

The 'love' that religious cults offer and its effects on members

S.P. Pretorius
Bestuurder: Logistieke en
Administratiewe Ondersteuning
UNISA

Pretosp@unisa.ac.za

Opsomming

Te midde van ontwikkeling in die post-moderne wêreld toon mense steeds 'n behoefte daaraan om geliefd en belangrik te voel en te behoort aan 'n organisasie of groep waar hulle geestelike behoefte vervul word. In die omgang met mense kan soveel vermag word as die korrekte benadering gevolg word. Een benadering wat baie suksesvol is, is 'n vertoon van liefde, begrip en waardering, dit wil sê deur 'n persoon te oorlaai met liefde en aandag. Ongelukkig word hierdie tegniek om mense te oorlaai met liefde en aandag ook deur kultes gebruik om potensiële lede te trek en uiteindelik ook te behou. In hierdie geval is die vertoon van liefde niks meer as 'n middel tot 'n doel, 'n voorwaardelike front om mense te werf nie. Die nadeel van die tegniek is dat dit 'n blywende impak op lede het selfs na hulle die groep verlaat. Hierdie artikel toon aan dat daar 'n sterk emosionele band gevorm word met lede wat ontstaan by die vertoon van die sogenaamde "liefde" wat steeds hulle denke en optrede beheer na hulle die groep verlaat en wat hul aanpassing in die gemeenskap bemoeilik. Dit is nodig om te verstaan hoe die konsep van liefde in die kulte persone se optrede en realiteit voorskryf ten einde hul aanpassing in die gemeenskap te bewerkstellig. Die artikel toon verder aan wat gedoen kan word om die aanpassing van lede in die gemeenskap te vergemaklik.

Abstract

It seems evident that, despite developments in the postmodern world, human beings still need loving care and a place where they

believe their need for spiritual well-being will be met. When dealing with people, much can be achieved by following the correct approach. One way to obtain results is by showing love, attention, appreciation and a sense of belonging, in other words, by 'love bombing' a person. The love bombing technique is also employed by cults to lure and eventually retain members. Love bombing is nothing more than a means to an end – a charade to enlist new members. Even after leaving the group, cult members remain challenged by the after effects of this technique and consequences thereof. This article points at how a strong emotional attachment between cult members and a cult develops. This emotional attachment is set to control a former cult member's behaviour, long after they leave the group. The negative impact of this emotional control on the person's new reality must be understood and altered, in order for them to readapt to society. Guidelines are provided on how former cult members may be assisted in dealing with this emotional attachment and ultimately adapt in society.

1. Introduction

Postmodern society may be described as a technology-driven society that enables citizens to participate in and become part of a global community. Technology has empowered the human race to cross over different barriers in order to communicate and share as participants of this global community. Despite these developments it seems that humans still require personal touch and personal care as a means to escape from or cope with the pressures of the fast-paced world. Some people seek out environments of serenity and peace that not only satisfy their inherent need for love and care but also provide for their spiritual wellbeing. Examples of such environments of 'true love' and camaraderie are those held out as an inducement by some alternative religious groups, also known as cults¹. One much debated aspect is the technique of 'love bom-

1 The term 'cult' has different meanings, ranging from a group which has deviated in terms of doctrine from the established religious traditions to pejorative connotations. A more acceptable term is 'alternative or new religious movements'. The latter unfortunately encompasses all religions and includes harmful and benign groups, complicating distinction (Pretorius, 2012:195). Groups under discussion in this article are groups that may be classified as

bing² that cults utilise to proselyte members. This technique and other dynamics at work in cults destabilise individuals emotionally, which has a lasting impact on their adaption to society once they leave the cult. Knowledge of the impact of this technique and other dynamics is essential when counsellors and ministers are faced with former cult members' struggle to adapt to society.

Involvement in a cult encompasses the spiritual, emotional, social, psychological, physical and transcendental existence of an individual. The approach in this article although from a theological perspective, will therefore also encompass the disciplines of psychology and sociology. The right to freedom of religion is founded on an essential condition namely that the expression of religion must be free and voluntary and that no coercion of whatever sort should impel individuals to believe or to participate in or belong to a religion (see section 15 of *Constitution of South Africa*, 1996). Questions are raised when the hold or impact of cult involvement becomes evident in the behaviour of individuals while in a cult or after they have left the cult. What impels people to join a cult that eventually secures an unequalled commitment, emotional attachment and dependency? Is it the utopia presented by cults and the

harmful because they tend to, through their dynamics, isolate members from the outside world and as a result alienate them from family and friends. In some cases young people are subtly discouraged from continuing their studies or having own ambitions, since the goals of the group deserve wholehearted commitment. Family and friends observe a drastic change in their behaviour after onset of their involvement with the group. High demands are placed on their time and their effort, in order to reach the goals of the group, which results in their withdrawal from society and family activities in some cases. Cults believe that they possess the only 'truth' and that contact with the outside world will contaminate them. This belief and the urge to protect the truth and stay true to the truth may even lead to drastic action such as involvement in illegal activities (illegal weapons trade and drug-dealing, etc.) all for the sake of a higher cause. All these aspects of the cult have a negative impact on the wellbeing and development of a person. In this article the term 'cult' will be used in relation to these characteristics for the purpose of distinction within the wider term 'alternative religions'.

- 2 Love bombing was reportedly coined by the Unification Church (Moonies) to describe a genuine expression of love, affection and fellowship (*Wikipedia love Bombing*, s.a.:1). It later became a point of discussion related to the brainwashing techniques used by cults.

display of 'true love' amongst members that ensures the decision to join? This article will discuss the emotional attachment believed to be the result of and reaction to the alleged love and attention that cults initially bestow on prospective members, as well as the effect it has on such individuals even after they have left the group. The article furthermore provides guidelines for assisting former cult members in adapting to society.

2. The need for attention and love bombing

It is no secret that human beings are created with a need for recognition, care and attention and that good results are obtained when people are assured that they are needed and when they feel loved and appreciated. Counsellors and psychologists continually stress the importance of the aforementioned pillars related to a person's sense of well-being in any relationship. Attention is the way that humans measure status. Attention is rewarding because it releases brain chemicals such as dopamine and endorphins. The need for attention can lead to repeated behaviour that can be called an addiction or dependency (Henson, 2002:343). Unfortunately, this knowledge of what is needed to win someone's unwavering commitment and participation may also be abused to achieve selfish results. A common term used to describe the use of affection and love to obtain results is 'love bombing'.

2.1 Love bombing as positive and negative action

Much has been written and taught about love bombing (Brenner, 1991, James, 2012, Singer, 1993 and Hassan, 1988). There are different views on love bombing and its effects, but most people seem to agree that love bombing is a powerful tool used to obtain commitment, loyalty and cooperation. 'Love bombing' is a general term that refers to affectionate attention focused on a person which engenders complete loyalty to the cause. It refers to an attempt to influence a person by the display of affection and attention (*Wikipedia*: Love bombing, sa:1).

Depending on the context, love bombing has positive and negative connotations. One positive application of love bombing is towards establishing good and sound relationships between parents and children. James (2012), a psychologist, believes that love bombing will solve all manner of behaviour problems in children. In this

context love bombing refers to parents spending intense, focused and uninterrupted time with the child. A child is repeatedly assured of the parent's love, also through physical affection, such as hugs, and by lovingly looking into a child's eyes while doing so. Scientific research has shown (James, 2012) that children's brains are malleable and that human beings have an emotional thermostat that can be altered. The adjustment of this thermostat is done through love bombing. Love bombing creates a special and safe emotional zone of love, different from the normal day to day life and rules, where the child is the focus (James, 2012:4). Another psychiatrist, Campbell (1977), confirms that focused attention, eye contact and physical touch will instil the sense of being loved and that this love is unconditional despite the shortcomings of the child (Campbell, 1999:1). The same effect is notable in all human beings exposed to this kind of love and care.

A negative connotation of love bombing is found in abusive romantic relationships where the abused partner is pacified after an abusive session through the display of renewed affection, gifts, praise and promises by the abusive partner (*Wikipedia: Love bombing sa:1*). Love bombing in this context is conditional and the desired effect is that the abusive partner obtains forgiveness which will mend the scarred relationship temporarily to enable the abuser to abuse the partner again. Another area where love bombing is evident is in cults.

2.2 Love bombing as pretence in cults

There is no consensus among scholars on the application of love bombing and its effects on potential members as part of the cultic indoctrination process. On the one end of the continuum are those who believe that the love bombing theory as part of the brainwashing strategy of cults is overblown and does not pose such a serious threat to the well being of individuals as is made to believe (Barker, 1984; Richardson, 1991; Iannaccone, 2006). At the other extreme are those who believe that it is indeed an essential strategy to lure people to cults (Singer, 1993; Singer & Lalich, 1995; Ofshe, 1992). The term "love bombing" was popularised by Singer in 1995. In their book, *Cults in our Midst* (1995), Singer argues that love bombing is part of the brainwashing techniques of cults (Richardson, 2004:479).

Love bombing is one of the first aspects of the cult that a potential member will experience. It is a powerful tool in the recruitment of new members seeing that it is related to and occurs in a seemingly safe and healthy environment. The sole purpose with this false show of affection and caring is to influence the behaviour and indoctrinate new members (MacHovec, 1989:82). The coordinated effort (Singer & Lalich, 1995:114), by the leadership and long-term members results in flooding recruits with flattery, verbal seduction, affectionate touching, and a great deal of attention.

Young people on university and college campuses are mostly targeted seeing that they are adventurous and on the lookout for new challenges, sometimes removed from their known support structures such as family and friends and still exploring their own identity (Jenkinson, 2013:19). The belief that they can make a difference by participating in the achievement of the group's goals whets their interest. Some believe that love bombing is even more effective because it addresses new members' predisposition during the recruitment process. 'Predisposition factors' refer to their feeling 'different' from others. Some individuals have experienced a life crisis, such as the death of a loved one, a divorce, or other setbacks and not really belonging anywhere or not feeling loved and appreciated (Whitsett, 1992:363; Coates, 2011:201).

The initial and seemingly irresistible true love that lure prospective members to the group (Brenner, 1991:1) that instils trust and a sense of serenity that is hard to resist soon turns to conditional love (Brenner, 2012:2). Vrankovich (2001:1) describes this show of love as an orchestrated method to create an illusion of unconditional and tight family love to the outside world. When the prospective member refuses to join the group, or members voice doubts or question the leader or doctrines and indicate a desire to leave the group, this love ceases (Wallis, 2007:21).

The initial pleasant experience of 'true love' that has addressed even dispositional factors creates not only an emotional desire for more contact but also the sense that the cult environment is a safe environment, which affects the person's critical faculties. It further stimulates an interest in the group and its activities (Pretorius, 2004:614).

From the above it is evident that love bombing in cults not only lure new members to the group but also obtains a reciprocal response

of open-mindedness that enables further investment of the cult in a new member's life.

2.3 Love bombing leads to isolation and alienation of cult members

Following the initial love bombing an individual is gradually introduced to the cult culture, practices and doctrine resulting in wholehearted commitment. What techniques are utilised by cults to establish and maintain this commitment from members?

Progressive conversion into a cult member refers to a transition from the known world of the individual to a new world and culture. Dissociation from the old life and world (Wallis, 2007:21) is mainly established by replacing of the individual's former points of reference, world view and structures of information with the points of reference, world view and information structures of the cult (Pretorius, 2007:202-206). In order to replace the old life prospective members are encouraged to suppress the "bad" past, in order to make room for a better future. An important motivator in former cult members' decision to join a cult is doubt in the effectiveness of their former world. Doubt in their former lives is normally established when the cult points out the shortcomings in the system of influence in his or her old world (Pretorius, 2004:617). Perceived degeneration in the country's education system due to new models and paradigms will be indicated as evidence of the departure from the will of God (Pretorius, 2004:616). The decadency of potential members' religious systems that have been penetrated by worldly influences, resulting in the Word of God being watered down will be emphasised. The political system is no longer effective because it fails to keep the Word of God central to the affairs of the state. As far as social life is concerned, individuals will be referred to the negative impact of family and friends who are not living a committed life and preventing the individual from attaining God's approval and blessing. The entire influence structure and world view of members is questioned and rendered ineffective, emphasising the need for drastic change in order to please God (Pretorius, 2007:208). The belief that the lifestyle based on the old world is ineffective eventually and progressively leads to the adoption of the cult leader, culture and life that was presented as a solution (Wallis, 2007:21). Members take on new superficial prescribed personalities and

identities that fit their membership. As a result of the change in priorities and views their behaviour also changes.

Cults mostly function independently and members are isolated from the outside world either geographically in cases where they are living on a farm and or emotionally or psychologically by means of the strict tenets of the group (Riggio & Garcia, 2009:109). Secluded from the outside world an inward bound lifestyle is evident and ideal for conditioning through strict prescriptions, peer pressure, group conformity and role modelling. Out of sight of society members are vulnerable for physical abuse such as sleep deprivation, high carbohydrate and low protein diets that increases energy and lower mental resistance, physical punishment, sexual abuse and hard labour. Individuals can further be abused psychologically through "name calling", public humiliation and confessions (Baron, 2000) and are also financially exploited (Riggio & Garcia, 2009:109). The progressive conditioning of a cult member largely numbs rational decision making and results in programmed behaviour stimulated by the responses of the leader or other members through punishment for disobedience and praise for obedience (Hayes, 2002:155).

An individual is alienated from family, friends and other important aspects in his or her life such as holidays, personal ambitions and goals, birthdays and personal hobbies (Riggio & Garcia, 2009:109). The other members in the group become his or her new 'spiritual family' (Pretorius, 2007:202). Camaraderie is formed amongst members in the cult motivated by the belief that their uniform suffering and commitment is for a sacred cause. This camaraderie leads to irrational and sometimes radical steps to protect the special calling they believe to have received, when threatened by the evil outside world. Camaraderie and emotional support of other members are according to Lalich (1997:11), an important deterrent for members to leave the group. Factors that contribute to the unique sense of camaraderie are: a centralised source of truth, the continual contact and association with one another as a result of regular meetings and studies, the same rules and regulations that govern all members, pressure to conform (enhanced by spies who publicly expose doubters and dissenters) and the uniform nature of thinking (Cult Awareness and Information Library, s.a.:1). Brinkerhoff & Burke (1980:42) point out that "common religious doctrines cause members to define a situation in a similar manner

thus reinforcing their camaraderie and friendship". A cult identity emerges from the sense of community. Henson (2002) explains that the cult culture obtains a drug-like hold on members more specifically through cult memes³ – replicating information patterns – ideas that are passed on. These replicating information patterns "... hijacks the brain reward system by inducing high levels of attention behaviour between cult members" (Henson, 2002:343). A competition for the attention of the cult leader can develop that result in members spying on one another to provide information to the leader that will reward them. Cult members become dependent on the attention and favour of the cult leader like a drug addict (Henson, 2002).

Progressively the isolation from the outside world, the totalitarian authority of the leader and tenets of the group have not only rendered their rational abilities ineffective but has also created a dependency on the instructions and protocol of the group and leader.

3. Leaving the cult

Cult members leave the cult in different ways. Some have left as a result of the intervention of family and friends (Haworth, 1997:5), others left the cult on their own (runaways) – because they realised the deficiencies of the group, others as castaways – thrown out of the group because they were no longer useful. Whatever way they have left the cult they all experience a sense of failure and rejection (Jenkinson, 2008:208). When members leave the cult the transition back to their former "bad" world brings challenges. Members are faced not only with the doubtfulness of their former "ineffective" world established in their minds by the cult but also the deficiencies of the cult world, which they have come to realise.

Singer (1993), a well-respected psychologist and one of the world's foremost experts, has studied thousands of cultists and the impact

3 A 'Meme', according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is "an idea, behavior, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture". "A meme acts as a unit for carrying cultural ideas, symbols, or practices that can be transmitted from one mind to another through writing, speech, gestures, rituals, or other imitable phenomena" (*Wiki/Meme*, s.a. 1).

of cult techniques on the cultist's behaviour. She has distinguished different types of cult namely, *dissociative types* and *emotional arousal* types. Although no one of the groups uses only the one or the other type of technique but a blend of both a group tends to lean more to one direction. In a *dissociative* group an individual will be exposed to dissociative techniques such as mind emptying, mantra and meditation, guided imagery, past lives, trance dancing, spinning, rocking and speaking in tongues (Singer, 1993:2-3). The aforementioned techniques create what is known as *relaxation induced anxiety* (RIA)⁴ that leads to certain psychological effects that is briefly discussed later. *Emotional arousal* groups are more likely to be Bible-based groups. The techniques mostly used in these groups to obtain adherence from members are fear and guilt. While in the group and after leaving a group, former cult members still experience intense and unwarranted fears about different kinds of things: guilt for doing or not doing things and doubt every time they need to make a decision (Singer, 1993:4). The dissociative techniques that aim to remove the person from the realities of life, to create an utopian world within the cult, and the emotional techniques that make the person sensitive and susceptible to emotional cues to obey tenets are powerful tools for establishing and maintaining commitment.

3.1 The effect of disillusionment when realising that the love displayed by cults is conditional

When the realisation hit that they have been misled it comes as a great shock to the cult member's system. When leaving the cultic group they belonged to, some of the first emotions they experience are disillusionment and confusion about their own emotional attachment and the true intention and purpose of the cult. Also

4 Relaxation induced anxiety (RIA) refers to a fear of relaxation itself or when a person experiences an increased fear not long after relaxation is achieved. For example, anxiety may be experienced when a person is relaxed during a massage. The fear of the physical sensations when their muscles and their neck and shoulders loosen up creates anxiety. Others are scared when in a relaxed situation and their minds are quiet down that unwanted thoughts will enter their heads. Others fear the consequences of relaxing activities, including appearing lazy or a feeling of losing control (Nierenberg, 2012:1).

because the two most familiar worlds, the world in which they were raised and the ultimate world of the cult, have disappointed them. The once blissful experience of “love” turns into rejection resulting in been excommunicated or the pronouncement of curses of sickness or bad fortune over themselves or their families (Wallis, 2007:21). Their wholehearted commitment, sacrifices and the belief of being in God’s will is scattered. It means the invalidation of everything they surrendered for the cult which they believed to be authentic, and of their purpose in life. It further means that the construing process adopted in the cult that gives sense to that lifestyle is also interrupted and interfered with. Former cult members are left with an inability to construe, to make sense of the world and things surrounding them (Pretorius, 2008:270, Neimeyer & Bridges, 2004:2). The cult dynamics that prescribed the behaviour of members and acted as thinking and deciding agent are suspended. Members do not find themselves directly surrounded by the strong group mentality that motivated uniform action and a cult pseudo personality (Jenkinson, 2008:210). Suddenly, three prominent realisations hit the former cult member namely their uneasiness about making decisions as well as a distrust in their rather eroded decision-making ability; the loneliness and sense of abandonment resulting from the absence of the tightly surrounded cult community which eased actions and obedience; and the resulting sense of ignorance about their state of mind and heart by outsiders that contributes to the sense of feeling ‘lost’.

The disillusionment and confusion brought about by this transition into the outside world and the impact of the conditioning of the cult is visible. In between the two doubtful worlds the natural reaction is that of withdrawal in an attempt to protect them. Conditioned to dissociate from things that can be harmful, they do that whenever they perceive behaviour by family and friends as harmful. They draw back into the safe mode of the cult – instead of facing new challenges, they dissociate. When faced with decisions they become indecisive. The following behavioural manifestations are evident with former cult members:

- Punctuality in attending appointments with a counsellor or people assisting them. It is also common that a former cultist will disrespect an appointment without any prior excuse or reason.

- Breaking contact for no apparent reason for a period of time with the counsellor or person assisting them.
- Displays of absent-mindedness, as if they are on another planet and not interested in the conversation.
- Displays of anger at any time. Anger attacks towards themselves or others for no apparent reason.
- Indecisiveness in every day actions. Former cult members display a lack of decision-making ability or ability to get things done in their personal lives.
- Dissociation from people in general but also from any religious or other group. They avoid being caught up in a church gathering or class situation.
- They also tend to break their personal devotion to God and display a sense of being betrayed by God.
- Reluctance to talk about their cultist experience.
- Sensitivity to and easily triggered by circumstances surrounding them to act out of the ordinary.
- Distrust in medicine, psychology, any religion, organisation, people and learning.

Other aspects of personal life that they find difficult are: feeling foolish for allowing it to happen (Jenkinson, 2013:19), lonely and suffering from depression; limited ability to make sense of their world because they distrust their own and other people's judgment (and as a result find it difficult to adapt in the world); limited ability to manage the emotions of fear, guilt (MacHovec, 1989:80-81, Singer & Lalich, 1995:301), doubt and anger; dealing with the sense of being a traitor leaving other cult members behind; and second-guessing the decision to leave the group.

Singer (1993:3) identified three psyche-related conditions when former cult members were involved in *dissociative* groups:

- There are sensory effects that include sensations of floating, heaviness, tingling, numbness and feelings of heat and cold.
- Former cultists experience anxiety and panic attacks which are motoric in nature and include spasms, twitches, uncontrollable restlessness, pounding heart, sweaty hand palms, nausea and abdominal distress, fear of losing control and shortness of breath.
- Former cultists also experience cognitive and affective flooding manifested in reactions or feelings such as feeling extremely

sexual, extremely aggressive and extremely angry without any cues and triggers from the environment.

The above generic characteristics of former cult members present the upside down world of confusion and uncertainty they find themselves in and that ministers, family and friends generally find difficult to understand. The lack of understanding of the former cultist's challenging internalised world hampers any attempt to establish a relationship or communication with the former cultist. It further complicates effective assistance of former cult members to adapt in society.

3.2 Enduring effect of the concept of love after a former cultist has left the group

Former cult members may have left the group but they are not free from the ongoing impact of the cult culture in their post-cult life. Former cult members are constantly reminded of their cult experience. It is not only a matter of getting a person out of a cult but more so to get the cult out of the person (Wallis, 2007:21). Singer (1993) indicates the different manners in which former cult members are constantly reminded of their cult experience. In the post-cult life former cult members are easily triggered by a cue in their present situation that will make them experience the cult reality again, their experience may be as intense as if they are back in the cult. The cue may take on different forms: a specific word, a phrase, situation, picture, odour, touch, song, place or person. The cue that triggers the former cult member results in a flashback, which calls the cult content or situation to mind in the form of an image picture, emotional consciousness or some form of reliving of the experience (Singer, 1993:4-5). This in turn may result in what is known as a floating experience which refers to a feeling of being placed back inside the cult, disassociated from the real world. The floating experience can otherwise be described as if the person is not present and that their thoughts have drifted, as if the curtains of their eyes have been closed (Singer, 1993:5).

Once cult members have left the group they show resentment to a person or environment similar to the cult situation that reminds them of the control of the cult (Singer, 1993:4). The former cult member's dissociative behaviour continues and is governed, according to Pretorius (2008:280), by the emotions of doubt, fear, guilt and anger.

Doubt in their own world was one of the important initial motivators that made them leave and join the cult. Once taken up in the cult the doctrines and dynamics of uncertainty about their salvation or place in the cult succeeded continually in keeping members on track, working even harder. After leaving the cult, former members suffer ongoing doubt about whether they made the right choice to leave. The emotion of doubt is especially strengthened by their struggle to adapt to the outside world.

The former cult members experience outbursts of anger or anger episodes. They experience anger towards themselves for their ignorance which resulted in their being taken up in the cult (Jenkinson, 2008:203). They feel angry because of the situation they have brought over themselves and their families, the damage it inflicted on relationships and the time they have lost. Former cult members also display anger towards the leader for misleading them and abusing their vulnerability and commitment; they feel exploited and abused (Pretorius, 2008:264).

Fear is a powerful emotion for keeping cult members in the behaviour pattern of the cult. Fear is especially effective in ensuring certain types of behaviour when members do not follow instructions, or are 'disobeying' God. Fear of been rejected by God or by the group as a result of their failure to meet the set standards ensures renewed commitment. Fear that they will not be able to succeed or survive in the outside world keeps cult members committed. Fear of what God may bring over those who disobey or leave the group also succeeds in securing and maintaining obedience. Accusing members of misdeeds, words or actions in order to arouse a sense of guilt is another application worth noting. Guilt is also used to reinforce negative self-perceptions and the bad past lives of members through repentance sessions (Singer & Lalich, 1995:77)

Initially a transition was made to a well-organised and structured cultic group; they now face assistance from parents, family or friends who have no background knowledge of the dynamics of cults. In most cases family and friends find the behaviour of former cult members strange and do not know how to deal with that. Ignorance about the mental and emotional state of cult members can easily lead to family and friends behaving in a way that agitates the emotional state and actions of the former cult member.

3.3 How to assist and address the behaviour of former cultists

Taking into account the mental and emotional state of former cult members, the following approach is essential in order to obtain results when assisting these members:

- Avoid situations that will trigger or remind them of their cult experience. Cult members are used to classroom settings or meetings where they are placed in a classroom setting to receive teaching or are ministered to. When meeting with former members, avoid unwelcome similarities by creating an informal setting (Singer, 1993:6).
- How do you deal with a former member when he or she is detached and absent, staring into the distance without taking notice of anything? This may signal that the former cult member is protecting him-or-herself against what a counsellor is saying by not paying attention. It is essential to get his or her attention by focusing it on something he or she used to enjoy doing before joining the cult (Singer, 1993:6). For example, if it is known that a young man used to enjoy fishing, begin by conversing about fishing before moving over to address the real issues. Reference to pleasant experiences in his life can be done throughout the conversation with the member.
- Flashbacks to the cult experience will continually interfere with the former cult member's personal life. When that happens, remind members that they do not need to give in to the dissociative feeling, that they are no longer in the cult and are now safe.
- Assist them to identify certain cues that trigger the cult experience. Once they are aware of those cues they can guard against that. One former cult member admitted that any mention of the word 'family' triggered flashbacks to the cult family and what they had to endure. They can deal with this by identifying the cues and attaching another meaning to the word 'family', for example, in that it reminds them of their personal happy family holidays.
- Feelings of loneliness and depression can be addressed by the creation of care groups consisting of former cult members from different groups. Regular informal meetings will create the opportunity to share and to experience a sense of being with

others who understand them. Members will also share with each other ways to cope when exposed to situations that are reminiscent of the cult.

- Conversation about the cult experience is essential so that former members get the opportunity to understand the processes that they were submitted to (Jenkinson, 2008:218). These processes may be discussed in one-to-one or group informal sessions.
- Explain how the cult has succeeded in employing fear, guilt, and doubt to control them. Explain that these emotions still function on the default which was set in the cult; that all the emotions are founded on the cult reality and not the individual's own reality. Cult members function and act based on what the cult taught as reality (Haworth, 1997:8). It is essential that former members be assisted to find their own reality, their own ambition and future. They need to understand that the specific context in which these emotions continue to govern their life and actions must be changed. In most cases, fear and guilt act as guards over the cult doctrine, that the only truth is found in the specific cult and that members are specially chosen. Indicating to the former cult member that the only truth is not found in the group will break the hold of these emotions.
- Former cult members must understand the importance of forgiveness in the healing process and in order to adapt in the world. They need to forgive themselves and what they believe they have brought over themselves and their family, but they also need to forgive the cult leader and others that contributed (Pretorius, 2008).
- Assist former cult members with patience, love and constant support, especially when they have been in the cult for many years and have experienced great financial loss (Haworth, 1994:8). They may also be in need of material support.
- Former members should be allowed time in an environment of love and understanding to work through feelings of antagonism towards religion and churches. They are generally reluctant to join any church or religion as a result of their disappointment and disillusionment.
- During the recovery period it is important that the former cult member live with other family or reliable family or friends in order to protect the member from attempts by the group to influence him or her again (Haworth, 1997:12).

- Let them understand that, although they believed that they were doing God's will, their being in the group was not God's doing. Many former cult members display a radical break in their personal relationship with God. Although they believed that it was an answer to prayer, it is important to point out that human beings are not exempted from making wrong decisions. The wisdom obtained from this can be very useful in life and in assisting others who find themselves in a similar situation in future. Convey to them that God has not abandoned them because of the wrong choice, as the cult taught them. God still loves us and is present in our lives but at times we confuse other influences with the will of God. The break in their personal relationships is mostly wrongfully based on a feeling of inferiority because they could not live up to God's calling and expectations. Another aspect that also needs to be dealt with in this regard is a feeling that God has allowed these circumstances.
- Assist former cult members to start planning their life and their days by writing down what they are going to do. According to Singer (1993:7) people who have left a group, experience a phase of being stunned, leaving a whole organised world behind without a plan. They need to take back the control that the cult had over the planning of their days and life ahead. Failure to start this simple process of planning may result in former members running in circles without getting direction in life.
- Encourage their erstwhile close friends to become involved so that they can systematically break through the self-constructed barrier of isolation. Some former cult members lock themselves in their rooms and do not want to make contact with the outside world for a very long time.
- Teach former cult members to take control of their emotions – this is essential. They should not be bullied into doing anything but rather motivated to act out of their own will. When former cult members share their experience family, friends or counsellors should listen attentively and stimulate the conversation by asking questions. Many former cult members are met with a response of disbelief when they share their story and as a result are disinclined to continue sharing. Some are left with a feeling “that no one understands what I am going through and no one believes”.

4. Conclusion

It is evident from the above that the dynamics and pretence of love of a cult impact on the cult member's entire being, and that leaving the cult does not mean that all aspects of that cult are left behind. The dynamics of cults that in essence produce an addiction for the favour and attention of the cult leader but at the same time also an emotional attachment to the members have a lasting effect on the wellbeing of a former cult member. Ignorance of this fact will result in difficulties not only to understand the behaviour of the former cult member, but also to effectively assisting the member to be taken up in society.

Guidelines presented in this article for assisting former cult members are by no means comprehensive, but offer a good starting point and can make members of society aware of the rather peculiar upside-down world that former cult members find themselves in when making the transition to the outside world. It should be emphasised that the relationship with structures and points of reference, family and friends in the life of a former cult member have been broken down as a result of their involvement in the cult. Caught between two worlds that both seem insufficient, former cult members are challenged with fear, doubt, uncertainty and guilt. The world that they once believed to be the ultimate world, the utopia, has come crumbling down.

Sensitivity to and knowledge of the mental and emotional state of former cult members is essential in assisting them to readapt to society. Although some scholars believe that the effect of 'love bombing' as part of the recruitment technique is overdrawn and that the retention rate of cult members is minimal (Iannaccone, 2006:7), the mere fact that cults are still functioning all over the world is reason enough to stay vigilant and report on this topic. Iannaccone (2006) moreover seems to generalise when indicating that the cult issue is on a decline, whilst the cult issue differs in frequency and complexity in different countries across the world. While countries such as Europe and the USA may have contributed largely to this debate, countries such as South Africa have only recently begun to take serious notice of these groups. The number of prior studies on this topic is of great advantage to our view of and approach to the matter.

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