
Former Pseudo-Christian cult member's reintegration into society

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Abstract

Reintegration of former pseudo-Christian cult members into society is a multi-layered endeavour. This article utilizes research conducted on cults, their dynamics and impact on members, and the findings of psychologists concerning the behaviour of cult members. It draws on personal research in dealing with former cult members for many years in an attempt to provide guidelines on how former pseudo-Christian cult members can be reintegrated into society. Different aspects are considered, especially the twisted Bible message that forms the basis of such cults. Also, how personality and value systems used to entrap members can be rightfully used to break the hold of the cult and assist in the reintegration process. The article points out that membership in a cult can result in disorders similar to addictive disorders. Knowing what areas the proselyting and controlling strategy of cults focused on is very valuable in undoing the hold of the cult culture on former members and re-establishing the Christian faith as part of reintegrating former members back into society.

Opsomming

Die herintegrasie van pseudo-Christelike ex-kulte lede in die samelewing is 'n omvattende strewende. Hierdie artikel steun op navorsing wat gedoen is oor die impak wat kulte kultuur, gebruike en metodiek op die gedrag van kulte lede het asook die bevindinge van sielkundiges en beraders in hierdie verband. Persoonlike navorsing word ook oorweeg ten einde riglyne te bied in die herintegrasieproses van ex-kulte lede. Verskillende aspekte wat 'n rol speel in hierdie proses, veral hoe die kulte se verdraaide interpretasie en toepassing van die Bybel wat die basis vorm vir die misbruik van persoonlikheid, en die waardestelsel van lede ten einde hulle in die kulte in te trek, regmatig gebruik kan word in die herintegrasieproses. Die artikel voer aan dat kulte lidmaatskap kan lei tot geestelike steurnisse gelykstaande aan verlawende steurnisse. Ten einde die reïntegrasie suksesvol te bewerkstellig is dit belangrik om te verstaan op watter areas van die mens die proseliterings en beheerstrategie van die kulte gemik is ten einde daardie houvas te verbreek en die Christelike geloof te hervestig wat nodig is vir reïntegrasie.

1. Introduction

One of the challenges former pseudo-Christian cult members are faced with after leaving a cult is to successfully reintegrate into society. Cult life and culture impact cult members' personalities on different levels resulting in them being systematically and progressively estranged from society and their belief system changed. In pseudo-Christian cults, the justification for the estranged life from society and excessive control is based on the cults' interpretation and application of the Bible. The longer cult members spend inside the cult the further they are removed from life in so-called 'normal' society and mainstream Christianity. This article endeavours to point out how estrangement comes about and what can be done to reintegrate former cult members into society. To address the issue of reintegration, a thorough understanding of different factors that play a role, as well as the process that led to their involvement is needed.

2. Impact of cult culture

2.1 *Life before the cult*

There are several reasons why people are more susceptible to cult influence that results in membership. The most common assumption is that cult members are generally individuals with some sort of negative emotional or mental state. However, some research does not support this view and indicates that two-thirds of cult members are psychologically healthy people. The other third may consist of those with some emotional or psychological issues such as personal loss, divorce, financial or career challenges, or failed romantic relationships (Ash, 1985), (Buxant & Saroglou, 2008), (Stipes, 1985), (West & Singer, 1980). Singer & Lalich (1995) indicates that only five to six percent of cult members had psychological problems before joining the cult. The majority of members had average to good relationships with their parents before joining the cult (Levine & Salter, 1976). Ryan (2022), admits that although it is not a certain type of person that is prone to become involved in a cult, periods of personal crisis make individuals more vulnerable to recruitment. According to Hassan (1988) cults do not recruit individuals with psychological problems or physical handicaps since cults aim at growth and productivity. Cult members must be able and capable to contribute financially and physically to expand the cult.

People find other reasons for getting involved in cults. It can be a desire to dedicate their lives to a good cause and leave a legacy or they may have unusual beliefs or fears. Others look for new challenges or seek to commit spiritually or to make a difference in the world (Ryan, 2022). Members can also be born into a cult and this leads to the biological growth of a cult. In pseudo-Christian cults, the radicalized presentation of the Bible manifested in a definite committed lifestyle is attractive to those who desire to live the way they believe the early Christian church functioned.

The attraction of cults is produced through the deceptive influencing techniques utilized to recruit members. No one just joins a cult. They are recruited by a systematic influence process, whether by family, friends, or other members of cults (Hassan, 2021). No matter what the circumstances of life are or what difficulties people encounter, cults have tailor-made solutions for those needs and challenges and therefore everyone is a potential candidate to be recruited for a cult.

The above studies on the mental state of members cannot lead to a definitive conclusion based on the selective groups surveyed. The research however

is helpful in the sense that it presents measured possibilities that can be taken into account when considering risk factors and contributors to joining cults.

2.2 Transformation of pseudo-Christian cult members

Commitment to a cult is a seductive process that preys on the vulnerability of members. Members that end up in cults undergo a progressive process that has five stages, namely: *love bombing*; *detachment*; *change*; *attachment*; and *total obedience* (Pretorius, 2004). The underlying belief that the pseudo-Christian cult is founded on God's "truth" eases the process of this transformation.

The induction starts with an initial period of love bombing that creates the feeling of belonging and those potential members are made to feel valued (Singer & Lalich, 1995). The love shown by the cult is justified as the means by which the world will recognize the disciples of Christ (John 15:35). After this, a serious process of subtle indoctrination to submit to the cult beliefs follows. In this process, the individual is firstly detached from their former life because they are made to believe that it was an unsuccessful and fruitless life. The prospective members' previous life in their faith is portrayed as lacking because it deviated from the "truth". The Christian church in general is viewed as having a form of godliness but without power, and a true believer is not to be unequally yoked with the unbeliever and is commanded to "come out from among them" (2 Tim 3:1-5, 2 Cor 6:14-17). The cult beliefs and practices are presented as the solution and leads to a God-pleasing lifestyle. Then follows a process of embedding the cult beliefs and practices that ties the individual to the truth only found in the cult. The Bible as interpreted by the leader is the truth that must be lived without questioning. God speaks through the cult leader as He spoke through the prophet of old to direct His people in His ways. Total commitment and continued trust in the leader will ensure members remain in the truth. The member becomes dependent on the leader and their instructions. The next stage attaches the individual to the cult. The attachment is secured through a system of punishment for disobedience and reward for obedience to the truth, spying, and reporting by other members, as well as peer pressure to adhere to all instructions (Rousselet, Duretete, Hardouin, & et al, 2017). These measures are believed to be the chastisement of God for those He loves (Heb 12:6). The new cult member sets aside their own identity to make room for the cult identity that enables fitting into the purpose of God. The cult identity overrules the individual's selfish ambition and limits their decision-making abilities.

Jenkins (2008) explains that the self is in contact moment by moment with others, self, and the environment, which makes the person vulnerable to change especially if it is a radicalized environment.

Whilst the cult member's self was responding moment by moment, becoming a fully-fledged member of the community, their personality (preferences, answer to the question — What are you like?) was also changing; and, the cult pseudo-personality, was formed. New preferences, a new sense of self and how they did things, was created by involvement in and interaction with the community (Jenkins 2008:205).

Total obedience to the decisions and instructions of the cult is the final stage. These stages lead to cult members internalizing this lifestyle and dependence on the 'doctrinal instruction' offered by the leader. Dependence complicates leaving the group for two main reasons: firstly, because members believe that there is no hope or salvation outside the group based on the biblical interpretation established in the group, and secondly because the member is dependent on the instructions of the leader without which the member is lost. Through this influential process, a mental referee is placed in the mind of members to ensure that members obey and are retained. The mental referee ensures self-reinforcement of the cult influence – that is self-justification of the legitimacy of the cult beliefs. Any attempt by family, friends or outsiders to warn about the danger of the cult is shunned in the light of the belief that commitment equals "taking up their cross and following Christ". This means that living a godly life in the cult will result in persecution by the world, even becoming alienated from family (2 Tim 3:12; Matt 10:37). The cult indoctrination process not only succeeds in creating a means for self-reinforcement by projecting that the members will experience emptiness or worthlessness outside the group but also indirectly causes a sense of emptiness inside the cult member (Miviludes, 2006). Members' dependence on the cult explains why most of them remain in it despite physical and psychological harm. The more dependent they become on the cult, the more estranged from society they become (Rousselet, Duretete, Hardouin, & et al, 2017). The internalized belief that members have been selected by God helps to establish the belief that leaving the cult is a rejection of God.

Individuals have different personality traits which in turn will lead to different approaches and responses to cult culture and how they deal with the influence of cult practices. A general understanding of the impact of cult practices on individuals will give a basis for challenges with which cult members are faced.

2.3 Dependence and addictive disorders

Apart from theories explaining the psychological manipulation of cult members, some research points to common characteristics between cult membership and addictive disorders (Ungerleider & Wellisch, 1979), (Booth & Bradshaw, 1999).

Rousselet, Duretete, Hardouin & et al, (2017:31) surveyed 31 former cult members and found that some vulnerability factors can be associated with addictive disorders. The following associations are recorded by this study:

1. Cult members experienced attachment insecurity before joining the cult. This refers to a reluctant approach concerning relationships based on fear of rejection that results in the inability for deep emotional relationships. Attachment insecurity is also associated with addictive disorders (Buxant & Saroglou, 2008).
2. Prevalence of psychiatric comorbidity before joining the cult. Comorbidity refers to a diagnosis of two or more mental disorders. These disorders can include psychological, physical, and mental disorders (Gans, 2021). Psychiatric comorbidity correlates to an addictive disorder according to the American Psychiatric Association (2013).
3. Sense of psychological relief when joining and being accepted into the cult. This relief is described in the literature as a “honeymoon” (Galanter & Buckley, 1978). Some cult members use addictive disorders as coping mechanisms to reduce psychological stress. Rousselet, Duretete, Hardouin & et al, (2017) found that some members' commitment to a cult gave them relief from psychological suffering while for others the cult context contributed to the lessening of addictive disorders.
4. Members' social precariousness – a state of being in danger or unsure about something, complicated their leaving the cult. Social impairment is also listed as an addictive disorder related to the use of substances by the American Psychiatric Association (2013).
5. A third of cult members were exposed in some way or another to the cult environment before joining. A similar tendency of wider availability is also found with addictive disorders involving drugs (Rousselet, Duretete, Hardouin, & et al, 2017).
6. Social learning through family members that are already in the cult. Some even recruited their own families. Social learning also contributes to the vulnerability to initiation and continuation of addictive disorders.

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7. Problematic family relationships before joining a cult could be a vulnerability factor for a member to join the cult (Abasi & Mohammadkhani, 2016).

Another important addictive disorder of pseudo-Christian cults that can be added to the above is the dependence of members on the spiritual 'biblical' directives of the leader. These directives become like a daily dose of chronic medication that will ensure that the member stays spiritually healthy, thereby creating a dependency without which members feel as aimless and lost as one that is "floating" (Singer & Lalich, 1995).

According to the above findings, it seems evident that cult practices utilize strategies that can lead to dependence similar to an addictive disorder that is associated with the use of substances. It is the addictive nature of cult influences and practices that are important for this study, seeing that it also implies strategies to free cult members from this addiction or dependence. Furthermore, such addictions are important contributors to the complexity of the reintegration of former cult members into society. Another aspect of importance is how cult members left the cult – voluntarily or otherwise.

2.4 *Exiting the cult*

Leaving a cult is not easy because of the cult member's oblivion that they have been caught in a neatly woven web of beliefs and practices creating a sense of security with no valid reason to leave. Hassan (1985) points out, that leaving the cult is a sign of "weakness, insanity, falling to temptation, brainwashing (by deprogrammers), pride, and sin".

How cult members have left the group also needs to be considered. There are three main ways to leave a cult. The first way is when cult members leave the group voluntarily and of their own free will without help from outside. A second way they leave is through what is known as a voluntary educational process. This refers to controlled, intensive, time-limited contractual sessions that are conducted by experts with individuals about the exploitative and manipulative processes of cults (Clark, Giambalvo, Giambalvo, Garvey, & Langone, 1993). A third way is through a deprogramming program. This process is an involuntary process that involves the 'kidnapping' or forced removal of the individual from the cult and they are then taken to a place and given information on the exploitative and manipulative nature of cults, with the aim that individuals will change their minds about the cult.

How members left the cult may also play an important role in the reintegration into society, as a forced way (as described in the last example above) may pose challenges to making the individual trust outside authorities.

2.5 *The emotional and physical state after leaving the cult*

When cult members leave a cult, they walk away with the impact the cult culture and practices have had on their well-being: physically, mentally, psychologically, spiritually and socially. It is evident from research and the findings of clinicians that psychological symptoms remain in former members which will have an impact on their physical, mental and social abilities and interactions with society (Aronoff, Lynn, & Malinoski, 2002).

The most common symptoms that have been identified include *dissociation*, *cognitive deficiencies* such as *difficulty in making decisions*, *black and white thinking* (Goldberg & Goldberg, 1982), (Singer & Ofshe, 1990), *anxiety* (Cushman, 1984), (Singer & Ofshe, 1990) and *depression* (Levine, 1980), (Wright, 1991). Also, a sense of rejection by God and confusion about the result their belief system produced.

Hassan (2018) added that despite the resilience of the human spirit to survive, finding a new life outside the cult remains a tough endeavor. Not everyone makes it and some get caught up in human trafficking, alcohol and drug abuse, while others have breakdowns and are institutionalized and are often misdiagnosed. Others get involved in abusive relationships while others end up joining a destructive cult again.

2.6 *Trauma*

Many cult members experience severe events while in the cult that can lead to trauma. These events can include sexual abuse, hard physical labor, illegal weapon transactions, and verbal abuse by the leaders or others in the cult. Trauma, according to the American Psychological Association (2022) is “an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer-term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives”. According to SAMHSA (2014) trauma can be defined as “*Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or*

threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being." The experience many cult members have in a cult can be described as trauma.

According to SAMHSA (2014:49), the effects of trauma on an individual's life can be isolated or pervasive. In a case where trauma is isolated it is kept from the larger context of life. This is relevant to a former cult member who contains the trauma as a result of shame for the self-deception and sometimes the effect it had on other members of their family; also, because it is surreal and 'unbelievable' to an outsider (Pretorius, 2014).

Another aspect of the impact of trauma is whether the trauma was an intentional act or not. If it was an intentional act, the harm would be a primary indicator in predicting subsequent difficulties among individuals exposed to this form of trauma. Dealing with trauma is the initial disbelief that another person would conceivably intend to harm others, followed by considerable emotional and, at times, behavioral investment in somehow making things right again or making sense of a senseless, malicious act. Cult members display initial disbelief that the "so-called" safe environment of the cult could have any intentions to harm (Pretorius, 2007), (Blue, 1993).

The consequences of trauma according to SAHMSA (2014:62-70):

... are different emotional reactions that are influenced by the individuals' sociocultural history and include reactions such as anger, fear, sadness, and shame that can follow the initial shock of trauma.

Former cult members have expressed fear and anger for being misled and abused by the cult practices and the cult leader. Some also expressed a feeling of sadness for the time they have spent in the cult, believing it was for a higher cause whilst it was to serve the selfish agenda of the cult.

Members experience *numbing* where emotions are detached from thoughts, behaviors, and memories hiding the emotional state of the individual. It is referred to as acting according to a "cult identity" suppressing the real identity (Pretorius, 2007). Pomeroy (2015) describes the double identity as a 'me' that a person had before entering the cult that changes into a new cult 'me'. Goffman's (2007) explanation of the stripping of an individual's identity in prison and replacing it with another identity and re-socializing them where the previous support is no longer accessible and the individual becomes dependent on the institution to meet their needs, also rings true for cult members.

Trauma impacts three cognitive areas namely: thoughts about self, the world (others/environment), and the future. Trauma can create the sense of being incompetent or damaged, viewing the world as unsafe, not trusting any other person, and having no future expectations. As a result, these individuals are antagonistic towards external support. The deception related to cults that breach the trust of their members causes former cult members to struggle with having trust in their own ability, other people's intentions, and any prospects. Also, they cannot trust any spiritual authority (Henke, 2006). More specifically, the member leaving a pseudo-Christian cult's life prospects are reduced to a sense of eternal damnation without hope because of the internalized belief system of the group.

3. The importance of environment, personality types, and values in recruitment and cult membership

3.1 Role of environment in establishing behavior

Researchers have been focused on finding the causes of addiction and what makes individuals susceptible to addiction. Biological or genetic traits, social factors, or a combination of these factors were considered. Another aspect of importance is the role environment plays in addiction and if it has any bearing on cults.

Environment, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is '*the circumstances, objects, or conditions by which one is surrounded*'. It thus includes anything in the individual's immediate surroundings – including the people and things in the place surrounding an individual.

The environment in which an individual grows up, as well as the one they live in as an adult, plays an important role in addiction. Addictions are exacerbated when an individual's friends are involved in addictive habits or they may be a response to stressful factors in that environment. The influence of the environment can be broken into four basic domains namely: the family domain, the peer domain, the work and school domain, and the community domain (Blažević, 2016), (Belle, Dec 2017). Other researchers also added trauma and mental illness to these domains (Frieze, 2015).

According to Lawder, Howsare, and Byrne (2013) the family context is important in providing information on how substance use disorders (SUDs) develop, are maintained, and what can positively or negatively influence the treatment of the disorder. The family in which an individual grew up will

not only influence the likelihood of becoming an addict but will also have a substantial impact on their ability to recover from an addiction.

Schools and universities should ideally create a community in which to grow up and be successful (Blažević, 2016). The school however can also pose risks for addiction. Depending on the friends or colleagues associated with the individual, the school years can either lead to excelling in life or getting involved in addictive behavior. Peer pressure that dictates what is needed to be acceptable can also contribute to and lead to addiction.

Community is a wide domain and can include contexts such as schools, churches, the workplace, and race/ethnicity (Antonishak, Suffin, & Reppucci, 2005). Community culture is a huge risk factor in addiction. If the culture of a community favours drugs, the risk of members of the community getting involved in types of drugs that lead to addiction is increased. Adolescents are impressionable and look up to what they believe to be role models in the community. If those role models promote drugs or other addictive substances for their use, the risk increases.

The underlying factor in how great an impact the environment will have on a person is the personality of the said individual. Personality is said to guide an individual in their reaction and response to their environment and influence (Vertava Health, 2022).

A cult is in most cases a geographically and mentally isolated environment that consists of dynamics to create and maintain it. Some of the important pillars holding up this environment are prescriptions (do's and do not's), a mentality of 'us' and 'them' – a sense of superiority that brings emotional and physical separation and isolation, role modeling of leaders and their abusive behaviour, peer pressure to perform to standard at whatever cost even if it means reporting others, stealing, lying, and even killing. Members' own individuality is not developed, instead the image of the leaders is duplicated. Spying on one another and a system of punishment and reward all contribute to ensuring this environment stays intact. The behaviours that are developed in such an environment are indicative of the measures to which an individual with addictive disorders will go. The cult member will do whatever is needed to get a reward and approval from the leader since his or her 'salvation' depends on it. Getting praise from the leader becomes addictive and will be pursued time after time. In pseudo-Christian cults there is no guarantee of salvation – the level of 'salvation' achieved is measured by the continuous praise or reprimands from the leader. Through this the cult member is kept in a continuous momentum to attain the goals of the leader.

Another area that will next be considered is the role that an individual's personality traits and values play in the recruitment and control process of cults.

3.2 Personality traits

Different theories explain personality and behaviour. One theory relevant for this study is the *Trait theory of personalities*. According to these theorists, all individuals have traits or characteristic ways of behaviour. Individuals tend to be sociable or shy, passive or aggressive, pessimistic or optimistic. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association (2013), indicates that personality traits are important aspects of personality that are displayed in different personal and social contexts. Individuals may be placed on a continuum of extroversion, ambiversion and introversion.

Individuals experience three levels of traits namely: cardinal traits, central traits, and secondary traits (Allport, 1937). Each of these levels or traits contributes to an individual's behaviour and personality. The *cardinal trait* refers to a person's behaviour and thinking patterns and forms the basis of what is called an individual's 'master control'. The *central trait* of an individual refers to general traits that everyone has. These traits include humility, kindness, honesty, friendliness and care. Secondary traits are the traits that are not always visible but yet are present at the bottom of the hierarchy and are most visible when triggered. For example, although an individual is generally kind and loving towards his or her friend, some behaviour or action on the side of the friend may trigger resentment towards that individual. Eysenck (1990, 1992) developed this theory further and described individuals' personalities as part of their biology. An individual will always act and behave within the parameters of this spectrum. Individuals are therefore born with one of three personality dimensions either Extroversion/Introversion, Neuroticism/Stability or Psychoticism/Superego control (Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett, 1985). According to these dimensions, an individual high on the extraversion spectrum is sociable, outgoing, lives and does things in contact and together with others, and seeks stimulating environments. An individual high on the introversion spectrum prefers to be alone, do things alone, and does not have much interaction with others. Introversion is more passive and seeks fewer stimulating environments. An individual high on the psychoticism spectrum thinks independently, displays a cold personality, does not conform easily, is impulsive and anti-social, and can be hostile. On the other hand, the superego control individual has good impulse control, behaves selflessly, is empathetic, coordinates, and is conventional.

Eysenck's theory was not comprehensive enough and was once again developed to be more comprehensive and accurate in describing behaviour and is known as the Five-factor model (FFM) or Five-factor theory (McCrae & Costa, 2003). McCrae and Costa (2003) disagreed with Eysenck's 'Psychoticism' and added 'Openness' and added also 'Agreeableness' and 'Conscientiousness'. Their five-factor theory consists of Neuroticism, Openness, Agreeableness and Experience, Conscientiousness, and Extraversion.

It is important to understand that these five traits represent a range of possible traits. Individuals are usually somewhere between the two extremes on the spectrum namely extraversion and introversion. The five traits are stable over an individual's lifespan however, some traits may slightly increase or decrease over time. For example, the trait of conscientiousness can increase from young adulthood into middle age to manage personal relationships and careers (Donnellan & Lucas, 2008). Agreeableness also increases and peaks between fifty to seventy years of age (Terracciano, McCrae, Brant, & Costa, 2005). Neuroticism decreases with age. All traits are necessary for functioning in a so-called 'normal' society and neither a higher or lower score is better, nor good or bad (McCrae & Costa 2003, 51-52).

The personality traits can explain the different experiences of cult members in the same cult. Depending on an individual's place on the spectrum of the personality traits, the response and behaviour of an individual can be better understood. For example, for an individual high on the extraversion spectrum, public humiliation by a cult leader may not be as traumatic as for another individual on the high side of introversion. While an individual on the introversion side will cope better alone after leaving the cult than the one on the extraversion side of the spectrum. For this reason, the inherent personality traits of a former member need to be considered as part of the reintegration process.

3.3 Values and their impact on behaviour

Hartman (2011) refers to *Intrinsic*, *Extrinsic*, and *Systemic* dimensions of value that give impetus to beliefs and thoughts that result in emotions and behaviour. Pomeroy (2015) refers to these values embodied in an individual as representing a *feeler*, a *doer*, or a *thinker*. He points out that they are a strong influence on the construction of identity, personhood, and self-esteem. How they are structured can contribute positively or negatively. For these values to function optimally there needs to be balance and flexibility.

There should be a reciprocal interaction between these dimensions if one allows the dominance of another to serve a useful purpose the others should in return give dominance to another dimension for another purpose. These dimensions must serve the right reasons. Unhealthy deviations from these dimensions can result in serious problems. Pomeroy (2015) describes these deviations as follows:

Feelers that deviate can experience depression, narcissism, and loss of empathy to the point of psychopathic behavior, shyness, cynicism, alienation, and disturbed communication.

Doers can experience self-defeating perfectionism and procrastination, compulsive behaviors, and rebellion against authority.

Thinkers that deviate can experience obsessions, paranoia, fanaticism, anger, extreme nationalism, and religiosity. The individual can become more of an observer than a participant in life.

These dimensions of value can unfortunately be powerful tools in the hands of abusers to obtain a required outcome. Some cults include strategies that consider personality and value dimensions when they proselyte new members. Hassan (1988:41), a former member of *the Unification Church of Christ (Moonies)* explained how he sorted individuals he approached into groups of *Feelers, Doers, Thinkers, and Believers* to tailor his approach to be attractive to the individual. For example, a doer is a person that looks for challenges. In this case, the challenges a cult offer will be presented to stimulate interest in the cult. A believer on the other hand might look for biblical proof for any action.

The cult proselyting process engages the personality and values dimensions of the individual to serve as validations, firstly, for the legitimacy of the cult and secondly, to approve the individual's suitability for and contribution to the group. Cult culture employs an authoritarian approach – everything is controlled and although an image of utopia, love and warmth is displayed, it is all a disguise and artificial. Pseudo-Christian cults masterfully use the biblical façade as validation that the cult is a safe environment.

4. Reintegration process

It became evident from the above study that the reintegration process of former pseudo-cult members into society is a complex endeavour. Some of the important contributors and influences that must be considered in developing a strategy for reintegration are pre-cult environment and pre-cult

personality needs, personality traits, values, influences and impact of cult programming and psychological manipulation, self-reinforcement of the cult values (self-deception), addictive disorders and possible symptoms of harm (psychological scars) as a result of cult culture.

The starting point in developing a strategy for reintegration is to familiarize oneself with the underlying biblical teaching of the group and the impact of it on its members. It is important to note that the “truth” of the cult is generally presented as the solution to the unsatisfactory lifestyle of the person before joining the cult. The formative process of the cult member is based on and justified by that truth. Against this backdrop each of the above aspects needs to be considered by asking and finding answers to the following questions: What was the pre-cult environment of the cult member in terms of relationships with parents? What were the contents of their environment – was it loving, violent or “normal”? Was there abusive behaviour present in this environment that could contribute to joining the cult perhaps as an escape mechanism? It is also important to note that deficiencies before becoming a member of the cult may persist and need to be addressed.

Where on the spectrum of the personality traits theory can the cult member be placed? What is learned from the individual’s interaction with people and response to their environment and influences? Which approach is most suitable in this instance?

What value dimension seems to be dominant in the individual? Is the individual a feeler, doer, thinker, or believer? Is any deviation of the main value present? The cult utilized the dominant value of the individual to influence and convince them to become part of the cult as well as control them. How can that be undone and corrected?

How did the individual take responsibility and internalize the cult indoctrination and programming based on their personality traits? Different personalities deal differently with influences and environments. On what level was the individual’s relationship with other members and the leader? How does it impact the individual’s reintegration? How important are the relationships they had in the cult? Can contact with former members assist in the reintegration process? Another very important aspect of the psychological manipulation process is whether the member understands what traits they have and how the process has impacted and changed them. Without an understanding of these influences, the member will rationalize everything encountered circularly as they were taught in the cult. It is also important as part of this process that a member must not only understand the process but admit that they have been misled and subtly influenced by the cult and its practices to

become the person the cult wanted them to be. Furthermore, this process has led to their dependency on the cult, and they have become addicted to the practices of the cult similar to a person who has addictive disorders. The addictive disorders found in cult members are attachment insecurity, mental and physical disorders, social impairment, social learning, and family relationships. Similar to a person with an addiction disorder, the cult member needs a 'fix' to carry on. The member needs to understand how they became entrapped through a process of self-reinforcement by continuously justifying the things they did not agree with. They have succumbed to the pressure of the cult expectations by making themselves believe that it is right (self-deception). The possible symptoms or scars the individual has as a result of their membership need to be determined.

It is also important to note that one of the strategies to lure and attract members to a cult is the belief that the member's former life was not successful. Doubt in the person's former life was created to make what the cult offers irresistible (Pretorius, 2007). The view of the cult member on their life before the cult must be determined because they must be reintegrated into the society that they were made to believe is a defective world and lifestyle.

4.1 Strategy possibilities and guidelines

The following guidelines may assist in creating a strategy for reintegration. What cult members have experienced in a cult can be seen as trauma similar to that caused by addiction disorders. Members could end up in a cult as a result of deficiencies that contributed to their vulnerability in life before the cult. The approach should be all-encompassing to not only reverse the effects of the cult influence but also address possible causes for a vulnerability that led to membership. Pseudo-Christian cult members' indoctrination and lifestyle is firmly established on the belief that they are doing God's will confirmed by the twisted application and interpretation of scripture. The main aim of reintegration is to point out and correct this false foundation of their belief.

4.1.1 Build trust and create a safe environment

It is evident once a cult member realizes that they have been lied to and deceived in a so-called "safe environment" their trust in all people and organizations has been given a serious blow. One challenge that cult members often face is the fact that their experience is viewed as 'unbelievable'. According to SAMSHA (2014), any trauma experienced creates the sense of feeling 'different' from others and that resonates with former cult members.

This aspect is fundamental to the reintegration process. To work through and address the aforementioned questions, the cult member should find a place where they are trusted and respected as an individual and where the sharing of their experience is accepted and valued. A safe environment should be created for them to return to being themselves where they do not have to act according to their pseudo-personality or double identity, also known as a cult identity (Pretorius, 2007). This environment is the place where the counselor and the former cult member identify challenges together and work towards solutions. It is the place where the cult identity that used to be the coping mechanism of cult members is progressively replaced by the member's personal identity that was formerly suppressed to fit the cult life. Healing and restoration of the person start with reconnecting to their real identity by redirecting the individual back into the realm of that personality that will create an opportunity for discussion and correction. A good place to start is to recall the pleasant memories of the life before the cult as a foundation to work through challenges.

4.1.2 Understanding the process of proselyting and integration into the cult culture

Once the trusting environment is established, the former cult member must understand the process of psychological manipulation that led to their membership in the cult. They must also understand how the individual employed self-reinforcement and self-redefining processes to lock themselves up in the cult. A reverse of this process is needed to untangle the member from the web of the cult. It is equally important to explain how the cult member has internalized the cult lingo that embedded certain views on life and the world (Singer & Lalich, 1995). These loaded languages must also be explained, as well as the hold they have on the cult member. A new language declaring and professing another side of living needs to be established. For example, a common lingo used is "if you think, you sink", which reinforced a member's commitment to the cult. This can be replaced with "if you do not think, you will sink", reinforcing the importance of evaluating and questioning things.

4.1.3 Expose misuse of biblical interpretations in pseudo-Christian cults

There are two aspects present when a member leaves a cult namely: (a) their getting out of the cult and (b) getting the cult out of them. The internalized thinking and evaluating process does not simply leave

the member when they leave the cult. Members mostly leave the cult with a sense of failure – that they have failed personally but more so that they failed God all based on a twisted understanding of scripture. They leave with a sense of distrust in their own faith, other Christians and Christian organizations. Their personal faith and relationship with God and their personal reading and interpreting of the Bible is affected as they battle with the internalized “truth” of the cult. It is essential to determine what scriptures were used to establish their belief system and to present the error in the interpretation to point out the false premises of their belief. At the same time the true meaning of scripture needs to be restored.

4.1.4 Reunite with Family

One of the first and most important areas of relationships that are abandoned when the cult is first joined is the family. Former cult members must reestablish family support (Lawder, Howsare, & Byrne, 2013). If the family relationship has not been conducive to a strong bond before the cult membership, that is an area that could be improved upon to assist the member in the reintegration process. It is essential for the family to also understand the process of psychological manipulation to have an understanding of the behaviour of the loved one and to be able to assist on this healing journey.

4.1.5 Redefined purpose and meaning

For a long time while under the influence of the cult, members are subjected to the prescriptions and rules of the cult culture. Over time they have not only built their lives around the cult beliefs but also built walls around themselves to be insulated from “negative” outside influences. Cult living is a continuous endeavour of offering up more and more in an attempt to be recognized as a worthy member. In the end, the cult has become their total focus, and life outside of that loses its meaning. When they leave the cult, they enter back into a world that they have unlearned to maintain themselves in and with minimal or no networks and resources. They mostly doubt the validity of the Bible message since commitment in what they believed to be the truth turned out to be untrue, leaving a sense of distrust in the Bible and their reality of God.

Former cult members' purpose and values in life must be re-established. Their life needs to change from the cult's goals to their own goals. Their role and importance in society must be reestablished

and taken up. One way of regaining the meaning of life is to start to partake in society, even if it is in a small way, for example getting involved in a support group to share their journey.

4.1.6 Replace the cult mission with a personal mission

Cult members' priorities change when they leave a cult but unfortunately, the cult's mission is still internalized and will not just disappear through only the change in environment. The mission of the cult needs to be replaced by a new mission – a mission outside of the cult framework. The former cult member(s) needs to find a personal mission to focus their energy on. Without a new mission, the cult member will find themselves in a cyclical routine, searching for purpose since their purpose had been in the cult mission for a long time. A new mission will help in creating a sense of purpose and value in life and will create opportunities for ambitions.

To create a personal mission, the former cult member must reach the personal self instead of the cult self. According to Gestalt Psychotherapy a way to reach the personal self can be by asking the following questions: Who are you? What do you like? (Philippon, 2001). Hassan (2018) stresses the importance that former members must take control of their minds and the way they think. Success in this regard can be obtained through a coach who models what might work to regain their power to reach their potential.

A way to start with a new mission is to find something such as a hobby whether art, sport, or craft, and set goals to be achieved in making something or competing with someone.

4.1.7 Volunteer in organizations that work with former members

Former cult members possess a wealth of information gained through their experience in a cult that most likely includes experiences of hardship and abusive manipulation firsthand. They can not only identify with those leaving a cult but can also share their recovery on the way to healing. They can further be valuable in a support structure. Focusing on others' hardships will bring a clearer understanding of and healing to their situation. It further creates the sense of 'not being alone'.

Former cult members are mostly reluctant to commit to a new way of life afterwards because of threats by the cult leader. It is not a bad thing if it established a sense of caution but must not be used to avoid reintegration. They should be taught to evaluate groups before joining

anyone again and if they feel that it is safe, they can get involved but must know that they may leave at any time if the circumstances change. Those helping former cult members can play an important role in teaching how to discern dangerous groups.

4.1.8 Address floating

Floating describes the sense that former cult members have when leaving the cult – they feel useless and if they do not fit in, they may have the sense that they are just floating. Singer and Lalich (1995) provide good antidotes for this dissociative state. The person must keep a record of how often it happens, they must divert from it when they feel they are falling into it, suppress the feelings and do not act on them, and minimize the frightening feeling by the assurance that they are no longer in the cult. They need to learn to get out of the dissociative state with a change of scenery. Most importantly, they must work on reestablishing a trust in the Bible and its teachings that guides their life.

4.1.9 Do things that are meaningful

The former cult member can start to do small things that satisfy them and when these are achieved, they must learn to enjoy the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Some examples are feeding the animals or watering the garden or taking fruit to the neighbor. To break free from the strong need for cult approval, the former member must realize that these actions fall outside the parameters of the cult and do not need external approval. Joining a former cult member care group where they can openly share their journey and learn from one another will add value to their reintegration.

4.1.10 Patience and understanding

Recovering from a cult and its indoctrination is a journey and does take time. Those that are in the process of reintegrating into society will experience “ups and downs” and it is important that those assisting them on this journey be patient and understanding. Common reactions of cult members when they realize that they have been deceived and abused are anger, hate, and sadness. They feel cheated and let down by those they trusted with their life. It is a huge shock that they need to overcome. Members need to be allowed time to work through these emotions to take back their lives while a counselor assists.

5. Conclusion

As indicated above the process of reintegrating former cult members back into society is complicated and many factors need to be considered and aspects need to be involved in this process. Greatest of all is understanding the impact pseudo-Christian cult life and cult dynamics have had on an individual's spiritual life and view of God. The former cult member needs to be able to share freely as they feel ready in safe spaces. The member's trust has been scarred by coming from a so-called safe environment where trust was broken and they were deceived and cheated. Their support system needs to be patient and realize it will be a journey and to commit to walking with them on that journey on the rainy days as well as sunny days, always knowing and professing that "there is a life after the cult life".

It is advisable to get the help of qualified and knowledgeable counselors to facilitate this process, to continually assure the former members that their circumstances will change and to stay with them on their journey.

There is a need for former cult members to join the ranks of the counselors to assist in this important task of reintegrating members back into society. There is also a need for the establishment of organizations to provide support and information and for these to be a platform through which former cult members can share and contribute.

An area for further research in the field of cults is what should happen to cult structures and assets once they have been exposed as abusive and deceptive and are dissolved by court order. How should devout members be treated and accommodated if such a cult ceases to exist in terms of time in the cult and possessions gifted to the cult?

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