the centrality of these concepts within this paradigm which indicate that it would be eminently suitable for modelling the outcome of the psychosocial processes experienced by these ex-cult members before, during and subsequent to their cult career.

4.2 Beck's Expanded Theory of Modes

In his chapter: "*Beyond Belief: A Theory of Modes, Personality, and Psychopathology" in "Frontiers of Cognitive Therapy*" (Ed. Paul Salkovskis, 1996) Beck describes an expanded theory of modes. This theory not only encompasses a model of individual schemata, characterised by Beck as linear schematic processing, it also elaborates this earlier linear model to one in which there are "*more global constructs and additional refinements related to progress in the field*" (1996 p 1).

Beck's model seeks to address the problems of the multiplicity of related symptoms in what he describes as psychopathological conditions, and which have been described as long term difficulties in living in this research, with a more global and complex organisation of schemata. It embodies a stress-diathesis model of psychopathology, which acknowledges a wide variety of 'normal' reactions from different individuals who have the 'same' experiences. It also explains the differing intensities of reaction within the same individual to a given set of circumstances over time. This aspect of his model is helpful in this thesis when it is considered that the ability of mission focussed cult members to tolerate adverse experiences varies; their cult careers are not all of similar length or experienced with such intensity and not all ex-cult members experience long term difficulties in living on exiting from their cult (see Barker, 1984, 1989) and Beck's theory of modes of psychological functioning can account for these differences.

According to Beck, modes are:

> *"specific suborganizations within the personality organization and incorporate the relevant components of the basic systems of personality: cognitive (or information processing), affective, behavioral, and motivation…composed of structures labled schemata"* (1996 p4)

He goes on to describe how:

> *“the mode by virtue of the integrated cognitive-affective-behavioural network produces a synchronous response to external demands and provides a mechanism for implementing internal dictates and goals”* (1996 p4).

It is the mode of sociotrophy that addresses what Beck describes as a socially dependant way of functioning and which is concerned with social relatedness that is of most interest to this thesis, as it maps very precisely onto major Categories arising from the grounded theory of cults described here e.g. The Need to Belong, Obedience, Conformity. The sociotrophic mode of psychological functioning is one in which sociotrophic individuals are concerned about disapproval, they need to experience attachment and have high levels of concern about separation and they invest a great deal of effort in pleasing others (Beck et al., 1983).

This theory of modes is one which is best viewed as a meta-theory which encompasses affect, behaviour, cognition, motivation, physiology and mood. It is one in which a predisposition to functioning within certain primal modes (which are then elaborated through individual experiences) is innate within the individual and is manifest given the right combination of diathesis and stressor (triggering experience). This combination of diathesis and stressor activates an orienting schema, which kindles the mode to which it is attached and brings into play global schemata which are active in all domains of functioning; cognitive, affective and so forth.

This system however can be modified or even deactivated by what Beck called the 'conscious control system' which he says:

> *"is the instrument of the more reflective deliberate, conscious, and less automatic desires, goals, and values...."* (Beck, 1996 p6).

Beck's (1983, 1996) meta-theory enables an integrative view of the subsystems at work within an individual and gives a coherent explanation of the interplay between the different subsystems, the individual’s response and the role of schema

construction within individual development. By continuing to develop cognitive theory to incorporate modes Beck moves this meta-theory beyond schema reconstruction to the acknowledgement of the innate predisposition within an individual to the construction of particular categories of schema. These schemata are constructed within the individual when this innate predisposition is paired with certain categories of life experiences. This explains why for some 'outsiders' this experience is not problematic, not everyone who has this as a developmental experience is vulnerable to joining a mission focussed cult, they don't all feel an overwhelming need to belong at times. Beck's theory would suggest that those who do not develop this need do not have an innate propensity to function in a sociotrophic mode. Social relatedness is not such a powerful driver to these individuals. It also follows that by gaining knowledge of this predisposition that this allows individuals the possibility of control or moderation of its effects to some degree.

4.3 Revisiting Previous Research into Social Dependency and Cult Membership

Walsh et al., (1995) found that participants who felt negative about their experience of being in a cult scored significantly higher than the population norm on the sociotrophy scale of Beck's Sociotrophy/Autonomy Scale (SAS) (Beck et al., 1983). This means that they were significantly more socially dependent than the normal population. They also have higher scores on neuroticism; they were more anxious (Eysenck, Eysenck & Bartlett 1985). Walsh et al., (1995) speculated that ex-members may have these scores for three reasons, firstly it may be that cults attract neurotic people, secondly that the experience of membership in a cult raises these scores and thirdly that it is the experience of leaving a cult which has the effect of raising scores on these attributes. The fact that neuroticism reverted to age related norms as a factor of time out of the cults suggests that it was something about the cultic experience that caused this raised level in the first place; it would be hard to argue that the membership is made up of neurotic people as this score appears to drop later. This tentative conclusion is supported by the fact that those ex-members who had been in contact with a support group had lower neuroticism and

sociotrophy scores than those who had not. This present study suggests that both of the other two reasons given as alternatives are actually valid explanations for these scores, that is to say; being in a cult gives rise to these high scores and the experience of leaving a cult also has the potential to raise them.

Walsh and Bor's (1996) research into the psychological sequelae of involvement in new religious movements or cults focused in the main on the dimensions of sociotrophy and autonomy that Beck et al described in 1983. It also used the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised (EPQ-R) (Francis, Brown & Philipchalk, 1992) to examine personality dimensions from Eysenck's perspective of personality and aimed to gain insight into the intra-personal processes and the personality of people who joined a specific newly emerging religion: 'The Family' (now known as The Family International). Walsh and Bor (1996) found that an individual's experiences within 'The Family' related very strongly to what Beck et al., (1983) and Beck (1996) described as the modes of autonomy and sociotrophy, with differences from the normal population across subject groups and generations. The consequence of time spent in the group and the effect of length of time following departure from the group also varied across subject group and generation.

Walsh and Bor (1996) propose that those individuals, who were high on social dependency when they joined 'The Family', whilst they remained secure in their belonging to the cult, became more autonomous. However, the evidence was that for individuals with neither high scores on sociotrophy or autonomy, their stay in 'The Family' induced elevated scores on sociotrophy, which then diminished as a function of time out of the group. They also demonstrated significant correlations between factor two of Beck's SAS; the need for attachment and concern about separation, and time in the group. This suggests that those with high levels of social dependency stayed longer in their cult – and that once they left their cult the less socially dependant they became. This could be understood as the experience of being a member of this cult had triggered sociotrophic modes of functioning in these members and that on leaving their cult, as they developed ways of coping with this mode or the triggering factors reduced, this mode was either moderated or deactivated.

The evidence from this present study has shown that it is very hard for this group of people to access help with problems they experience after their cultic involvement. This is because of trust issues and the consequences of 'burning their bridges' when they joined their mission focussed cult, combined with the shame and guilt they feel because of the practices they took part in. However, on a positive note; in the first study there was a negative correlation between membership of a support group and sociotrophy – suggesting that if they can access psychological support this will be helpful.

4.4 Beck's Model and the Cultic Experience

Beck's model (in common with most other developmental theories in psychology) would suggest that the individuals' experiences before they joined a cult such as 'The Family' would have an impact on their experience of being a member of the group. Those who have innate modes for sociotrophy would be more likely to elaborate schema around dependency given the appropriate life experiences, and this is what appears to have happened with the participants in this research. If these individuals have then elaborated schema for specific modes of functioning this model would suggest that orienting schema, when in a congruent situation, would trigger these 'modes'.

This can be clearly seen in those individuals who come from backgrounds where they felt themselves to be outsiders and for whom psychological distress was an antecedent to their joining a mission focussed cult (Galanter, 1982). Those whose primary mode is sociotrophy would (within such a cult, which is seen by the new member as the ideal loving and caring family) develop a mode of functioning which is both triggered and shaped by these elaborated schemata. The beliefs that generate these schemata would reflect the individual's necessity for social dependency. Typical of these beliefs are thoughts that state ideas which are consonant with this such as: "I am accepted" or "I have access to an intimate relationship with this group of people, and they support me and will guide me". Or even "If these people love me, then I must be lovable". " I am loved here in this group; it accepts me and I belong."

Thus, those individuals that have a predisposition to function in a sociotrophic mode; those outsiders who have a need to belong and for whom this is problematic, could be described as having schema (which predispose them to social dependency) that are elaborated through their developmental experiences. They would, it is expected, develop further elaborated schema within such a cult, which would then result in raised levels of sociotrophy caused by triggering their primary mode or predisposition for sociotrophy. These individuals would then function within this sociotrophic mode; that is to say they would be socially dependant people who are *".... Invested in positive interchange with others, focusing on acceptance, intimacy, support and guidance"* (Beck, et al., 1983 p3).

Many mission focussed groups are described as their members' new or replacement families. Thus, if those members who function with a high level of social dependency are then unable to continue as members of this idealised family, they will, as other socially dependant individuals Beck and others have described, experience depression, feelings of loss and other psychological problems (Beck et al., 1983, Moore & Blackburn, 1994).

4.5 Another Level of Complexity

Another level of complexity to add to this model is that of the development of elaborated schema that are maladaptive due to negative life experiences. These elaborated schemata generate conditional beliefs, which govern the way in which individuals process their world, their expectations of that world and their behaviour in that world. A person who had an innate sociotrophic mode of functioning who has maladaptive developmental experiences would develop elaborated schema, which would generate conditional beliefs such as '*If I love someone, then they will hurt me*' or '*If I do not do whatever I am told then I will be punished*'. A simple version of the model can be seen in Figure 2.

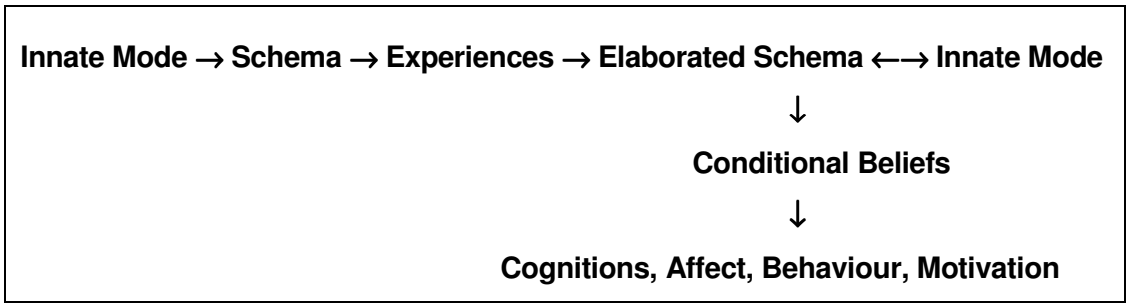

Figure 2 A Cognitive Model of Functioning

5 A Cognitive Approach to Understanding These Processes

This theory serves to illustrate quite well how childhood experiences, which fashion the beliefs one holds, can enmesh with those experiences and beliefs adopted as an adult to engender psychological distress. It maps well onto Beck's model of the development of psychological problems, which proposes that people develop schemata, which enable them to function in a complex social world. These schemata are frameworks that shape ones knowledge of self and understanding of others and the world.

Beck's (1967 onwards) cognitive developmental theory maintains that in our interpersonal relationships we develop schemata for psychological operations which seem to work automatically without much evidence of conscious thought, deliberation or reflection and can be applied to many situations (Beck, 1976, Beck, et al., 1983). Therefore when a person experiences multiple rejections from an early age they are likely to generate schema which incorporate these rejections. It could be suggested that mission focussed cult members who experience long term difficulties in living have developed elaborated schema because of their developmental experiences, which tell them that they do not fit in, perhaps because they are inadequate or a failure, and that if things go wrong it is their fault. The experiences and the beliefs encountered within the cults studied here serve to both trigger sociotrophic modes of functioning (Beck, 1996) and elaborate and reinforce these negative schemata, engendering such difficulties in living as described here (Persons, 1989).

Beck (1976) describes how psychological problems result from commonplace processes and are not necessarily the product of mysterious, impenetrable forces. An individual might start with negative thoughts about herself; feeling defective, worthless, inadequate; these are a product of developmental experiences (Brown & Harris, 1978). They then lead to elaborated negative schemata which shape ones perception of present day experiences. If these schemata are further elaborated as an adult, incorporating beliefs such as 'My unhappiness is due to my lack of spiritual maturity' or 'I am unhappy because I am sinful', when in fact what is happening is that the individual is not involved in things which challenge and stimulate them or is doing things which either contradict or trigger their schema developed as a child, it seems obvious that this will cause psychological distress (Persons, 1989).

Beck's theory also points out errors in logic, for example, psychologically distressed people often exhibit arbitrary inference and their inferences are not accurate, and are frequently self-blaming. 'I am unhappy because I'm disobedient' or 'because I left my cult I'm a failure'. When automatic thoughts are self-defeating or falsely negative they can have serious effects on emotional and mental health. If you continually tell yourself you are useless or inadequate (or if powerful others do the same) it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

5.1 Post Cult Experiences

If the pre-cult experiences of these ex-members can elaborate schema, combining both experience and taught beliefs, what of their experiences after them leaving their groups? How do these affect the difficulties in living experienced by them?

The notion that incorporating the belief system of the organisation into elaborated schema can cause psychological distress on leaving a mission focussed cult, in conjunction with subsequent events, is in agreement with previous research into the psychological consequences of involvement in one of the new religious movements or cults: The Family International. What this earlier research demonstrated was that those who had left the group for reasons other than having rejected the group's beliefs exhibited significantly higher levels of sociotrophy compared to population norms (Walsh & Bor, 1995).

What this suggests is that leaving the cult for those people who have incorporated some or all of the world-view of their particular mission focussed cult into their elaborated schema is problematic. This is especially so when they are socially dependent on a community that has rejected them or that they can no longer function within. In addition, because of their beliefs, they feel they have no 'legitimate' recourse, or desire, to partake of the wider society's social support structures. These ex-members are thrust out into a world which they perceive as inhospitable and threatening, their social support systems are withdrawn and they feel vulnerable and exposed to all the bad things they believe are part of the outside world. A model of the cognitive developmental process for this is demonstrated in Figure 3

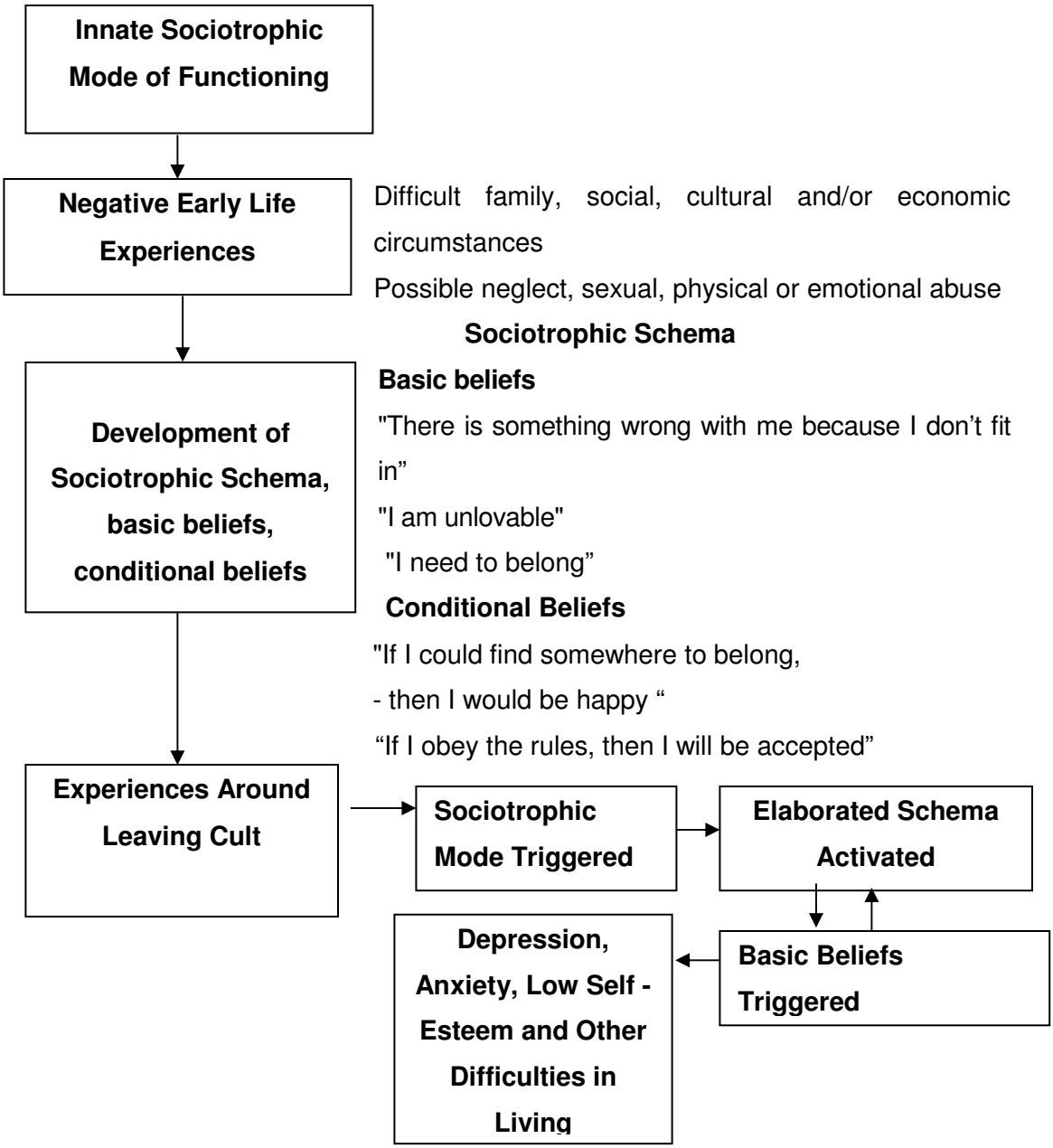

Figure 3 A Cognitive Developmental Model of Ex-Cult Members Difficulties in Living

The personality characteristic of sociotrophy discussed previously is not considered a fixed personality type, but an innate mode that can dominate an individual's psychological functioning (Beck et al., 1983). This then signifies that therapy should not only concentrate on restructuring those maladaptive schemata, which were constructed by a combination of experiences and beliefs both prior to and whilst a member, it should also assist the individual in moving toward a less sociotrophic mode of functioning (Padesky, 1994).

This thesis has posited a model in which some ex-member's of cults have damaging elaborated schema, which are formed from both maladaptive childhood experiences and the beliefs inculcated in members within mission focussed cults. These elaborated schemata, given the right combination of diathesis and stressor, (triggering experience) activate innate modes of functioning which are specific sub-organisations within the personality, encompassing affect, behaviour, cognition, motivation, physiology and mood (Beck, 1996). The model proposes that it is this combination of processes that are the primary reasons for the difficulties some ex-members experience (Beck, 1976, Beck et al., 1983, Walsh & Bor 1996, Walsh et al., 1995).

6 Conclusion

It was intended that this thesis would develop a theoretical explanation, largely at a psychological level – of the common features of the experience of mission focussed cult membership which lead to a proportion of former members emerging from such groups with long term difficulties in living.

The theory which has emerged from the two Classical Grounded Theory analyses that have been carried out for the purpose of this research includes features of the cults themselves, in particular the psychosocial processes individuals undergo on joining and during their membership, and the psychological sequelae of leaving such a group, as well as considering common features identified by participants studied here as being present in their way of relating to the world from before they

joined their cult who appear to suffer long-term psychological harm after leaving the cult.

This theory proposes that the cults studied here are organisations formed for the sole purpose of carrying out a mission; it is this mission that structures the mission focussed cult and how it functions and the members, beliefs and practices exist to service that mission. The psychosocial processes which are present in these cults are there to facilitate the creation of a willing and able work force to carryout this overriding mission.

As a consequence of experiencing the psychosocial processes present within mission focussed cults the individual (and the group) develop a high level of responsibility for fulfilling (or culpability for failing) the cult's mission. This highly developed sense is honed by the exposure of the mission focussed cult member to both the systematic experience of (and the use of) these psychosocial techniques and it is this sense of responsibility and culpability within the membership that is the driver for the use of these psychosocial techniques. The system functions as a reciprocal relationship between the organisations, and their changeable elements; whether they are beliefs, members or structure. This process of a systematic use of psychosocial techniques functions as a reciprocal feedback loop; as the more the techniques are used the stronger the commitment is to fulfilling the mission and the more this then necessitates the use of these techniques.

The analysis of the experiences of the sub-section of the membership of mission focussed cults studied here theorises that these individuals join their cult in a large part because of their pre-cult experience of themselves as being an outsider, with a concomitant overriding need for someone, something or somewhere to belong to. This problematic feeling of social alienation has arisen for these individuals as a consequence of the developmentally significant experience of being an outsider, either of their family, the society they have been brought up in or of the culture they live in. It is this feeling of exclusion (which is problematic for those studied here) that engenders the need to belong and which enables these individuals firstly to embrace and then when the pressure of cult membership starts to become

problematic for the individual, to tolerate being an expendable component within the cultic system.

Eventually though, the costs of being a member of a mission focussed cult will outweigh the benefits of belonging, which causes deterioration in these cult members ability to function within the cult and leads to the decision that they can no longer remain as members. For a person who has joined a mission focussed cult seeking somewhere and/or something to belong to this rejection either by the cult, of the cult, or of them self; because they are not able to remain in the cult, compounds the effects of their need to belong. This downwards spiral has as its conclusion a raft of potential difficulties in living ranging from depression and anxiety disorders to substance misuse or even in some cases suicidality.

As shown in this chapter the first three research questions have been answered by the grounded theory analyses which have demonstrated that the overriding purpose of a mission focussed cult; to fulfil a mission, directs the psychosocial processes of the cult (for the purpose of achieving a membership which is committed to fulfilling this mission). Whilst the overriding need for belonging maintains members' commitment to the cult, so for a time the value the individual member puts on belonging outweighs the cost of membership of the group. It is proposed that the experience of having believed oneself to be a special person belonging to a special group with a mission to fulfil who then experiences the type of rejection (of them by the cult, of the cult or of themselves because of their inability to function in the cult) when compounded with negative developmental experiences, leads to long term difficulties in living such as depression, anxiety, drug and/or alcohol abuse, suicidality etcetera.

The fourth research question of how to model this within a mainstream psychotherapeutic paradigm was explored firstly within a Psychoanalytic paradigm and then a Person Centred paradigm, but was answered most adequately by Beck's theory of modes within a Cognitive Developmental model (1996). This model was used because relevant research already exists in this area and it elegantly accounts for members varied responses to mission focussed cult membership and because of centrality of the concept of social dependency within Beck's theory,

which is consonant with the emergent theory derived from the analyses in this thesis.

There is now the development of a third approach to understanding the experience of the psychosocial processes within mission focussed cults which is characterised by psychological sophistication, and the construction of an empirically based thesis in place of speculation and a pre-determined ideological position (Keiser & Keiser, 1987, Lalich, 2004, Walsh et al., 1995, Walsh & Bor, 1996 and Zablocki, 2001) and the model that is being developed within this research fits with this approach. This approach acknowledges that there are very strong psychosocial processes utilised within mission focussed groups, but rejects the idea that these processes result in brainwashing, thought reform or coercive persuasion. It recognizes that individuals who join mission focussed cults accept and participate in the use of these techniques to enable them to become a willing workforce to achieve the aim of the cult; which is to fulfil a mission. Those cult members studied here make what can be seen to be a rational choice as to whether they should acquiesce to the use of these techniques based on what has been loosely described here as a cost benefit analysis. Those cult members who have experienced themselves to be outsiders, have a very strong need to belong and are, at least at first, willing to pay the price for the reward of being a special person in a special group. It is only when the cost outweighs the benefits that these mission focussed cult members will leave their groups and will then have to contend with the results of this experience.

Chapter 8 Evaluation and Implications

1 Introduction

It was intended that this thesis would develop a theoretical explanation, largely at a psychological level, of the ways in which the structure and functioning of the kinds of groups that are variously termed cults, new religious movements, high demand groups or charismatic groups etcetera interact with individual elements in certain members to produce effects which they identify as lasting difficulties in living.

To develop the theoretical explanation the thesis asked three more detailed research questions about these mission focussed groups, from which some ex-members emerge describing themselves as experiencing long term difficulties in living, and about such former group members themselves. Firstly: Can an analysis of a body of descriptive and theoretical material give rise to a coherent and overarching conceptual model of the structure and function of such groups? Next: Can an analysis of the testimonies of those who identify themselves as having long term difficulties in living which they attribute to their membership of such groups produce a potentially generalisable model of the elements that contribute to these problems? And lastly: Which main stream psychological paradigms might lend themselves to an understanding of the interaction between the findings from questions 1 and 2, and which will be most useful to enable psychotherapists who undertake work with this client group to have a sound conceptual framework underlying their interventions?

As a result of this research the form and function of these groups has been identified as focussed around the fulfilment of a mission. Consequentially these groups are now, within this thesis, termed mission focussed groups, or mission focussed cults (if they fulfil the criteria discussed in Chapter 1 for a cult). The research has also shown that those participants studied here who exit from mission focussed cults experiencing self-identified long term difficulties in living describe common similarities in the way in which they relate to the world before they joined their cult. These similarities were centred on the perception of themselves as outsiders, in conjunction with experiencing a very strong need to belong (and that

this was problematic for them). The emergent theory has proposed that it is the interaction of the form and functioning of these groups and these common similarities that produce effects which lead to what participants within this research identify as lasting difficulties in living.

2 Review of the Thesis In Terms of Glaser's Criteria for Assessing the Effectiveness of Study Using Classical Grounded Theory.

As in all grounded theories the concepts and the relationships between these concepts that have emerged from the two Classical Grounded Theory analyses in this study are in effect probability statements; which can be thought of as potential hypotheses. This means that the emergent theory is founded on probability statements about the relationship between concepts, or an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses developed from empirical data (Glaser, 1998). Validity in its traditional sense is consequently not an issue at this stage of theory development, because the theory is not stated as 'facts' or truths. The final validity of the theory will be established through the testing of these potential hypotheses, and others constructed from the theory, in future research. Glaser (1978, 1998) suggests that at this stage grounded theories should be judged by the concepts of *fit, relevance, workability,* and *modifiability*.

Fit is concerned with how closely the concepts fit with the subject matter they are representing, and this is related to how thoroughly the constant comparison of incidents to concepts was carried out.

Both the Grounded Theory studies in themselves and the overall response to the four research questions in this thesis demonstrate a fair degree of fit. The Categories and the Meta-Categories that have emerged in both the studies have developed clearly, in a straightforward manner from the coded material, as items were repeatedly reviewed and compared and developed into categorisations. When these were subsequently checked both against the existing literature in the field (or in related areas) and more importantly with individuals with direct personal concerns

in this area, they were seen as reasonable and appropriate and matched their experiences.

Relevance is concerned primarily with the utility of the theory for those who participated in the study, those who have had similar experiences, with similar outcomes and to those who have an interest in this area of research; do the findings of the study relate to the problem they are addressing and give insight into it? A relevant study deals with the focus of the concerns of participants and resonates with those who have an interest in the area studied (both academics and other interested parties such as practitioners and policy makers who are potential stakeholders).

There can be little doubt that the studies themselves and their findings are relevant in the sense in which Glaser has defined it. As indicated above people with a personal interest in the way these groups work and the difficulties of former members who have heard lectures or attended workshops based on the first part of this analysis have found what seems to be emerging relevant and helpful. A paper based on some of the early steps in the grounded theory work was well received by colleagues with a more academic or therapeutic interest in this area of work and a further paper was presented (and was also well received) at the Division of Counselling Psychology's 2007 annual conference (Walsh, 2007).

Workability is concerned with how well the theory functions as an explanation for the problem that is being addressed and how this explanation works in solving the problem.

There are two stages of theorising to consider here (1) the emergent theory per se and (2) the further theoretical link that has been made with Beck's model (1983, 1996). As regards the workability of the emergent theory itself, as described previously, it has been assessed by both experts-by-experience and academic's who have an interest in this area and has been well received. It is evident from discussions with these parties that Categories like The Need to Belong, Mission Focussed Groups and No Way Out provide new tools for developing thinking about experiences with these groups, giving rise to new insights and links to other

theoretical constructs. Some of this utility/workability has already been identified in Chapters 3 and 5 and it is clear that such respondents found it easy to integrate these constructs into the conceptual maps they were using to understand the experience of such groups (Razzaque Personal Communication May 2007). In relation to the further theoretical link, a number of other theoretical structures have been tried, during the period in which this study has been in gestation, in an attempt to find a workable model which holds together, even begins to explain or make sense of the data and categories that have emerged in relation to pre-existing academic work of some moment or merit. It now seems that a viable (workable) model; Beck's (1983, 1996) does this, successfully linking the functioning of the mission focussed cult with the needs of the member and their in-cult experiences and providing an explanatory framework from cognitive theory which not only explains the psychopathological (Beck's terminology) issues but may provide a framework or reference point for therapeutic help for individuals experiencing psychological harm.

The *modifiability* of a theory refers to the flexibility of the theory for the accommodation of new relevant data when this is brought to bear on it.

Although the model currently being proposed here seems to be relevant and workable and to provide a good fit, the current formulation is not rigid, and, as can be seen from some of the other potential models and formulations alluded to in Chapter 7 as potentially having explanatory value, it may well be modified in the light of other data or theoretical issues as they arise. One of the characteristics of the Cognitive approach in psychotherapeutic theory is that it has proved to be flexible and open to such modifications and so locating the theoretical explanations of this thesis in the Cognitive approach buys in to that modifiability.

Although it is impossible to predict the direction of these modifications at this time, it might well be that further research, such as the more recent work of Zimbardo (2007), where he addresses the notion of how good people can do 'evil' things might have an impact on this approach. Another development of this theory could be influenced by the continuation of therapy with this group in that the formulation

regarding the relational issues experienced by this client group is likely to be further developed.

3 Some Strengths of this Study

One of the weaknesses of earlier studies in this area has been their somewhat sweeping speculative nature (e.g. Clark, 1977 inter alia). This study however, by the nature of the research method chosen, grows out of empirical material drawn from the direct experience of individuals personally involved with the area studied. So that it is firmly grounded in the data, analysed using clearly articulated formal research methods and subsequently theorised in greater depth using an established psychological/psychotherapeutic model.

It has been a feature of much of the research in this area that even those studies which have attempted to talk about individual effects have often done so without a firm grounding in a formal psychological paradigm (APA, 1987). A conscious effort has been made here to use and create theoretical constructs and models which are embedded in mainstream psychology and are therefore testable and open to challenge within this discipline.

Care has been taken throughout this thesis not to assume that all groups studied within this field are identical, even though at a definitional level there are common features. In addition this thesis has worked from a position that not all members have similar experiences or understand these experiences in the same way. Further, it has not been assumed that all their experiences are similar and negative, but a wholly different set of studies would be needed to map and model the experiences of those for whom membership of such groups has had a neutral or positive long term outcome.

4 Limitations of the Research

4.1 The Limited Focus of this Study

Stress has been laid throughout this research on the fact that this thesis has addressed only a specific sub-section of the membership of mission focussed groups; those who emerge from such cults with self-identified long term difficulties

in living such as alcoholism, drug dependency, clinical depression and suicidality etcetera. Although the study utilized rigorous methods recognized within the sphere of qualitative research in general, and specifically within Classical Grounded Theory methodology, there are limitations to the study and its findings. There is no pretence that the research has demonstrated that the theory generated here can be generalised to all mission focussed cults or similar groups. The theory derived from the research may well be applicable to a wider group of organisations, but no attempt to demonstrate that this is the case has been made here.

The most obvious (and deliberate) limitations of this study relate to the kind of groups studied, and the sub-set of members focussed on. It deals in the second study with mission focussed groups that are based on religion, and are for the most part in the broadly millenarian Christian tradition. These groups do not actively use physical restraint or torture to hold members, the lifestyle within these groups is communal and although a micro-culture they have their origins in Anglophone, liberal societies. The study only gave attention to the accounts of individuals who had freely joined, and eventually left such cults, and believed their experience in them to have led to psychological harm. It did not analyse accounts from people who had never experienced joining a mission focussed cult (because of being born into them) or people who had left such cults but had not experienced them as harmful. It did not consider individuals who remain high functioning cult members.

The purpose of the research was to derive a grounded theory which was directly applicable to a sub-group of cult members in mission focussed groups which were defined as religions. This does not mean that the theory could not be applicable to other groups, which are not religious or to members of groups described as new religions, cults, charismatic groups or high demand groups in general. However, if this is the case it will need to be demonstrated by further research. Such research might in addition, look at ‘mission based’ groups with predominantly secular (probably political) motivations, or groups like resistance units or even military groups to see to what extent the emergent categories found here, both about the functioning of the organisation and the effect of processes on individuals, are duplicated in these non-religious organisations.

It was also not the purpose of this thesis to explain why there appear to be high-functioning and psychologically sound people operating within these groups. Such a research topic would need to be addressed by using a different sample of membership to that which has taken part in this study and this further research is clearly beyond the scope of this thesis. Although a study of this type would throw additional light on the emergent theory if it were found, for example, that these individuals had significantly different motivations for joining such a group or had a previously unrecognised set of coping mechanisms which those in this study lack.

As mentioned previously, this thesis has not addressed the experiences (or their outcomes) of those who were born into mission focussed cults. This too would need a completely different cohort of participants and it would appear logical to suggest that their needs and their experiences could be very different to those who, after developmental experiences outside a mission focussed cult, in effect, choose to join a such cult, or at least to stay in one for some time when they identified in some manner the nature of the group they had joined, being aware of the nature of tasks they were being asked to perform.

This research also has not addressed the experiences of those who join groups in which there are elements of physical restraint and violence, and both the threat of and the experience of death at the hands of the group. There are no reports of such brutality being used on any of the participants in this research thesis. This does not exclude such phenomena from the experiences of others in different groups; Lifton in his book "*Destroying the World to Save It*" (1999) speaks very eloquently of the experiences of the membership of the Aum Shirinkyo, a group which employed violent coercion to ensure obedience from it's membership. Again, examining this would be outside the scope of this thesis. However, it would be of great interest to explore how a group which resembles the socio-political totalitarian system described in Lifton's work (1961), much more closely than the cults studied here, maps onto the techniques he describes as being present in the thought reform regime in Communist China.

It should also be noted that all participants in this study were members of cults that required all members to live within a cult residence and that participants did this for

the majority (if not all) of their cult career. Thus, the applicability of this theory to those who are members of groups which do not require their members to live communally within group homes will need to be explored in future research.

4.2 The Use of Background and Academic Information

Strauss and Corbin have argued that a researcher's prior knowledge poses a threat to their study as it could be suggested that the concepts that appear to have emerged through the coding process of Classical Grounded Theory do so because they seem familiar to the researcher from previous knowledge or experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This suggests that this researcher's prior knowledge gained over years of experience in this research area could be seen as a drawback in this study.

However, it is widely acknowledged within qualitative research that transparency on the part of the researcher effectively counters this problem. Seale, Gobo, Gurbrium & Silverman (2004, cited in Hiles and Čermák, 2008) recognize, amongst their list of 23 features of good qualitative research, the researcher's need *"to be transparent and reflexive about conduct, theoretical perspective and values"* p2.

This researcher's experience has been openly acknowledged throughout this thesis and the author's previous published work has been cited wherever appropriate. Previous knowledge has been treated as 'data' in the iterative process of comparison and categorisation, according to Glaser's dictum that all is data (Glaser, 2001). Far from distorting the study, it is argued here that the previous experience is at least useful and possibly vital for this research.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) originally maintained that:

> *"the researcher can get – and cultivate - crucial insights not only during his research (and from his research) but from his own personal experiences prior to or outside it"* Glaser and Strauss (1967 p252).

And this is the position adopted in this study.

Although Glaser argues that 'all is data' (2001) his recommendation in relation to carrying out a literature search is that this should not precede the data gathering and coding process, so in line with the normal methodology for Classical Grounded Theory, as set out by Glaser (1998), a review of the literature was not conducted until the latter stages of the two Classical Grounded Theory analyses that form a central element of this thesis. This may seem counter intuitive to those who are used to undertaking research based on a hypothetico-deductive model. For them it is only sensible to refine one's hypothesis against all relevant and available knowledge, but, to reiterate; this research was not undertaken to test theory, but to generate theory and this method of theory generation (Glaser 1967, 1978 inter alia) does not rest on such a model; findings are not developed from previous research, rather previous research is used, in effect, as more data to test out and add to the theory. In the context of this thesis the literature review also serves to tie the work into existing psychological and psychotherapeutic traditions in line with normal academic requirements, but that may be done as well after the generation of the theory as before it.

4.3 Sampling Issues

When compared to quantitative research it may seem that the relatively small number of the participants and texts sampled is a limitation of this study. However, sample size is viewed differently in such studies. With Classical Grounded Theory the decision that a large enough sample has been analysed is based on achieving saturation of categories (that is to say; no more categories emerge from the data) and not on whether enough individuals participated to make a representative sample. In the first analysis saturation was achieved after analysing 9 texts, with subsequent feedback from 3 ex-members. In the second study the self-generated personal testimonies of 10 ex-members, an open letter from an ex-member to two of his friends explaining why he left the cult he was a member of for twenty-seven years, 4 sets of case notes and 6 sets of field notes generated from interviews with ex-members were analysed leading to eventual saturation.

5 Implications

As indicated throughout, the focus of this study has been deliberately limited to enable a focussed piece of empirical work to be undertaken through which some theoretical re-conceptualisation of the issues raised might occur in a way that is manageable within a piece of doctoral research. Having arrived at this appropriately limited set of ideas it is, nevertheless, interesting to speculate briefly on implications that the theoretical understanding presented here might have in related areas.

5.1 Implications for Understanding Other Groups with a Mission Etcetera

One area in which this theorising may have implications for both practice and further research is in the endeavour to develop an understanding of those who belong to other types of organisations which developed to fulfil a mission and the extreme commitment that many of these organisations engender. These organisations (which may or may not be religious) span a wide range of subject areas; from kibbutzim to socio-political groups and military groupings, and like mission focussed cults, they appear to evoke extreme behaviour on the part of some adherents and leave some ex-members with psychological damage.

Cults were defined in the second study of this thesis as enclosed groupings with a religious ideal that led to the creation of a new micro-culture and the generation of a mission which becomes the defining feature of the cult. If it were to transpire that the religious element of these organisations was of relatively little significance and that the active defining features of such a cult might be better understood simply in terms of micro-cultures that lock on to a mission, the model of group functioning and the way that affects and potentially harms individuals who have been part of such groups would become relevant to a very much wider set of circumstances. These might include not only fringe political groups and armed ‘extremist groups’ but even parts of mainstream trading organisations (management teams for example) or subsets of national military forces (if not whole regiments then perhaps special service units or groups charged with special roles; such as the Abu Ghraib guards during the American war in Iraq). If it were to transpire that such groups did indeed become the kind of group as defined in this study, the conceptual frame established

here might become relevant to understanding both how these groups function and how to help people whose experience in such groups has apparently been harmful to them, for example some psychologically damaged military veterans or even some 'burnt-out' corporate executives.

In relation to 'extremist groups', the understanding of how the need to belong, originating from the experience of perceiving ones-self as an outsider, also may go some way towards helping to understand the membership of such groups. Reuter (2004) has observed that a consensus has emerged within existing research that 'terrorist profiling' does not work very well as there do not appear to be any psychological commonalities that identify potential members of such groups, which often appear to have a highly disparate membership. He cites the psychologist Ariel Merari of Tel Aviv University saying that the better these peoples' biographies are understood, the less likely it appears that factors such as simple poverty or educational disadvantage have a formative role in shaping the terrorist profile.

Reuter (2004) goes on to describe how members of terrorist groups come from a mixture of families which are both poor and wealthy, and from those who do not have an education and those who are university graduates. This heterogeneity and perhaps the level of commitment that members of such groups demonstrate resembles that of the membership of the mission focussed cults studied here. Although the 'Need to Belong' is not as straightforward to track as age, ethnicity, educational background, relationship status etc which might form the more concrete elements of such profiling, this concept might go some way towards offering an understanding of the kinds of people who might become dedicated adherents of the 'terrorist' groups considered as potential threats to the societies in which they operate. This makes the idea of researching whether such group members experience themselves in some way as outsiders whose need to belong drives them to an extreme commitment to a cause; with a mission to fulfil as a response to this need, very interesting.

5.2 Implications for Psychotherapy

One of the purposes of this work was to explore potential constructs which might assist psychotherapists and other helping professionals who come into contact with those ex-members of mission focussed cults (or as noted above potentially similar organisations) who experience long term difficulties in living. The paradigm used within this thesis for modelling the development of long-term difficulties in living in this client group is that which informs the practice of cognitive therapy. As discussed in Chapter 7 this was chosen because of the centrality of the concept of social dependency to the theoretical basis constructed by Beck (Beck, 1996, Beck et al., 1983). However, this research does not seek to specify which particular psychotherapeutic orientation any therapist working with these clients should adopt, but merely to identify key elements of the psychotherapeutic process that seem likely to be particularly important for this client group.

Although the explanatory paradigm focuses on the development of cognitive modes and schemata to make the responses of this client group comprehensible and is formulated around Beck's principles for cognitive therapy, this should not be taken to indicate that simple manualised Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is appropriate to use with this client group. These clients need to experience therapy in which the relational aspects (as emphasised by Beck himself (Beck, 1967)) are as important as the technique, as it is the issue of the experience of being an outsider and the centrality of the need for relationship for these clients which seems likely to be the most significant element in successful therapy. The development of a warm, trusting relationship as the basis of the therapeutic alliance should be thought of as having primary importance when working with this client group.

As this is a key element in many psychotherapies and there is a wealth of research in which it is agreed that the relationship, particularly the therapeutic relationship, is pivotal to the successful outcome of therapy (see for example the work of Bourgeois, Sabourin, & Wright, 1990, Gelso & Carter, 1985, Marziali, Munroe-Blum, & McCleary, 1981 and Rogers, 1959) it would not, at this stage of the research, be appropriate to recommend any particular model of practice at the expense of any other. Nonetheless, it is asserted here that since the relationship would appear to be of paramount importance with these clients, whichever the psychotherapeutic

model is chosen, it must have this relational element as a fundamental underpinning.

Problems may well arise within the therapeutic relationship resulting from the client's past experiences with others' demands and expectations; demands which in this case would have been as a consequence of the overarching need to fulfil the cult's mission. The ex-member is not used to having relationships that are based on unconditional positive regard. Past relationships (both within the cult and probably before joining the cult) will have carried significant conditions of worth. Thus, the therapist needs to be able to work towards helping the client feel valued unconditionally, and help them to understand the effects that these past experiences have had on them so that they can choose to respond differently to these internal drivers in future.

Additionally, therapists working with this client group need to take into consideration that although these ex-members have an overriding need to belong, the experience of this is problematic for them. This may give rise to paradoxical behaviours in the therapeutic relationship as difficulties which arise from their underlying needs and their cultic experience relating to trust and dependency are likely to surface as these clients work through their psychological issues. It seems likely that therapists will need to have a capacity to tolerate vacillation between quite high levels of distance and dependency as these clients work through their issues. Therapists will almost certainly have to adopt a style characterised by openness and transparency if the kinds of issues thrown up in the mission focussed cult are not to be re-awakened in a disruptive/anti-therapeutic manner.

In cognitive therapy terms, problems within therapy could result from a failure to attend to the client's underlying schema about themselves and others, with underlying beliefs such as "People are dangerous and will take advantage of me if I am not careful; the cult did". Because of the high level of social dependency and lack of social rootedness, which has been exacerbated by their experiences both in, and on leaving their cult, these clients (especially those who did not leave the cult of their own volition) may feel rejected, flawed, or even worthless, believing that they are 'unlovable', and that their worth and/or happiness depends on the love and acceptance of others. This gives rise to beliefs such as: "If others accept me, I am

worthwhile; if others reject me, I am worthless". Such problematic beliefs need to be acknowledged, and their impact on the client's difficulty in trusting the therapist (and others) needs to be considered, examining what specifically was involved in constructing this mistrust, and gently challenging the beliefs which have grown from these experiences.

6 Final Thoughts

In concluding this study it seems worthwhile reflecting on the personal process that undertaking such a piece of work entails and the ideas for future research activities that have arisen from it.

Prior to beginning this research I had taken twenty-seven examinations in seven years, written numerous essays, case studies and process reports all answering other people's questions. Part of the personal motivation for undertaking this present research was to answer the questions that I wanted an answer to. Because a cult had formed an early part of my adult experiences and my knowledge of the processes that I and others had been exposed to had no explanatory value (other than; 'a bigger boy did it') for the somewhat less than orthodox behaviour that I and other ex-members participated in whilst in our cults, I decided that I would like to know 'why?' A further motivator, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, was the need for those second generation ex-members who had suffered physically, emotionally and sexually at the hands of members of cults in which their parents had raised them, to understand how their parents could have done such a thing.

Lastly, and perhaps as time went on, predominantly, I could see that there were people who had suffered and continued to suffer long term psychological problems, which were described by them as being caused by their cultic involvement. My reasoning was that if a psychological understanding of the processes that these people had experienced could be achieved, and their impact on psychological functioning could be understood, then it would be possible to formulate a psychotherapeutic response based on solid research which would enable a more coherent and effective way of working with these people to be developed.

This present research forms the basis for the achievement of all three of these aims. They may not all be answered fully; (and this leads to the development of a

new series of ambitions for research in this area) but they move the debate along considerably and set the scene for what could happen next. One paper from this research has already been published (see Appendix 5) and a successful workshop based on some of the early constructs from the research was held in October 2006. The research was successfully presented at the Counselling Psychology Annual conference in May 2007 (see Appendix 6) and a further workshop was held in October 2007.

Ideally, my research will continue into the most efficacious treatment for the psychological problems ex-members experience, randomised control trials for different relationally based psychotherapy would be a useful technique for this research. Also, research into social dependency and whether other sub-groups of mission focussed cult members (for example those who had either neutral or positive experiences as members of cults) have high scores on sociotrophy measures, would help to develop the thinking concerning the structure, and functioning of mission focussed cults. I would also be very interested to develop this research in regards to other organisations that have a mission, but are not religions, examining the make up of their membership and the consequences of this membership in their group.

Another area that is also of very timely interest is that of the psychology of why good people do bad things in situations such as that found in Abu Ghraib. Zimbardo in a talk he gave to members of the British Psychological Society in London in April 2007 on his new book "*The Lucifer Effect*" (Zimbardo, 2007) discussed this, and although he mentioned very briefly that those he wrote about had a mission, the significance of the mission and its role in the subsequent actions of these people was not explored. There was no mention as to whether those he studied may have had a need for belonging which interacted with this mission, or if their compliance in extreme actions was being driven by social dependency and their drive to fulfil their mission.

Reflecting on this present research has illustrated just a few of the plethora of questions that it has generated, which has brought me full circle: I now have further questions that I want answers for.

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Appendix 1 Feedback Sheet

Understanding and Communicating with Cult Members Workshop
Yvonne Walsh14th October 2006.

It would be very useful for my research if you would be willing to spend a little time giving me some feedback on what you have heard about today.

What did you find useful?

What did you find surprising?

Was anything new to you?

What did you disagree with?

Thank you for your help with this.

The Professional Practice Component of this thesis has been removed for confidentiality purposes.

It can be consulted by Psychology researchers on application at the Library of City, University of London.

Appendix 3 Prompt Questions for Interviews

What significant **memories, feelings** or **events** do you recall concerning:

- Your childhood
- The time leading up to your joining the group you were a member of
- The period of time whilst you were a member of this group
- The period of time leading up to your leaving the group
- The period of time immediately after you left this group
- The period of time since leaving this group

Appendix 4 Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. As this study is not about individuals, but whole groups of people, the research will be totally anonymous, unless you chose otherwise. You have the right to withdraw from this research at any time and can request that any information you give for the research is destroyed at any time. Any information used will be rendered anonymous by changing dates, names, locations and other identifying details unless you specifically give permission for information not to be anonymous. However, there is no intention for any information to be used that will identify individuals or families.

I agree to take part in this research, I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

(If you wish to be anonymous please just initial or tick to indicate agreement.)

Signed:

Appendix 5 Deconstructing 'Brainwashing' as an aid to Counselling Psychologists

Counselling Psychology Quarterly, Vol. 14, *No.2, 2001, pp. 119-128*

COUNSELLING IN ACTION

Deconstructing 'brainwashing' within cults as an aid to counselling psychologists

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ABSTRACT *With the approach of the new millennium there was increased activity within many of the new cultic movements. Many of these organizations promise a future paradise on earth, and can be identified as millenarian cults. Others predicted the end of the world with the focus for this event being the new millennium, the beginning of which is mutable, some claiming it for the year 2000 others the year 2001. The date for the end of the world can by quite idiosyncratic. It was, for instance, believed by the Movement for the Restoration of the Twelve Commandments to be due in March 2000, when over 1000 members of this particular Ugandan cult lost their lives, many through strangulation. The death toll was a stark demonstration of what appears to be some form of extreme control exercised within such groups. It has been estimated that there are between 500 and 800 different cults active in the United Kingdom with membership ranging from under ten people to thousands. This activity indicates that counselling psychologists need to be aware of the problem of the psychological damage with which some members or ex-members of cults continue to present and of the techniques of control practiced within the cult and the effect that these techniques have on members. These types of techniques and the resultant negative psychological consequences are the focus of this paper. This paper aims to begin to educate counselling psychologists in the techniques used within cults which effect social control. It intends to equip counselling psychologists to work with a group of clients, that they will meet on an increasing basis as the new millennium, whatever date is allocated to it, approaches and passes. That is if heaven on earth or the earth's destruction does not materialize*

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Appendix 6 Abstract from Conference

Oral Presentation

Title: Is it the cultic experience or what the cult member brings with them to this experience which shapes the psychological consequences of membership in a cult

Abstract

The focus of this paper is on the development of a psychological theory concerning the psychological processes present in cults from which a proportion of those who have been members will emerge from this membership with long term psychological problems. There is a debate within the literature concerning whether involvement in cults is shaped by a 'brainwashing' process or is more easily explained as part of a developmental process. As a consequence of this debate a Classical Grounded Theory analysis was carried out to build a grounded theory, from the perspective of former members of cults who emerged from their cultic experience with long term psychological problems, as to what their life in a cult was like, how they experienced their post cult adjustment, and how their lives were affected by the psychological processes experienced both before they joined the cult and within the cult. This study has identified predisposing factors for these individuals who are likely to have long term psychological problems on leaving such a cult, it has also identified the psychological processes individuals undergo on joining and during their membership which are likely to affect their psychological wellbeing and the psychological sequelae for such people on leaving their cult. A core category of 'The Need to Belong' was identified as a primary driver in shaping the experiences of both being in a cult and subsequent long term psychological problems.

Yvonne Walsh (Mrs)
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