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Research project

Title:
An exploration of the methods used by therapists to address instances of re-traumatising in therapeutic meetings with former members of psychologically abusive cults.

Abstract:

Various authors have disagreed about whether or not cults are harmful to individuals; whether members experience trauma during their time in the cult; and whether they continue to experience cult related traumas in the post-cult life. And, if this is the case, is there a special form of post cult post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)? Does potential exist for re-traumatisation during therapy? And, if it occurs, what is the therapists' attitude to the incidence of trauma and what is the recommended approach to address it? This proposed study argues that some members are traumatised by their cult experience and asserts that there is a distinct form of PTSD (Post- Cult PTSD) which increases the likelihood of retraumatising, including when the ex-member is in a therapeutic meeting. The study sets out, using Grounded Theory, to explore the experience of therapists who regularly work with former cult members and understand how to recognise it, anticipate it and address it during therapy sessions.

Introduction:

Many articles and books have been written about cults but there is little research documented on how therapists, in therapy sessions with former members of "psychologically abusive cults" (PAC), address incidents of re-traumatisation. By first establishing that many former members of PAC are traumatised by their cult experiences and defining the nature of these traumas, this research then sets out

to explore what therapists understand about the traumatising effects of being a member of a PAC, how they anticipate the potential for ex-members to be re-traumatised, how they recognise signs of re-traumatisation and how they deal with any instances of re-traumatisation during therapy sessions. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide some guidance to health professionals working with such individuals. Additionally, a parallel study could be conducted with these therapists to understand more deeply the therapeutic modalities used, why they were chosen, and how they have been effective.

The proposed Research Design will utilise the Inductive (interpretative) epistemology of Grounded Theory, because, in the absence of any existing theories, the study wants to allow a theory to emerge from the data. It will initially be conducted with a small sample of therapists, who will be selected using convenience sampling, and, then, additional participants will be selected utilizing theoretical and snowball sampling methods. Data collection and analysis will be conducted interactively based on Grounded Theory's defined procedures. The procedures will be followed to a point of "saturation", which will hopefully provide some clear outcomes as well as indicate scope for further studies.

A literature review, the research method, interactive data collection (including sampling), and data analysis (including interviewing) will be outlined as well as issues of Validity, Credibility, and Generalizability. Ethical conduct (approvals, including Ethics application, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and privacy) will also be included. A Reflexive Diary with some example entries has been included in an Appendix.

Literature review:

Much has been researched and written about cults, frequently with different terminology. This review will initially define what is meant by a Psychologically Abusive Cult (PAC), and establish that the coercive methods described in the PAC definition do actually occur in cults. It will then describe the psychologically harmful effects of these practices, with a particular focus on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), including the trauma related topics of Triggers, Floating, Phobias and Dissociation. The review will discuss some studies which disagree with these findings, and finally it will explore suggested therapeutic methods for working with former PAC members and identify gaps in terms of lack of awareness of the potential to re-traumatise during therapy, and also a lack of defined responses to be taken in the event of a re-traumatising event during therapy.

Overall, then, little research has been conducted into how therapists address issues of re-traumatising former members of PAC during therapy sessions. This research explores this topic.

Definition:

The term "cult" has been applied, often pejoratively, to a variety of organisations, such as mainstream religions, corporations, pyramid marketing organisations, (for example, the description of Amway being a "business cult", including "mystical experiences in the early stages of indoctrination" (Szimhart, 2012, p.16)), Evangelical churches, personal growth workshops ("which use the same types of intense influence techniques that are identified with cults" (Singer, 2003, p.183)), small enclosed groups, psychotherapy groups, and political groups.

Equally, varying terminology is used by multiple authors to describe the latter three groups. For example, the most common is New Religious Movements (NRM), but other forms include coercive sects, pseudo-religious totalitarian

groups, authoritarian sects, destructive sects, psychologically manipulative groups (Almendros et al., 2011, p.62), intentional community (Gibson, 2011, p.413) charismatic groups (Coates, 2010, p.296), world rejecting groups (Ayella, 1990, p.562).

Even though all these organisations use techniques of influence and persuasion to some degree, I want to make it clear that I am not arguing that all of the above are Psychologically Abusive Cults (PAC), nor, even, that all New Religious Movements (NRMs) are, in fact, PACs. That is not to say that some of the organisations mentioned above do not do psychological harm to their members, rather that PAC's are distinguished by both the consistency and depth of harm to their members from their practices, methods and techniques. This is a fluid concept since it is difficult to quantify this "consistency and depth", because, at one extreme, for some ex-members their recollections of their experiences in the cult have been generally positive, whereas at the other extreme, some demonstrate suicide ideation.

It is important to emphasise at this point, that the risk to members of PACs is not based on the *beliefs* of the particular organisation, but rather the on *abusive practices* and *psychological manipulation* being perpetrated and "on the various criminal acts they may invite"(Almendros et al. 2001, p.62). These practices will be described in more detail in the following.

I have identified specific criteria for an organisation to be defined as a PAC. The criteria incorporate *deceptive recruitment practices, influence and persuasion methods, restrictive conditions,* linked with *Thought Reform/ mind control techniques.* These are described in more detail in the following:

Deceptive recruitment practices:

Lofland (1977, pp.805-818) outlines the stages of recruitment of new cult members, being "Picking-up" (casual meeting followed, for example, by an invitation to a lecture or seminar without identifying the organisation behind the event); "Hooking" (surrounding candidate with friendly, enthusiastic people vitally interested in the candidates personal interests and moving the candidate on to the next event, for example, "a weekend workshop"); "Encapsulating" (at the highly controlled "event", being kept extremely busy over very long hours, always accompanied by a "buddy", participating in lots of group activities and being presented with the cults simple solutions to major life issues); "Loving" ("love bombing"- "to drench recruits with approval and love"); and "Committing" (for example, subtly extending "the weekend" and gradually drawing the recruit into increased levels of commitment). Lofland (1977, p.806) describes this recruitment process as "one of the most ingenious, sophisticated and effective conversion organisations ever devised", and emphasises that the whole process is designed to inculcate the prospective member without that person having any awareness of the sophisticated process of progressive commitment that they are participating in. The following is a quote from Jeannie Mills, an ex-member of the Peoples Temple, who was later found murdered. (Dubrow-Marshall, 2010, p.2).

> "When you meet the friendliest people you have ever known, who introduce you to the most loving group of people you've ever encountered, and you find the leader to be the most inspired, caring and compassionate and understanding person you've ever met, and then you learn that the cause of the group is something you never dared hope could be accomplished, and all of this sounds too good to be true – *it probably is too good to be true!* Don't give up your education, your hopes, and ambitions to follow a rainbow."

Influence and Persuasion methods:

Singer (2003, pp.58-59) draws clear distinctions between different influence methods in her Continuum of Influence and Persuasion in which she compares methods of *Persuasion* (Education, Advertising, Propaganda, Indoctrination and Thought Reform) with *Elements of the Communication.* Thought Reform is at the extreme end of the spectrum implying deceptiveness, a closed body of knowledge, one sided communication and an attempt to keep the follower in the cult forever.

Restrictive Conditions:

Singer (2003, pp.64-69) defines conditions - all of which must be present- which facilitate the execution of the Thought Reform program. These conditions are: *Unawareness*: The person being "changed" must be unaware that there is a step by step process being conducted to change them. *Control of the environment*, particularly time, so the candidate does not have personal thinking time to ruminate on their experiences. *Powerlessness:* Inculcate a sense of powerlessness: deprive person of their normal support system; use of "in-group" language; unfamiliar songs, games, activities, stories to disorient them. *Behaviour modification:* "old" beliefs and "old" behaviours are demeaned and only the values, views and behaviours of the cult are acceptable. This is achieved via a system of rewards and punishments. *Closed system*. Both the logic and authority of the group are controlled. There is no tolerance for criticism of the leader, who must always be "right"; nor any criticisms of the tenets, dogmas, rules, or behaviours of the group.

Thought Reform:

Lifton (1989) identified eight themes for promoting behavioural and attitude change in totalitarian environments. They are:

Milieu control: Controlling all communication, both internal and external to the cult, which incorporates a hierarchical structure demanding total obedience from the members as reflected in a strict daily program of rituals, overwork, busy-ness, with limited rest and sleep. Outside contact is restricted in order to isolate the member from their support group. Spying on members on behalf of the leader is encouraged. The effects of this are a reduction in the members' ability to make critical judgments and a predisposition for them to look to the group/ leader for information, (particularly spiritual) rather than from outside sources. (Dubrow-Marshall, 2010, p.4).

Loading the language: This is the substitution of contemporary language with unique jargon, a "group speak" (often incomprehensible to "outsiders"), which reinforces the separation from those outside the cult and is designed to strengthen the "omnipotence" of the group and the leader. Complex problems are reduced to very simple, even one word answers, which are constantly repeated, often in chants. (Dubrow-Marshall, 2010, p.5). It includes the use of thought terminating, highly simplified clichés to quell conflicting thoughts, for example, responding to any criticism of the cult: "*They don't know what we're doing*"; "*They don't know what they're talking about*"; "*We're doing good work here*"; "*We are transcending our egos and becoming higher beings and they are still sitting in their shit*". The effect of this is to diminish judgment and critical thinking by the member.

Demand for purity: Members are required to judge themselves against the "black and white", perfectionistic standards of the cult, and guilt and shame are induced when followers are made to compare these standards against their former "impurities". One effect of this, in conjunction with other thought reform

techniques, is to make it difficult for the member to develop or maintain any conventional, societal concept of morality. (Dubrow-Marshall, 2010, p.5).

The Cult of confession: This is closely linked with the Demand for Purity and involves confessing, frequently publicly, all their "impurities" (and particularly their "sins" prior to joining the group). Its objective is to increase the members' sense of powerlessness and to look to the leader as the source of "salvation". At the same time it is designed to increase the distance between the member and their former life, family and friends, the consequence of which is an increased commitment to the cult (Singer, 2003, p.72).

Mystical manipulation: The use of pre-planned supposedly spontaneous mystical experiences to demonstrate the enigmatic skills of cult leader. One example of this is explained by Singer (2003, pp.128-131), when she discusses hyperventilation (over-breathing and repetitive sighing). Cult leaders will conduct group sessions in which members, in unison, and frequently accompanied by chanting, will exhale rapidly, forcefully and sharply. The effects of this are light headedness, a feeling of being on a "high", accompanied by loss of judgment and an inability to think critically. In its extreme it can lead to a range of physical symptoms such as tingling in the extremities, ringing in the ears, racing of the heart, even fainting. Cult leaders exploit this experience and describe it as "bliss" – the experience of taking in the spirit, of "being on the path". Note that this is not a criticism of this particular technique, per se, because such techniques have been claimed to be helpful in some therapeutic modalities, rather it is an example as to how such a technique can be manipulated to cement the influence of the leader.

Sacred Science: The cult leader positions themselves as close to "God", as "God's" spokesperson, with the highest possible level of enlightenment and knowledge accompanied by "unique insights into the science of the world and

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universe" (Dubrow-Marshall, 2010, p.5). It is positioned so that no member would dare criticise this ultimate science. Its effect is to inhibit any search for knowledge and discourage independent thinking. (Jenkinson, 2011).

Doctrine over the person: The member is engulfed in the cult's doctrine which is "the consummate truth" and which must be adhered to absolutely in order that the member can achieve "redemption". In many instances, past events in the person's life are retrospectively revised to fit in with the doctrine. Similarly, anything which seems to contradict the doctrine must also be either denied or deconstructed. Its effect, once again, is to exercise control and diminish any questioning and critical thinking.

Dispensing with Existence: This doctrine dictates that the cult members' previous life, career, interests, experiences, and previous relationships have no value; the only valid relationships are those within the cult. Additionally, the cult members are encouraged to see themselves as an elitist, select group, who have unique knowledges. Anyone who is a non-member, including family and friends, is "doomed". This has the effect of reinforcing the followers adherence to the group, because "without it you will not survive". It also permits members to exploit non-members for the benefit of the group.

Definition: Drawing these elements together provides a precise definition of Psychologically Abusive Cults: A cult is an organisation or group that, in a substantial way:

(a)   engages in deceptive recruitment practices to gain new members and

 Langone (1993, cited in Jenkinson, 2008, pp.199-200) states:

"(b) Exhibits great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea, or thing,

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(c) Uses a thought-reform program to persuade, control and socialise members (i.e., to integrate them into the group's unique pattern of relationships, beliefs, values and practices),

(d) Systematically induces states of psychological dependency in members,

(e) Exploits members to advance the leadership's goals, and

(f) causes psychological harm to members, their families and the community."

Evidence of these practices and methods.

The following presents the evidence of the prevalence of these deceitful practices and coercive methods in cults:

Deceptive recruitment practices:

A variety of authors including Singer (2003, pp.105-124); Hassan (1990, pp.41-42); Lalich (1988, pp.150-155); Lalich & Tobias (2006, pp.22-27); Jenkinson (2008, pp.200-201, 206-207) confirm the existence of such practices; the former one from her work with over 3000 ex-cult members and the latter four from personal experience.

Influence methods, Restrictive Conditions and Thought Reform:

From various authors' personal experience:

Among many such recountings, Lalich (1988) describes her experience with the psychologically abusive practices of the USA based Democratic Workers Party cult and uses her knowledge of these practices to analyse the Heaven's Gate cult and its tragic aftermath. Similarly, Hassan (1990) describes his experience with these techniques in the Unification Church ("Moonies). Falk (2009) details his involvement with the Self Realisation Fellowship, a Los Angeles based cult, and,

based on his experience, provides published critiques of many of the prominent spiritual leaders, such as Rajneesh, Satya Sai Baba, Ken Wilbur, Andrew Cohen, Werner Erhard, Swami Rama Ramakrishna, Krishnamurti, Yogahanda, Meher Baba, Amrit Desai, Ram Dass, Sri Chinmoy, Aurobindo, Yogi Bajahan, L. Ron Hubbard, Muktandanda, Satchin Danandai, Adi Da, Chogym Trungpa Vinekananda.

From Case studies and Mini case studies of former cult members:

Case studies are in depth analyses presenting multiple elements of an ex-members cultic experiences. One example is Lifton (1989) who presents a limited number of detailed case studies of both Western and Chinese prisoners who were subjected to Communist Chinese "thought reform" techniques in the Korean War. Another example of many is Goldberg (2003, pp.18-26) who outlines the case of "Andrew and Barbara" in describing the control exercised by cult leaders over their members sex lives, for example, determining the frequency and nature of sexual activity, encouragement to have sex with numerous partners or alternatively enforced celibacy, ritualised sex with cult leaders and sometimes encouraging adult members to engage in sex with children. In another example, Jenkinson (2008, pp.199-223) presents the case, in a bible based cult, of "Jenny/Magdalene", who was verbally attacked and beaten 40 times with a cane, because she had indicated her slight displeasure at having to get the cult leaders breakfast. After many such beatings, she did what she was told and acquiesced when she was assigned to bring men into the cult, fully believing that it was the work of God to sleep with men in order to bring them into the cult.

Mini case studies are examples used to highlight only one or two aspects of the ex-members' time in the cult. A few, of many, instances are: Lalich & Tobias (2006, pp. 67-70) who use the example of David Koresh and the Branch Davidians to describe the characteristics and behaviours of cult leaders; Lalich & Tobias (2006, pp.89-90) present scenarios of "Cynthia N", who attempted suicide three months after leaving a cult and "George O" (ibid. pp.96-97), who also attempted suicide when he was rejected from a political cult because he had voiced criticism of the lack of support he received when he was arrested, convicted and jailed for selling drugs to raise money for the cult; Singer (2003, pp.142-147) describes the effects of frequent and extensive meditation in cults: "John" (fainting, blackouts, anxiety attacks, loss of boundaries); "Lisa" (dissociative experiences especially "waist high orange fog"); and "Bruno" (loss of boundaries)

Appropriateness of the term "psychologically abusive":

Studies suggest that psychological abuse does exist in cults. For example, a study by Langone and Chambers (1991, cited in Almendros et al. 2011, p.65) with 108 former cult members, who were asked to rate 20 terms relating to their experience in the cult, indicated that the terms participants found more relevant were the ones related to trauma and abuse, the first positions being for "*psychological trauma*" and "*psychological abuse*".

Evidence of Harm:

The following provides evidence of the harm done by PAC:

A variety of authors including Clark (1979, cited in Martin et al. 1992, p.51); Goldberg & Goldberg, 1982; Hochman, 1984; Schwartz, 1985; Singer, 1978, 1987; Spero, 1982; Swartling & Swartling, 1992; Temerlin & and Temerlin, 1982;

West & Singer, 1980; conclude that clinical investigations of ex cult members confirm that their cult experience has contributed to a significant level of distress for them. Additional studies supporting these clinical observations include Conway, Siegelman, Carmichael & Coggins (1986) with 353 ex-cultists from 48 different groups; Galanter (1983) with 66 Unification Church, ex-members, for whom the author uses the term "dropouts"; and Knight (1986) with 58 former members of a psychotherapy cult (all cited in Martin et al. 1992, pp.51-52). Further, Martin et al. (1992, pp.54-65) in their study of 124 former cult members in which they compared results on the Milton Clinical Multiaxal Inventory, the Beck Depression Inventory, Hopkins Symptom Checklist and the Staff Burnout Scale reported clinical levels of distress in the former cultists. "Overall, this population of ex-cultists is as distressed as some psychiatric inpatients" (ibid. p.65). Continuing (ibid. p.66), they argue that the study does support the claim that dependency and distortion of personality are outcomes of cultic involvement and that a central psychological symptom outcome is that of dissociation.

Dubrow-Marshall (2010, p. 11) using a sample of 567 former members, found significant relationships between EGIS (Extent of Group Identity Scale) and GPA (Group Psychological Abuse), and between EGIS and measures of depression (the Beck Depression Inventory), dissociation (the Hopkins dissociation screen) and anxiety (the Symptom Checklist 90 Revised Global Severity Index, Derogatis et al.). In another study, Winocour et al. (1997, cited in Almendros et al. 2011, p. 68) based on the results of a study using the ICE Index (detailed in the Appendix), reported a clear differentiation between people who had a previous involvement in cults and those who had not and also reflected a clear relationship between the current distress of former members and the level of their cult involvement.

In one of the few available qualitative studies of cults, Gibson et al. (2011, pp.413-434) explored sexual abuse in the Centrepoint community in New Zealand. The authors found evidence that children were encouraged to join the

cult because of the interest in some of the adult members in having sex with children. The authors spoke of how communities like Centrepoint use sessions described as "Therapy" to keep members compliant and spoke of one particular "therapeutic session" designed to encourage openness around sexuality by having children and adolescents being required to take off all the clothes in front of the group and "discuss their body while looking in the mirror".

One significant finding was "there were many kinds of sexual abuse that occurred to children at Centrepoint" and "While participants did not generally recognise what had happened to them as sexual abuse at the time, they were able to identify this retrospectively".

Details of the Harm:

The following provides more specifics on the nature of ex-members distress: Martin et al, (1992, p.51); Singer (1979, cited in Lalich & Tobias, 2006, pp.116-120); agree that some of the major areas of post cult difficulties are depression, loneliness, indecisiveness, distressful incidence of slipping into altered states, dissociative symptoms such as "floating" (a phenomenon similar to drug "flashbacks"), and inability to concentrate. It is important to make it clear at this point that not all former members exhibit all of these issues. Singer, (1979, p.75), states "Not all former cultists have all of these problems, nor do most have them in severe or extended form", and Langone, M. (1991) says "some cults hurt some people some of the time".

Trauma Related Harm, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Post- Cult PTSD:

In this section I will validate Whitsett's (2010) assertion that there is a specific form of PTSD, Post- Cult PTSD, which is a direct result of members' experiences in cults. I will achieve this by firstly discussing the general symptoms

of PTSD, as outlined by Herman (1997, pp.35-47). I will then present the unique characteristics of Post- Cult PTSD.

As background to this discussion, it is important to understand that cult members are often kept either in a state of *hyperarousal* (emotionally aroused, easily startled) as a result of cultic practices such as, using Bateson's double bind ("if you're not getting this, it's not because the cult leaders dogma is wrong, you are just not trying hard enough!") , public confessions, poorly defined and ever changing boundaries, sleep and food deprivation and many others; or in a state of *hypoarousal* (flat, numb, lethargic, not fully present) through extensive meditation, chanting, and hypnotic guided sessions.(Jenkinson, 2011).

Herman (1997, pp.35-47) defines three distinct symptoms of PTSD: *Hyperarousal*, *Intrusion* and *Constriction*. Each of these is described in more detail in the following:

The first of Herman's symptoms: Hyperarousal.

Generic PTSD Hyperarousal: Pitman (1990, cited in Herman (1997, p.36) describes hyperarousal as a combination of phobias and generalized anxiety, and is experienced physiologically as an increased "startle response" to general stimuli and an intense response to stimuli related to the traumatic event. It includes hypervigilance - "an elevated baseline of arousal: their bodies are always on the alert to danger". (McFall et al.1989, p.252).

Post Cult PTSD Hyperarousal: What distinguishes this version is that some of the ex- members' phobias, to which they respond as presented above, have been *deliberately installed by the cult/ cult leader* (Hassan, 2000, p.233). Equally, the ex-members, as a consequence of having extended periods of hyperarousal in the cult, have a significantly increased predisposition to physiologically recognize and respond to these installed phobias (ibid. p.233). One of the most common

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ways for cult leaders to install phobias is to make suggestions, use testimonials, or tell stories during psychologically vulnerable altered states, such as extensive meditation, chanting, guided hypnotic sessions and so on (ibid. pp.242-245). Phobias frequently relate to the world outside the cult and, for example, they instill the fear of the dire circumstances relating to the cult members' physical health, their mental health, their social life or their spiritual life (their "chance of redemption"), if the member ever leaves the cult.(ibid. pp.236-241). In addition, cult leaders often use information of individuals' vulnerabilities obtained during Public Confession sessions as the basis of a phobia, which they then "install". The implication for therapists is that the client could be in therapy in a state of hyperarousal including hypervigilance and that installed phobias could surface during the session.

The Second of Herman's symptoms: Intrusion.

Generic PTSD Intrusion: Herman (1997, p.37) defines this as "long after the danger is past, traumatised people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present". As a result of "triggers", which are "seemingly insignificant reminders" of the trauma, the traumatic moment instantaneously bursts into consciousness and is experienced either as "flashbacks" during waking states or as "traumatic nightmares" while asleep. What is significant about these flashbacks and nightmares is that, because they have become encrypted into an abnormal form of memory where they are stored as graphic images and sensations without context and verbal narrative, they recur with "the emotional force of the original event", with a heightened reality. The consequence of this for the traumatised person is never feeling "safe", as triggers can occur in what are normally "safe" environments. (Brett &Ostroff, 1985, pp.422-423).

Post-Cult PTSD Intrusion: Several aspects distinguish this version: the *nature of the nightmares*, the *range of triggers* to which the former cult member is vulnerable and a *phobic avoidance of triggers*.

The *nightmares* of former cult members are distinctly "themes of death, dying, violence and / or loss, helplessness" (Whitsett, 2010).

Former cult members experience a *wide range of triggers*, which reconnect them with often abhorrent cult experiences. For example, a tone of voice, a particular song or chant sung in the cult, a word or a phrase, in fact, any type of sight, sound, smell, taste or sensation can trigger the ex-member. Ex- members frequently have many triggers. Lalich & Tobias (2006, pp.120-121) provide an extensive list of common post-cult triggers:

> *"Sensory triggers are probably the most common: typical ones are:*
>
> - sights*: special colors, flags, pictures of the leader, facial expressions, hand signals, group symbols, items used in group activities rituals, certain buildings or locations;*
>
> - physical sensations*: hunger, fatigue, touches, handshakes, a kiss or caress, massage;*
>
> - sounds*: songs, certain music, slogans, mantras, certain prayers, key words and phrases, a certain rhythm or tone of voice, yelling;*
>
> - smells*: incense, perfume or Cologne of the leader, certain food aromas, room odors, body odors;*
>
> - tastes*: certain foods or liquids, herbs or spices;*
>
> - Plus certain emotions*: feelings of guilt, fear and shame, all of which were encouraged in the cult."*

Phobic avoidance of triggers: Resulting both from their hyperarousal, including hypervigilance, and also from the vividness and emotional force of the flashbacks, many ex-members are confronted with a "double-whammy"- a panic,

a phobic response to the whole idea of triggers themselves; "the fear of the fear" (Whitsett, 2010).

The Third of Herman's symptoms: Constriction.

Generic PTSD Constriction: Different authors use different terms to describe this phenomenon and they all claim that it lies at the heart of the trauma disorders: "Constriction" and "numbing" (Herman); "Floating" (Lalich & Tobias); "Dissociation" (Lifton, Martin et al., Singer); "Splitting" (Lifton). They are all referring to the commonly observed PTSD reaction which has been likened to the "freeze" state in animals when they are attacked (Herman, 1997, p.42) "These detached states of consciousness are similar to hypnotic trance states. They share the same features of surrender of voluntary action, suspension of initiative and critical judgment, subjective detachment or calm, enhanced perception of imagery, altered sensation, including numbness and angalgesia, and distortion of reality including depersonalization (a sense of separation or detachment from your body), derealization ("the world seems unreal") and change in the sense of time". For many, these are very distressing states. (Hilgard, 1977, cited in Herman, 1997, p.43).

Post-Cult PTSD Constriction: A key understanding is that people who go into a dissociative state at the time of the traumatic incident are among those "most likely to develop long-lasting PTSD" (Cardena & Spiegel,1993, pp.474,477) and, as mentioned above, cult members, as a result of extensive periods of *hypoarousal* (meditation, chanting, hypnotic guided sessions, fatigue accompanied by insufficient food), have a much greater predisposition to dissociation, in other words, an increased likelihood of developing "long-lasting PTSD" (Lalich & Tobias, 2006, p.108).

> Former cult members also experience a particular type of
> Constriction. Various authors use different terms to describe the

phenomenon of the former member frequently "floating" between their pre cult and post cult identities/ personalities: "doubling" (Lifton, 2000); "false self" (Winnicott, 1965); "adaptation" (Reber and Reber, 2011); (all cited in Jenkinson, 2008, pp.199-224); "pseudo-personality" (West, 1992, cited in Martin et al. 1992, p.66); "altered persona" (Goldberg, 2006, p.5); "A double self" (Herman, 1997, p.103); "new identity" (Singer, 2003, pp.77-79); "surrender their identity" (Curtis & Curtis, 1993,p.458) and "cult pseudo-personality" (Jenkinson, 2008, pp.199-224). Herman (1997, p. 56) states:

> "traumatised people suffered damage to the basic structures of the self. They lose their trust in themselves, in other people, and in God. Their self esteem is assaulted by experiences of humiliation, guilt and helplessness. Their capacity for intimacy is compromised by intense and contradictory feelings of need and fear. The identity they have formed prior to the trauma is irrevocably destroyed."

Pre-existing psychological problems?

In considering whether many former cult members have pre-existing psychological problems, Martin et al. (1992, p.53) concluded that "the level of psychopathology in the cult joiner population may not be much greater than that of the population as a whole". Similarly, Galanter (1980); Galanter et al (1979); Kilbourne (1983); Kuner (1984): Ungerleider & Wellisch (1983) (all cited in Barker,1986, p.336) report that psychological tests comparing cult members with "normal" population indicate no support for the hypothesis that people who join cults are in some way "abnormally pathetic or weak".

Alternative Explanations:

A range of authors, mostly sociologists, including Bromley and Shupe (1995); Melton (1993), (2004); Lewis & Bromley (1987); Barker (1984, 1986); Robbins & Anthony (1979) (1980); Wright (1991); Coates (2009) disagree with the "thought reform" explanation of cult involvement and, as a consequence, find little evidence of the PTSD symptoms outlined above. Instead, these authors explain the development of New Religious Movements (NRMs) as a sociological phenomenon resulting from several concurrent factors including "rebelliousness" of teenagers seeking separation from parents by choosing an alternative religion to that of their parents ("youth counterculture"); immigration, particularly Asian, accompanied by the introduction of new religions; adverse socio economic conditions; increased tolerance of differences in lifestyle; general population growth; experimentation with alternative communities; and individual models of relationships. In this context, these authors argue that joining an NRM is more of a response to social change/ a need to contribute to urgently needed social change (a "push" from outside) rather than the result of deceptive recruitment practices, that is, it is not from "any 'pull' from the movement" (based) "on their promise to compensate for the shortcomings of the wider society" (Barker, 1986, p.336). Barker (1986, p.337) describes it as a model of "seekership", rather than a "narrative of captivity". Melton (1993, p.108) states:

> *"no issue has been so discussed and seemingly found so much agreement among social scientists as has the assertion of the connection between social turmoil and the emergence of new religions"*

As a result of their studies, these same authors conclude that their own findings of symptoms of distress of people who leave NRMs are definitely not the result of any thought reform techniques, but their symptoms are similar to the distresses associated with major life changes, such as, a divorce or bereavement.

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Studies disputing Thought Reform explanation:

These "sociologist" authors in general strongly disagree with the studies of many of the previously mentioned authors (Martin et al. Langone, Lalich, Singer, Lifton, Hassan, Goldberg); they apply the label Anti-Cult Movement (ACM) to this group and argue that their (the "sociologists'") studies show that it is the involvement by the ACM, particularly during "deprogramming" of former cult members, which has resulted in the Thought Reform explanation and not the prevalence of any such practices in NRMs. [Note: I use the term "sociologist" authors, not in any way to suggest criticism for their profession, but rather to distinguish them as a group and to avoid using the term "Cult apologists", which has been applied to them and which I consider has contributed to the antagonism between this group and the ACM.]

Some examples of these studies are: Lewis (1986, cited in Lewis and Bromley, 1987, p.513) studied 154 members of a number of new religious groups. The study included individuals who had been the subject of influence by ACM and some who had not. Lewis found that "the tendency of ex-members to hold negative, cult-stereotypical attitudes towards their former groups is highly correlated with the extent of their exposure to the socialising influences of the anti-cult movement". He identified the voluntary and involuntary exit counseling as the basis of the process of desocialisation and resocialisation.

Similarly, Solomon (1981, cited in Lewis and Bromley, 1987, p.513) conducted a study with 100 former members of the Unification Church with a similar split of those who had contact with ACM and those who did not. Solomon concluded that the involvement of the ACM influenced the values and attitudes of former members in the direction of the "brainwashing explanation" and argued that this was both a "negative conceptualization" at the time of the ACM intervention and also as a result of ongoing contact with the ACM.

Wright (1984, cited in Lewis and Bromley, 1987, p.513) conducted research on 45 voluntary defectors from Unification Church, International Society for Krishna Consciousness and the Children of God and found very few ex members who used the explanation of mind control as the basis of their connection with these NRMs. "Despite the fact that many of these individuals experience conflict and disillusionment, they were most likely to report themselves as being 'wiser for the experience'".

Lewis and Bromley (1987, p.514-520) conducted a mail survey of 154 members of controversial religious groups with 72 former members being provided by ACM and the balance by snowball sampling. The conclusions are similar to the previously outlined studies and report that the symptoms studied (floating/ altered states; nightmares; amnesia; hallucinations/ delusions; inability to break mental rhythms of chanting; violent outbursts; suicidal/ self-destructive tendencies) are largely related to the degree of influence by the ACM, particularly in relation to whether the means of leaving the NRM was voluntary or involuntary.

Robbins and Anthony (1980. P.69) state "what is described as coercive 'mind control' in the practices of certain authoritarian communal groups may also be viewed as commendable monastic discipline and austerity".

Response to Studies disputing Thought Reform explanation:

Ayella (1990, p.567) argues that NRM researchers frequently label former cult members as "apostates" and denigrate them, as described below on page 26. They discount the accounts of their cult experience (including how they were recruited, their time in the cult, and how they exited) describing them as "atrocity tales" which have been generated during exiting programs. By contrast, these researchers are ever willing to accept the typically positive descriptions by

current cult members about the same aspects of their cult experience. Beckford (1985, cited in Ayella, 1990, p.567) argues similarly, that is, that the same credibility must be given to ex-members as given to current members.

Further, Beckford (1978); Rochford (1985) (both cited in Ayella, 1990, p.567) both highlight how the beliefs, doctrines and dogmas of the cult are a "screen" or construct through which current members are encouraged to reinterpret their past and their present. Balch (1985, cited in Ayella, 1990, pp.567-568) has similarly highlighted how retrospective interpretation must be considered for both current members and for ex-members when they are being interviewed in the studies. Cult recruitment practices are a good example of this. The deceptive practices (as described by Lofland) by their very nature, rely on the potential recruit being unaware of what is being orchestrated. Consequently, unless they participate in recruitment of new members, they remain ignorant of these practices until they are explained in some form of exit counselling.

This resonates with Gibson et al. (2011, pp.413-444) observations (described in more detail on page 13) "While participants did not generally recognise what had happened to them as sexual abuse at the time, they were able to identify this retrospectively".

Studies linking symptoms to major life changes

Wright (1991, p.127) conducted a study which made a detailed comparison between experiences of leaving an NRM with those associated with a dissolution of marriage. Wright argues "The processes, experiences, and symptoms of leavers are strikingly similar to those evidenced by persons facing marital dissolution". Wright (1991, pp. 138-139), as part of this research, provided a compilation of commonly mentioned symptoms appearing in research literature on divorce and apostasy and concludes that the symptoms of "Cult Disaffiliation"

are the same as those of "Divorce". [Note: "apostasy" is the term used by "sociologist researchers" to describe those ex-cult members, who speak negatively about their experiences in the cult.]

Coates (2010, p.307) likens the experience of separation from a cult as similar to other major life transitions, such as the experience of "divorce" (Wright, 1984, 1991), or "leaving a monastery (Maple, 2007).

Response to Studies linking symptoms to major life changes

There are some major difficulties associated with these comparisons. Firstly, in Wright's study the commonly mentioned symptoms used for comparison purposes were not detailed descriptions but typically one or two words. This method makes distinctions very difficult between different degrees of effect of the systems.

Regarding Coates study, several of the circumstances described in conjunction with leaving the NRM, seem to be more extreme than those associated with a divorce or a bereavement. For example, "Laura who was pregnant, Thomas and their five children were kicked out onto the streets in India with no money and nowhere to go" (p.304) or "they're taken everything. What more could they take from me. They're taken my life, they've taken the man I loved, my marriage, my kids and my grand-children, there is nothing else that they could take from me" (p.304).

Sociologist authors relationships with NRM organisations:

Ayella (1990, p.564) draws attention to the fact that in the Bromley and Shupe 1979 study "one of the researchers was acting chair of his university's Sociology department and he agreed, 'on civil libertarian principles', to be faculty sponsor

for a Unification Church campus student organisation. In exchange, Bromley and Shupe were permitted to conduct in-depth interviews and were allowed to observe the group". Further, Ayella (1990, p.570) points out that the authors written work was scruitinised by the Unification Church, who also requested a copy of the researchers questions in advance.

Henn (2006, pp.177-178) discusses Barkers (Barker,1986) six-year study of the "Moonies" including "actually spending six years residing in various centres in a number of different countries, including full engagement with the concepts and language of the church and its members". Singer (2003, p.218) states that the Religious News Service reported in 1989 that the Unification Church (the "Moonies") funded the cost of Dr. Barkers book *The Making of a Moonie* and also paid all her expenses to attend 18 conferences throughout the world (Europe, New York, the Caribbean, Korea and South America). Barker argues her attendance was necessary for her research.

"Push" from Society v's "pull" from the cult:

The "sociologist" authors, including Barker(1986, p.338), have consistently maintained that people who join NRMs are responding to the "push" of major sociological changes, rather than the "pull" of deceptive recruitment campaigns by these organisations. Yet, Barker (1984, cited in Singer, 2003, p.217-218) reports that "recruits are deceived by members not declaring that they are Moonies", but argues that such duplicity does not affect the candidates decision to join. Barker continues that other deceptions such as concealing the true nature of the group, or the fact that the Unification Church has been closely scruitinised by several government agencies, or that Moon lives in luxury are all simply "information for members only."

Language inconsistent with Academic impartiality:

The language used by the "sociology authors" is inconsistent with academic impartiality and in some instances borders on the emotional. For example, Bromley and Shupe (1981, cited in Singer, 2003, p.219) describe ex-members first-person accounts as "tales the atrocity that include the lurid themes of exploitation, manipulation and deception" and that former members are merely "publicity seekers wishing to stand in the limelight and profiteers looking to make money by writing books about their cult experiences". Other examples include: "Atrocity tales" Lewis & Bromley (1987, p.509); Bromley & Shupe (1995, pp.222-236) "vigilante-style abductions", "counter subversion movement", "create a strong sense of frustration, and even panic, among early ACM activists" "ACM ideology was extreme", "the ACM response was to "*demonise*" *NRMs as subversive*", and "affiliations with NRMs outflanked the Maginot Line that families constructed in anticipation of such rebellion"; Melton (2003) "ACM is seen a little more than a meddlesome nuisance"; Robbins & Anthony (1979, p.87) "these activists (former cult members) somewhat resemble the anti-Communist ex-communists of the 50s, who were often in the vanguard of McCarthyism"

Conclusion: In conclusion, the weight of credibility must go to the "ACM authors", especially as the majority of them are recounting either their personal experience of being in a PAC, or as therapists working with large numbers of ex-members of PAC or, in many instances, a combination of both of these. Their research and factually based case studies contrast strongly with the emotional , unscientific language of the "sociologist authors"

Guidelines for therapists:

Lalich & Tobias (2006, p.315-325) and Whitsett (2010), provide some guidelines for psychotherapists in working with former cult members, but make no mention of the risk of re-traumatising.

Giambalvo & Henry (2010, p.4) discuss PTSD and suggest that "survivors recount specific aspects of their cult trauma" during Giambalvo & Henry's weekend therapy workshops for ex-cult members. They do not mention the potential to re-traumatise, nor any discussion of what action to take should a re-traumatising incident occur.

Herman (1997, pp.134-139) warns of the risk of re-traumatising by the therapist, as an authority figure, reproducing the cult leader relationship with the client, but provides few suggestions regarding a therapeutic response. Herman claims: "Drawn into the dynamics of dominance and submission, the therapist may inadvertently reenact aspects of the abusive relationship".

Jenkinson (2011) in her therapy program for former cult members presents the trauma managing strategies of Containment and Centring for hyper arousal; Orienting and Grounding for both hyper or hypo arousal and implements these strategies during any therapeutic occurrences of re-traumatising.

In conclusion, it is clear that some former cult members of PAC have the potential to be re-traumatised during therapy, but a gap exists in terms of the lack of research into how therapists address these specific incidents of re-traumatisation in the context of Post Cult PTSD. This study aims to address that gap.

The Research Problem:

An exploration of the methods used by therapists in therapeutic meetings to address instances of re-traumatising during therapy with former members of psychologically abusive cults.

The Research Method - Grounded Theory:

"In using grounded theory methodology, you assume that the theory is concealed in your data for you to discover"
*(*Dick, 2005, p.7).

Why Grounded Theory?:

Henderson (1998, cited in Skeat & Perry 2008, p.98) states that grounded theory is considered to be relevant when the social phenomenon being studied has neither been sufficiently defined or when theories have not been developed to explain it. In the case of this study no consistent theory has been applied to the phenomenon of re-traumatising of former cult members during therapy.

Definition:

Dick (2005); (1998) Corbin & Strauss (2008, cited by Docan-Morgan, T. 2010, p.203); Glaser and Strauss (1967, cited by Skeat & Perry, 2010, p.98); all argue that what differentiates grounded theory from other research is that it is qualitative, inductive, explicitly emergent with theory being generated from the data and it is also not based on testing hypotheses. In addition, while acknowledging that there are variations of grounded theory, each has a specific set of procedures.

Procedures:

> *"the procedures of grounded theory are designed to develop a well-integrated set of concepts that provide a thorough theoretical explanation of social phenomena under study." Corbin & Strauss (1990, p.3).*

A variety of authors including: Strauss (1987, cited by Skeat & Perry, 2008, p.98)); Becker (1993); Wilson & Hutchison (1996); Annells (1997); Charmaz (2000); McCann & Clarke (2003): identify these five procedures as *theory structured around a core category; concurrent data collection and analysis; constant and consistent comparison* with other sources of data*; theoretical sampling;* and *spontaneous and regular memo writing.* The following reviews each of these procedures in detail.

The first Grounded Theory Procedure: Theory structured around a core category.

The basic units of analysis in grounded theory are *concepts*, which are derived from the data gathering and represent "potential indicators of phenomenon". Concepts that are relevant to the same phenomenon are grouped together to create *categories.* (Corbin & Strauss,1990, p.7). These *categories* are consistently defined and saturated, concurrent with the exploration of the relationship between categories, leading eventually to theory development. (Dick, 2005, p.7).

The second Grounded Theory Procedure: Concurrent and integrated data collection and analysis.

> *"Grounded theory has specific procedures for data collection and analysis." Corbin & Strauss (1990, p.6).*

This is a distinguishing characteristic of grounded theory. The process moves interactively from the research question, to sampling decisions, to data analysis to theory construction. At each stage the process can be reassessed and revert to one of the other stages. For example, as data is collected, the research question could be revised or an alternative group could be sampled for interview, or a modified theory developed, and so on. This is one of the strengths of grounded theory because it is extremely flexible in responding to changes as they occur but, at the same time, is conducted in such a structured way that a clear path can be identified and examined by other researchers.

In this study it is envisaged that multiple sources of data collection will be used such as face-to-face and telephone-based unstructured and semi-structured interviews, Skype based focus groups, and other methods appropriate to the emerging data.

Glaser & Strauss (1965, p.6) state: "there is no sharp division between implicit coding and the data collection or data analysis. There tends to be continual blurring and intertwining of all three operations from the beginning of the investigation until it is near end".

The third Grounded Theory Procedure: Constant comparison imparting Credibility.

Another basic tenet of grounded theory is constant comparison. As the integrated data collection and analysis proceeds, comparisons are systematically made with other sources, which could be the literature review, previously analysed data, or other research. In turn, this can influence the direction of the next step in the research, for example, an obvious weakness or omission in the study as a result of this comparison might guide the selection of a different sample .

Glaser and Strauss (1965, p.7) write that "this strategy involves systematic choice and study of several comparison groups"… "and historical documents, or

other library materials, lend themselves wonderfully to the comparative method".
In this study, this will be achieved by Triangulation, for example, comparing
results of interviews against the Literature Review or against studies of other
forms of long term trauma, for example, people in prisons or in captivity.

In this study, the issue of *Credibility* will be achieved by carefully explaining and
documenting each step, its purpose, how the researcher decided on the next
step in the process, and how the researcher arrived at their conclusions.

The fourth Grounded Theory Procedure: Theoretical Sampling and Validity.

This is another canon of grounded theory. Theoretical sampling is integral to the
process of data collection for the generation of theory. As a result of initial data
collection and analysis, the researcher decides what comparison group is next
appropriate to source for data and then determines how to find that group. The
primary purpose of theoretical sampling is to facilitate the emergence of theory.
Associated with this is the concept of "saturation" or "theoretical saturation"
which states that sampling of a particular population ceases, when no additional
data can be identified which will add to the development of this category.

The concept of *Validity* in Grounded Theory is not meaningful, because the
sample being reviewed will probably be constantly changing. Its relevance lies in
an examination of whether the research has actively sought out and studied the
precise sub populations, which have been identified in previous steps of the
study.

In this study, each of *convenience*, *theoretical* and *snowball* sampling will be
used: *Convenience* sampling in this instance will be a delicate procedure,

because of the difficulty in locating participants. It has been initially chosen because I have a professional relationship with two therapists (one in Sydney and one in the UK) who work with former cult members. I expect they will be willing to be cooperative with the initial interviews. *Theoretical sampling*, will be used following the results of the initial interviews sourced from the convenience sampling above. Regarding theoretical sampling, Babbie (2004); Holloway & Wheeler (2002); (both cited by Coates, 2010, p.299) advocate that participants should be selected on the basis of their personal knowledge about the phenomenon under study. In this study the sample is very specific – psychotherapists who conduct therapy with former members of PAC. *Snowball* sampling relies on locating several participants, who, in turn, will introduce the researcher to other potential participants and is often used when participants are difficult to locate (Henn et al, 2006, p.158). This method has been chosen for this study because there are a limited number of therapists who regularly and specifically work with former cult members and I currently know only two of them. I expect these two therapists will be able to provide the names of other therapists who fit the profile arising from the theoretical sampling.

Sample criteria:

Holloway & Wheeler (2002, cited in Coates, 2010, p.300), identify the need for a "number of inclusion and exclusion criteria." Consequently, the sample will be comprised of psychotherapists who meet the criteria of having conducted therapy with "former members" and the cult must meet the criteria of a "psychologically abusive cult (PAC)" defined above.

Sampling Problems:

The most significant anticipated problem is locating and interviewing participants. There is probably a very small number of therapists who meet the criteria and who are also known to the sources/ referees. It is highly likely that the design might need to be modified to include overseas therapists and having interviews conducted by phone, rather than face to face, although a majority could be covered via a visit to the UK and USA.

The fifth Grounded Theory Procedure: Spontaneous and regular memo writing.

Although grounded theory is not based on testing hypotheses, the researcher is typically dealing with multiple theoretical propositions, concepts and categories simultaneously. These propositions might relate to a concept, a category, the relationships between categories and so on. It is highly recommended that when these propositions arise that they are documented promptly by way of "memos". (Dick, 2005, pp.3-7). Glaser and Strauss (1965, p.6) state "those memorable events are either analysed immediately after they occur, or keep recurring in memory with nagging persistence until systematically analysed during memo writing periods." *In this study,* memos will be written immediately in order to capture new concepts as they arise.

Interviewing:

Interview content:

In a semi structured session, the initial one or two therapists will be interviewed in depth, one to one, and either face to face or by Skype using one or two initial questions, followed by a series of follow up prompts or topics. The aim of these initial interviews is to elicit the personal experience of each therapist and to allow

for the data to emerge, as is paramount in Grounded Theory. The interviews will avoid participants' general observations and theories around cults but they will encourage participants to describe their experiences with former members of PAC. The initial interview question(s) have been designed to elicit specific experiences around re-traumatising during therapy.

The follow up topics, based around the Research Question, have been constructed from the literature review which identified some of the possible indicators of retraumatising, what elicited the retraumatising and how it was handled. These prompts have been pre-prepared and will not be asked in any set order, nor with any specific wording, nor will they necessarily all be asked. They are designed more to be an *aide memoir* for me and the wording will be varied based on the experiences of the participant. I will reconfirm many of the participants comments to ensure that the intended meaning is captured, and I will use techniques of active listening and probing will be used in order to assist the researcher in gathering rich information without leading the discussion consistent with the suggestions of Durocher (1999) (cited in Coates, 2010, p.30). The proposed initial questions and follow up prompts follow this section.

This method has been selected because the study is seeking to understand the therapists knowledge and experience and open ended questions allow the participants a great deal of flexibility in the direction and content of their answers (Dunn, 2009, p.160), while prompts allow some direction when deeper information is sought according to Creswell (1994); Miles and Huberman (1984); Morrisey and Higgs (2006); (all cited in Coates, 2010, p.301). This method is also an excellent way of avoiding phraseology which might have an influence on how the participant answers (Coates, 2010, p.301). In seeking to understand the knowledges and experiences of the interviewee, and consistent with Grounded Theory, my attitude will be "always maintaining a stance of curiosity, and always

asking questions to which you genuinely do not know the answers" (Morgan, 2000, p.2).

Questions and prompts:

Initial questions:

Can you please tell me in what context you work with former cult members (group? One-on-one? Other?), and, then can you tell me about your experiences in therapy with former cult members?

Have there been instances during therapy when an ex-member has become traumatised, and, if so, can you tell me something about your experiences with that?

Prompts:

Experience with Trauma:

Can you describe the frequency of the incidence of trauma to me? Has this occurred with every ex-member? What percentage of ex-members has it occurred with?

During a therapy session what would be a typical frequency of trauma, that is, how many incidents?

In your experience how do you recognise trauma?

Are there any steps that you take to anticipate trauma?

Can you tell me your thoughts and theories about the basis of this trauma?

There is a suggestion that a specific form of PTSD, Post- Cult PTSD, exists. Do you have any views on this?

Response to trauma:

What is your attitude to this trauma?

Do you attempt to minimise it or encourage it?

Do you see it as a point of breakthrough to address the trauma or something to be avoided at all costs or an opportunity to teach skills for the ex member to use outside of therapy?

Or something else?

When it occurs, how do you address it?

Other:

There is a suggestion that former cult members develop an additional "personality" as a result of their cult experiences, sometimes called their "cult personality" or "pseudo personality" and that this might increase the potential for retraumatisation. Do you have any views on this?

What suggestions do you have for other therapists working with former cult members regarding potential re-traumatisation?

Interview recording:

As recommended by Henn et al (2006, pp.248-249), interviews will be audio recorded, rather than risk the flow of the interview by attempting to take written

notes because I will be able to capture the full transcript of the interview which is not usually possible with note taking and it will free me up to focus on the content of the interview: how it is going, what should be asked next etc.

Benefits of focus groups:

Focus Groups facilitate discussion among people and help to bring to the bring to the surface responses that would otherwise be undeveloped. I will use a variety of techniques to encourage respondents to debate topics and issues, to challenge opinions expressed by others, and to identify areas of consensus and disagreement.

Bracketing:

According to authors, Holloway and Wheeler (2002); Hycner (1999) bracketing is the process of auditing one's own assumptions regarding the topic being studied and making them specific and unambiguous. In practice, this means "putting on hold" as much as possible the researchers own meanings and interpretations and accessing the interviewees unique worldview (Hycner, 1985 p. 281). As Coates (2010, p.302) notes, "bracketing" is a fundamental skill in counselling and psychotherapy and it should be noted that the author is an experienced counsellor and therapist. Multiple authors including Hycner, (1985); Morrisey & Higgs, (2006); Coates, (2011); Henn et al. (2006); Robson (2002) (cited in Coates, 2009, pp.301-302); recommend the documentation of the interviewers presuppositions, though some use the term "reflexivity". The purpose of recording these is to build up "such a set of documents [that] the research is laying a 'paper trail' open up to an external audit" Henwood & Pidgeon, (1993, cited in Henn et al. 2006, p.211). In this study, a Reflexive Diary, which captures all elements of the research process, will be maintained and a Reflexive Analysis discussion will be included in the final Research Report. I have made initial

entries in the Reflexive Diary listing my subjective daily reflections to clarify my thoughts, the earlier notes I had made about cults, and any possible blocks to my thinking. I did this as I conducted the Literature Review and will do so as I conduct the interviews. Some specific examples of my entries are included in the Appendix.

Delineation. It is proposed to ultilse the computer based tool NVivo, which has specifically been designed for qualitative research. NVivo has inbuilt software functions which help classify, sort and arrange information to enable the consolidation of elements of interviews into these units of general meaning and also suggest potential broader themes. Fitzgerald, Cernusca, & Kelly (2003) have reviewed its "suitability in a doctoral-level qualitative methods research course built around a real research project".

Validity, reliability and generalisability:

Validity:

Dunn (2009, p. 236) describes *internal validity* as: whether or not "the research reveals the hypothesized causal relationship between the independent and dependent variable? Are the causal findings trustworthy?", but such causal relationships are not necessarily so direct for qualitative studies. In this study internal validity will be based on Hycner's (1985, pp.297-298) that the results of the data analysis will be reviewed against current literature to assess the degree of fit. Validity in Grounded Research is discussed on page 34 of this document.

Generalisability:

Dunn (2009, pp. 241-242) defines *external validity/ genralisaability* as: "whether the research findings can be generalized from one setting to another". Generalisability in Grounded Theory comes as a result of the *process*, compared to the quantitative model, which requires very large samples. In grounded theory if the process is strictly followed, documented, and the method of theoretical saturation is applied such that the theory emerges from the data, then it can be argued that the results can be generalised to a wider audience. A further process supporting generalisability is that of triangulation of the data, by which the categories which have been developed in the study can be cross checked with a variety of other sources.(Mc Cann, 2007).

Replication:

Dunn (2009, pp. 241-242) also argues that, in effect, most of the significant findings in social research can be validated by extensive *replication. Replication* in this study will be achieved by providing extensive documentation such that another reviewer, when assuming the same point of view as the researcher, "can also see what the researcher saw, whether he (she) agrees with it. This is the key criterion for qualitative research" (Hycner, 1985 p.298). This level of documentation will also meet Henn at al. (2009, p.209) definition of *reliability*.

Soundness:

Soundness is ensuring that the Research Process is clear, such that another researcher can comprehend both the process and method of the research and the researcher as defined by Koch, (1994, cited in Morrissey & Higgs, 2006, p.163). To achieve this, the entire process will be described in detail. Hutchison et al, (2011, p.251): "a rich description of the entire research process, including

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justification for all the decisions made". This will include all the documentation described in Data Collection and Data Analysis.

Ethical Conduct:

Ethical approvals:

An Ethics Application Form will be prepared and submitted for approval to the Ethics Committee.

Informed Consent:

Informed Consent is part of a framework of respect for the rights of the individual. Couchman & Dawson (1990, cited in Holloway & Wheeler,1995, p.224) identify these rights as "they will not be harmed; informed consent must be obtained; participation must be voluntary; and participants must be assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and they will be treated with dignity and respect".

By the nature of the sample, being therapists, all those interviewed will be over 18 years of age, and will probably have a good understanding of Informed Consent. Notwithstanding this, the purpose of the research will be explained as clearly as possible. Equally, to ensure comprehensive understanding, questions about the study will be encouraged, the study will follow the recommendations of Dunn (2009, p.66); Henn et al. (2006, p.85); Coates (2010, p.300); and will review the risks and benefits with potential participants.

Finally, as recommended by Dunn (2009, p.67) and Holloway & Wheeler (1995, p.224), it will be made clear to interviewees that participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Anonymity:

Holloway & Wheeler (1995, pp.226-7) highlight the importance of anonymity. In Grounded theory studies interviews typically use small samples and are very detailed, which increases the risk of the interviewee being identified. This can be particularly dangerous for therapists of former cult members, some of whom have been sued for defamation for making "negative" comments about their clients cult experiences (Bachelard, 2008). The study will adopt Holloway & Wheelers' (1995, p.227) recommendations regarding immediate use of pseudonyms accompanied with changing minor identity details, provided these details are not relevant to the study.

Confidentiality and Privacy:

Interviewees expect that their comments will be treated confidentially and this will be confirmed in the Informed Consent document. The practice of not attaching participants' names to interviews or transcripts will be followed, pseudonyms will be used immediately and the document linking names and interviews will be locked in a secure filing cabinet. (Coates, 2010, p.300; Dunn, 2009, p.67).

Appendix:

ICE Index

Almendros (2011 et al., pp. 66-68) citing Winocur, Whitney, Sorensen, Vaughan & Foy (1997) describes the ICE index (the Individual Cult Experience Index) for studying cultic techniques as covering the following categories:

"(a) the control of group members (isolation and social alienation, and control of information, sensory overload, and suppression of critical thinking;

(b) physical control (sleep, food, or exercise deprivation; long periods of inactivity or hyperactivity; exploitation of personal resources);

(c) emotional manipulation (inducing guilt; fear and uncertainty; reinforcement and random or unpredictable punishment); and

(d) experiences of abuse (verbal abuse; physical or sexual abuse; perception of threat to physical integrity or own life)".

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