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EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

The Making of Cults: The Factors that Contribute to Membership and the Leaders'
Influence

Honors Thesis

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the

Requirements of HON 420

Fall 2021

By

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Faculty Mentor

Dr. Matthew Winslow

The Making of Cults: The Factors that Contribute to Membership and the Leaders'
Influence

Chloe Greenidge

Dr. Matthew Winslow of the Department of Psychology

Abstract description: This thesis investigates the factors that contribute to the increased vulnerability to cult membership. This paper also investigates the factors commonly found in cult leaders that increase their influence over their members. Cults have gained much more public attention due to their appearance in the media, typically after a tragic event. This has brought more questions regarding the members and leaders of these cult organizations. Developments associated with youth such as a need for belonging, the search for non-traditional forms of spirituality, emergence of black-and-white and independent thinking, conflicts with the adult world, and growing sexuality can increase an individual's vulnerability to joining a cult. Additionally, certain personality disorders and characteristics, such as Antisocial Personality Disorder and Dependent Personality Disorder, can increase one's vulnerability to joining and staying in a cult. Certain personality disorders can increase a leader's sphere of influence over followers. In particular, Antisocial Personality Disorder and Psychopathy are the most prominent disorders. These factors are applied to various case examples in this paper. The case examples explored in this paper are Jonestown, The Kentucky Vampire Clan, The Manson Family, and The Source Family. Awareness on the factors that make up a cult is a crucial step in the prevention of cult membership.

Keywords and phrases: cults, members, leaders, vulnerabilities, personality disorders,
youth

Table of Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Table of Contents | iv |
| Acknowledgements | v |
| List of Figures | vi |
| List of Tables | vii |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Members | 2 |
| Leaders | 6 |
| Case Examples | 8 |
| Jonestown | 8 |
| Leader | 10 |
| Members | 12 |
| Kentucky Vampire Clan | 13 |
| Leader | 14 |
| Members | 15 |
| Manson Family | 16 |
| Leader | 17 |
| Members | 18 |
| Source Family | 19 |
| Leader | 20 |
| Members | 22 |
| Discussion | 23 |
| Limitations | 26 |
| References | 27 |

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List of Figures

Figure 1: Aerial view of Jonestown

Figure 2: Aftermath of Jonestown

Figure 3: Jones talking to fellow members

Figure 4: Ferrell in custody

Figure 5: Ferrell and fellow members awaiting sentencing

Figure 6: Manson being taken into custody

Figure 7: Members of the Manson Family

Figure 8: Members of the Source Family

Figure 9: Jim Jones during a concert

List of Tables

Table 1: Leader characteristics in case examples.

Table 2: Member characteristics in case examples.

Introduction

Before I go any further, I must define cult in order to have some context to what groups I am referring to. The Cambridge Dictionary (2021) defines cults as “a religious group, often living together, whose beliefs are considered extreme or strange by many people” (para.1). For the purpose of my research, I will also add on to this definition by including groups that manipulate, control, and exploit its members. Throughout history there has been the emergence of cults. However, they grew in awareness in America during the 1960s and 1970s. This is due to devastating events such as the tragedy that occurred at Jonestown where hundreds of members committed mass suicide by ingesting cyanide, or the horrid crimes committed by the Manson Family. As these groups began to gain awareness in the general media, it led to the development of the Christian Counter Movement and the Secular Anti-Cult Movement. The Secular Anti-Cult Movement in particular began to attribute cult membership to techniques like “brainwashing” which led to the use of “deprogramming” for those leaving cults (Encyclopedia, n.d.; Galanter, 1989). These developments in the perspective of cults gave way to questions such as why people would join? And what makes these cult leaders so influential? Developments associated with youth, some personality disorders, and environmental influences can increase one’s vulnerability to joining cult membership. Certain personality

characteristics and disorders can contribute to cult leaders' sphere of influence on followers. I will first talk about the characteristics and theories about cult member and leaders and then I will analyze how my theories are displayed in historic cults through case examples.

Members

While members of cults can be a variety of ages, younger individuals are more likely to be targeted for membership. This is not because of their age necessarily, but rather because it is a crucial time in development for youth (Hunter, 1998). Yakovleva (2018) argues that conditions such as fear of rejection, development of their sexuality, growing conflicts with the adult world, black-and-white thinking, the emergence of independent thinking, and search for non-traditional forms of spirituality, while not required to join a cult, can increase vulnerability to joining cults. During adolescence an individual's need for belonging grows and whether they feel like they belong or not plays a role in their development. This is because it is a transitional time where they are creating social relationships outside of their family unit. This need to belong to a group is also driven by their need to define themselves often in the context of the social groups they belong to (Haugen et al, 2019). Cult organizations prey on this need for belonging. They step in to fill the place of a social group. Individuals are motivated to join cults because it would provide them with a social group to belong to and a set of belief that can aid in defining themselves. Cults also use this need for belonging to their advantage in the way most cults are internally structured. In addition to most cults being structured in a hierarchy, they often have a family concept. They reinforce this in many ways including

using familial names such as “brother” and “sister” (Yakovleva, 2018, p. 274; Curtis & Curtis, 1993).

Young adults often are searching for meaning in their life. They do this through searching for their own personal purpose and or through searching for a higher power. This makes cults appealing to them. Cults usually have a strict set of beliefs, often in a higher power or of a religious premise of sorts, that satisfy that search for a higher power or meaning (Yakovleva, 2018). This search for meaning is a widely studied concept. Viktor Frankl studied this and found many discoveries. One of the most important discoveries he made was that human’s primary motivation was to find meaning in existence, or Will to Meaning. He analyzed his time in the Holocaust and found Will to Meaning to be one of the main reasons he and others survived. He applied to this finding to his own work and created Logotherapy which uses meaning as a focus of treatment (Frankl, 2020).

Additionally, during this stage of development, young people often have a black-and-white thinking process. This means that they often cognitively process things with no middle ground. Things are good or bad. Cult organizations often have strict sets of rules or beliefs, which appeals to young individuals. Joining these organizations allows them to be free of their responsibility of making decisions. The strict rules and beliefs also allow them to have a set of absolute rules to abide by which appeases their black and white thinking (Yakovleva, 2018). This black-and-white thinking that is present in young individuals also increase their vulnerability to techniques often used by cult organizations for member retention. Many cult organizations instill an us-versus-them mentality into their members in order to retain membership. They encourage members to cut off ties

with the outside world, including family and friends. In addition to this, they also instill a fear of the world outside of the cult. This fits into the black-and-white thinking process as young individuals begin to view the cult as good and anyone outside of it as bad.

Many cult organizations also commonly prey on the growing sexuality that usually emerges in adolescents during this time of development. Cults often provide an open environment in which individuals can explore their sexuality free from disapproval which is particularly prominent in the youth. In addition to this they often use sexuality in their recruitment techniques. The Children of God cult notably used this technique. They trained and used their female members to use their sexuality to recruit new members or donations for the cult (Yakovleva, 2018).

Aside from developments associated with youth being a factor that can increase one's vulnerability for cult membership, one's environment can play a role as well. Many people assume that people who join these groups are always rare, abnormally docile and weak, and crazy. This kind of thinking is a consequence of underestimating the power of outside influences. Aronson (2000) talks about this in his book *Nobody Left to Hate*. He explains that sometimes the external or social influences are so powerful in situations that normal, sane people may behave in an abnormal manner that they otherwise wouldn't under normal circumstances. This can manifest as social influences that surround an individual. Interactions with friends, family, peers, or community members, can contribute to an individual's motivation to join a cult. Rousselet, Duretete, Hardouin, & Grall-Bronnec (2017) interviewed 31 former cult members using self-report questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. They found that 32.3% of participants considered that the social presence of the group in their lives prior to membership

contributed to them joining. They also found that 19.4% reported having a family member that was already in the cult.

In addition to youth and an individual's environment increasing vulnerability for cult membership, antisocial and dependent personality profile development, aided by the cult, increases cult member retention. Most of the time cult members do not have antisocial or dependent tendencies prior to joining the cult. Usually, the antisocial tendencies stem from the cult leader and the dependent tendencies stem from the collective structure of the cult (Venter, 1998; Rahmani, Azad, Shuki, & Meloy, 2019). Freud (as cited in Venter, 1998) researched the interplay between cult leaders and members. He found that members often perceive the leader as a parental figure through the process of transference. As a result, they begin to identify with the leader and their beliefs. This is further encouraged by the members' suppression of any negative or doubt about the leader. The cult leader often overwhelms the members with the cult's beliefs and practices while also isolating them from the outside world (Gajewski, 2020; Rahman, 2018). This creates of anxiety and fear in the members which causes them to cope by devolving into a dissociative state. In this state it makes the members more susceptible to accepting the leader's belief (Venter, 1998; Coates, 2012; Walsh, Russell, & Wells, 1995). Venter (1998) interviewed a past cult member and noted that members can sometimes be influenced by the leader to become victimizers towards other members. Venter provide an example from their client, Katie, who convinced other members to take out student loans and give the money to their leader. Katie was drawn to the cult after her brother committed suicide and blamed herself for it. In order to encourage Katie

to cut all outside ties, the leader deflected the blame of her brother's suicide to her parents. This encouraged Katie's dependency on the leader and the cult.

In sum, the characteristics of members of cults that I will use to analyze the case examples are developments associated with youth (fear of rejection, development of their sexuality, growing conflicts with the adult world, black-and-white thinking, the emergence of independent thinking, and search for non-traditional forms of spirituality), environmental factors, and specific personality disorders (Dependent Personality Disorder and Antisocial Personality Disorder).

Leaders

Olsson (2013) argues that like most research studies, the findings of the sample in question do not have significance unless compared to normative data. The sample in this case would be the cult organizations and the normative data in this case would be organized religious or secular groups that are not considered cults. In this study they compared "normal" religious and political groups to destructive and abnormal groups and leaders. Regarding leaders, they found that most "normal" political and religious leaders examined were intelligent, have incorruptible honesty, and have healthy narcissism. In contrast, cult leaders develop a quest to enhance their self-esteem and power to compensate for their own childhood. Many cult leaders also share antisocial characteristics and tendencies that make up the diagnostic definition of antisocial personality disorder (Goldberg, n.d). Some of these characteristics include a predisposition for dominance and aggression. Olsson explained these predispositions through Millon's Dimensional Model of Personality Disorders. In this model antisocial personality disorder is characterized through "modification" or shaping their social world

rather than “accommodation” or adapting to their social world. Cult leaders are also characterized as being more “self-focused” or more focused on their own needs rather than “other-focused” or more focused on other’s needs. These predispositions fit into the usual characteristics displayed by most cult leaders and include the need for admiration and the manipulation of the members for their own benefit (Strack & Millon, 2007).

Many traits and characteristics commonly found in cult leaders fit into the characteristics and criteria for psychopathy. The Triarchic Model of Psychopathy is characterized by three dimensions: disinhibition, meanness, and boldness. Disinhibition includes a lack of impulse control and foresight into possible consequences of their actions. Meanness constitutes an empathy deficit, callousness, and lack of close connections. Boldness is characterized by remain calm under high pressure situations, social efficiency, and thrill-seeking behavior. Many leaders display these characteristics through the manipulation of members and their confidence in their social efficiency (Snowden, Smith, & Gray, 2017). Cult leaders also display a lack of empathy towards the members, although this characteristic may be harder to spot for those in the cult. This is due to the nature psychopathy. While those with psychopathy lack empathy, they often can replicate and analyze the emotions of other and use that information for further manipulation (Burke, 2006). A example of this is the use of guilt and shame as well as the dependency of the members to solicit monetary donations from them. Also, as previously mentioned, leaders often demand that female members use their sexuality to solicit monetary donations from individuals outside of the cult.

In sum, the characteristics of leaders of cults that I will use to analyze the case examples are characteristics associated with Antisocial Personality Disorder

(modification, self-focused, manipulation, aggression, dominance) and dimensions associated with Psychopathy (disinhibition, meanness, boldness).

Case Examples

Jonestown

Jonestown is the name often used in reference to the cult lead by Jim Jones during the 1950s through the 70s. Jim Jones started his church in 1954, which he named The People's Temple. He moved his church around to a few cities before moving to San Francisco, California. It was here that his church began to gain traction. Jones focused on racial equality and socialist ideas in his preaching, which better resonated with the views of the west compared to the Midwest, where Jones started out. Jones' church gained further attention and recognition from politicians as Jones used his congregation to aid with canvassing for political candidates. Eventually, in an effort to cultivate more control, Jones moved any willing congregation members and himself to Guyana. This settlement created in Guyana gave rise to the name Jonestown. It was here, on November 18th, 1978, that one of the worst massacres in recent history occurred. When California Representative Leo Ryan arrived in Guyana, for the purpose of conducting a welfare check, he and his associates were ambushed and killed by a congregation member at Jones' request. Jones then proceeded to lead a mass suicide, through ingesting poison, that would claim the lives of over 900 people (see Figures 1 and 2; Poster, 2018; "Perspective Jonestown teaches," n.d.). The actions of Jim Jones and his followers can be analyzed using the factors and theories previously mentioned.

Figure 1

Aerial view of Jonestown

*Note. Photos from David Hume Kennerly.**Figure 2*

Aftermath of Jonestown

*Note. Photos from David Hume Kennerly. 1*

Leader. Jim Jones displayed many antisocial characteristics that fit within the model of cult leaders I outlined previously. Many cult leaders display a predisposition for dominance. In Jim Jones, his predisposition for dominance was displayed through his need for control over the community and his members. Jones campaigned for and developed significant influence over politicians at the time. He exhibited so much influence that even future first lady, Rosalynn Carter, met with Jones during Jimmy Carter's Presidential campaign. This influence was not only a product of his campaigning skills, but also the fear he instilled. Many politicians sought to be in Jones' good graces out of fear ("Perspective Jonestown teaches," n.d.; Nesci, 2018; Sumpter & Burroughs, 1994). Jones also exhibited a predisposition for aggression in his actions. When Representative Ryan came to conduct a welfare check, Jones retaliated in a violent way, killing Ryan and his associates. Jones also set his final act of aggression into motion, the mass suicide of his members and himself, as he felt his control crumbling.

Additionally, Jones exhibited tendencies that fit much of the criteria of the Triarchic Model of Psychopathy. The first dimension is disinhibition. Jones displayed the lack of impulse control or inability to have foresight into consequences in a couple instances. One such instance is when he moved his congregation to Guyana. He did not think ahead into the consequences legally and socially. He did not think about the fact that there might be concern as it clearly established the evolution of the church into a cult. This concern led to the welfare check conducted by Representative Ryan. Another instance is when he ordered the killing of Representative Ryan and his associates. This shows a clear lack of forethought as murdering an elected official would bring considerable publicity. The second dimension of the model is meanness, or a lack of empathy. Jones displayed meanness in how he treated the members. He reportedly had sessions in which he would beat the members with wooden paddles and had them write false confessions of illegal acts (“Perspective Jonestown teaches,” n.d.). This behavior clearly shows a lack of empathy as he abused his own members. He sacrificed the well being of his members just to cultivate more control and dominance. The third dimension is boldness or thrill seeking or staying calm under high pressure situations. Jones did not hesitate or appear flustered during high pressure situation of having orchestrated multiple murders. He immediately enacted his final plan before authorities could come (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Jones talking to fellow members



Note. Photo credit to Claire Janaro and The Jonestown Institute.

Also, there are many accounts and evidence of Jones displaying narcissistic tendencies. Jones often referenced himself as the person of highest importance. In one sermon he referenced to himself as “the center and circumference of the universe.” One example of this is the reason why Jones moved his congregation to Guyana in the first place. In 1973, eight college students became angered with the church and Jones and left. This damaged Jones ego and drove him to consolidate more power by further isolating his congregation from the rest of the world. Another observed instance was in Guyana. When Representative Ryan arrived to interview the members of The People’s Temple, some of the members voiced their desire to leave and some were planning on traveling back to the states with Representative Ryan. Jones viewed this as betrayal, and it took a blow to his ego. This drove him to ordering the murder of Representative Ryan and the

defectors. In addition, this propelled him to enact his plan which would be his followers' ultimate act of absolute loyalty.

Members. Jones' followers shared many of the vulnerabilities I mentioned in my model of cult members. Members of cults join cults to fill a void in their life such as a need for belonging (Osman, Mănescu, Tatu, & Nireștean, 2019). Many of the members were individuals who were oppressed in society so the feeling of acceptance they experienced at The People's Temple filled their need to belong. The environment can also play a role as well. In the case of those who joined The People's Temple, many of them were a part of groups who were oppressed by the current society as the time. Many of the members were black which is a significant fact given the time period. The time period, which was that of the civil rights movement, played a role in the members joining. Jones often preached about how the members were being marginalized and oppressed by society. These sermons were only further validated by the discrimination and violence against minorities that was observed during this period.

The members also showed signs of personality disorder that they most likely developed during their involvement in the cult. Some of the members displayed signs of Antisocial Personality Disorder. This is most prominently seen in the assassination of Ryan, his associates, and the defecting members. Members of the cult willingly carried out Jones' orders even though it involved murder. This most likely stemmed from their identification with Jones and his own actions. Many members also displayed signs of Dependent Personality Disorder. This is most clearly seen through their blind obedience and compliance with the mass suicide at Jonestown. While some members were unwilling to participate and were forced to drink the Kool-Aid, many were dependent on

Jones and his set of beliefs which willed them to participate despite the tragic consequences. Some even went so far as to willingly have their children participate.

Kentucky Vampire Clan

The Vampire Clan is a name given to the cult-like group of juveniles that operated out of Kentucky and Florida during the 1990s. This group was run by Rod Ferrell, who was 16 at the time. Ferrell was born in Murray, Kentucky to his mother Sondra Gibson, who raised him. They bounced around in their living situation, switching between living with his maternal grandparents or public housing. Ferrell began to become interested in vampirism and began to hang out with a group of students at his school who shared his same interest. The group dressed in all black and drank each other's blood in a ritual-like fashion. When his grandparents moved down to Eustis, Florida, he also moved there with his mother for a while. It was here that he met and developed a relationship with Heather Wendorf. Around his sophomore year, Ferrell and his mother moved back to Kentucky. It was during this time that Ferrell began to claim that he was a 500-year-old vampire and began recruiting followers to his group. In 1996, Ferrell and three of his followers, including his girlfriend at the time, drove down to Eustis to go get Heather Wendorf. Heather Wendorf expressed her wishes to run away with the group. On the evening of November 25th, Heather met up with group and completed her own transition into the group in the local cemetery. After that, Ferrell took drugs and returned to Heather's house to steal her parent's car, against her wishes. Once there, Ferrell bludgeoned both of her parents to death with a crowbar and burned them as part of a ritual. The group fled to Louisiana; Heather was unaware of what had happened to her parents. They were then caught three days later. Ferrell was sentenced to death, but due to a new law in Florida,

which prevented the execution of individuals who committed the crime prior to the age of 17, he was instead sentenced to life in prison (See Figures 4 and 5; “*How ‘The Vampire Clan’*” 2019). The actions displayed by Ferrell and his followers fits into models of cults that I previously described (Miller, Lane, Veltkamp, Kraus, & Tag, 1999).

Figure 4

Ferrell in custody



Note. Credit for the photo given to AP Photo, The Daily Commercial, and Vasha Hunt.

Figure 5

Ferrell and fellow members awaiting sentencing



Note. Photo credit given to Gate House Media.

Leader. Ferrell’s actions closely align with the dimensions of the Triarchic Model of Psychopathy I previously described. Ferrell displayed disinhibition in the crimes he committed. The murder of Wendorf’s parents was not premeditated, but rather an impulsive decision made in the heat of the moment. This last-minute decision that altered the lives of everyone involved clearly displays a severe lack of impulse control. Also, the severity of the crime without preplanning demonstrates a clear lack of foresight into the possible consequences of his actions. Ferrell demonstrated meanness in the Wendorf murders. The nature of the murder exhibits an explicit lack of remorse or empathy. Ferrell brutally attacked the unarmed couple in their home, which could have been

avoided. Ferrell went out of his way to commit the murders. In addition to this, what Ferrell did after the murders aligns with the meanness dimension. He disfigured their bodies with ritualistic burns and rummaged through the house collecting any and all valuables. This mutilation of the bodies postmortem and the theft of their property clearly shows Ferrell showed no remorse for his crimes and showed no empathy towards the couple or Heather who asked that her parents not be harmed. The last dimension that Ferrell's actions align with is boldness. Following the murders, Ferrell did not hesitate to continue with their original plan of traveling down to Louisiana. This shows that Ferrell had the ability to stay calm under high pressure and high stress situations. In addition, Ferrell was on the run from the police for three days. This is a prime example of thrill-seeking behavior as capture would mean high stakes in regard to punishment. Ferrell also displayed more subtle example of thrill-seeking behavior prior to his capture. Many of the rituals included risky elements such as drinking each other's blood.

Members. The members of the clan also aligned with many of the factors connected with increased vulnerability for membership into cult organizations. All the members were teenagers and minors. During this time young individuals often have a need for belonging and defining oneself through social affiliations. The cult provided the members with not only a social group to belong to but also with a space where they could openly explore their interest of vampirism without restrictions or judgement. Along with this, young people tend to develop black-and-white thinking which often produces anxiety within the individual when confronted with the mostly shades of grey reality of the world. By participating in the collective belief of the cult, members were able to practice vampirism without shame since it promoted and seen as good in the group. In addition,

young individuals begin to develop independent thinking and as a result tend to have conflicts with the adult world around them. This conflict is most prominently seen in former member, Heather Wendorf. Heather had been experiencing significant conflicts with her parents and had been relaying them to Ferrell. The conflicts involved normal teenage things such as who she was not allowed to hang with. Her parents wanted her to stop contact with Ferrell in particular. The reason that Ferrell came down to Florida on the day of the murders was to pick up Heather, who had decided to run away from home. The turmoil and conflict between Heather and the adult world, in this case her parents, set in motion the actions that would lead to her parent's murder.

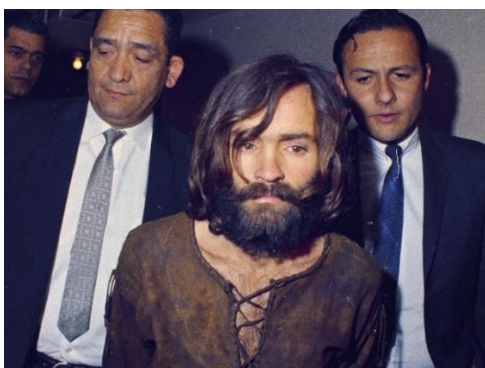
Manson Family

The Mason Family was a notorious cult that operated in the 1960s, led by Charles Manson. Manson was born in 1934 to a teenage mother, however, he lived with his aunt and uncle after his mother was sent to prison. Beginning in youth, Manson found himself in frequent legal trouble bouncing around from juvenile detention centers and eventually prison for crimes such as robbery. When he was finally released from prison, he traveled to San Francisco, California. It was here that he began collecting followers to engage in his radical beliefs and religious practices. Within a year, Manson had grown his group of followers and was considered the leader of their group which they called "The Family." The main belief that Manson held was that there was going to be war between races in which the whites would be eradicated. Manson thought his followers and himself had to get ahead of the war by starting it themselves. Through this Manson believed that starting the war would place The Family in a dominant position at its end. Under this delusion, Manson had his followers carry out multiple murders. The most famous of the victims

was actress Sharon Tate along with three guest she had over the night of the murders. This crime grabbed national attention and Manson was arrested and originally sentenced to death. However, due to a change in the law regarding the death penalty in California, Manson was instead sentenced to life in prison (see Figures 6 and 7; “*Charles Manson Biography,*” *n.d.*”). The characteristics displayed by Manson and his followers align with the factors and model I previously mentioned.

Figure 6

Manson being taken into custody



Note. Credit given to AP Photo, <https://www.history.com/news/charles-manson-was-sentenced-to-death-why-wasnt-he-executed>

Figure 7

Members of the Manson Family



Note. Credit given to AP Photo, <https://gulfnews.com/world/americas/manson-prosecutor-keep-them-all-locked-up-forever-1.1565072612853>

Leader. Manson exhibited the dimension of aggression before creating his cult and during his involvement in it prior to his capture. Before creating the cult, he was in and out of legal trouble as a youth, often spending much of his time in juvenile reformatories. As he grew older, he eventually found himself in prison for petty crimes such as auto theft, but also escalated to bigger crimes like armed robbery. During his time in The Family, he showed this predisposition for aggression as well which is most clearly exemplified in his violent delusions of an impending race war. In efforts to start a race war, he ordered the murder of multiple people. This was his peak of aggression while in

the cult. This delusion of a race war also displayed his predisposition for dominance. He believed that by committing these murders it would initiate the race war. His insistence on starting the race came from his delusion that by starting the race war, it would place himself and his followers in a position of power at its end. This clearly shows his need for dominance, control, and his narcissistic nature.

The characteristics of the murders themselves align with the meanness and disinhibition dimensions of the Triarchic Model of Psychopathy. The meanness is seen in the motivation for the murders. As I previously mentioned, the murders were committed to start a delusional race war that would place Manson in a position of power. These selfishly motivated murders suggest a lack of value for human life and a lack of remorse. The murders displayed disinhibition as Manson lacked the forethought into the potential legal consequences for himself and his members after the murders.

Members. The members themselves consisted of mostly younger people and they displayed many of the vulnerabilities that are associated with the development of youth. The need for belonging was a primary motivation for cult membership for many members. The name of the cult itself includes the word family, which as I previously mentioned is a strategy often used by cults to recruit members. This preyed on members need for belonging as it gave them a false sense of comfort and made them believe they would part of a social group that had bonds as strong as that of a family. Along with this, the members developed a common collective belief through the process of transference which is a product of the black-and-white thinking that usually develops in youth. By viewing Manson as a father figure, which was further encouraged through the use of the word family, they adopted many of his views despite their extreme and violent nature.

The adoption of these extreme values was also facilitated by members black-and-white thought process. By adhering to the set of beliefs they had a strict set of what is considered right and wrong. This in turn freed members from the burden and anxiety of choosing what is right and wrong for themselves. This freedom from the burden of choice only further fueled their belief in Manson's prediction of an impending race war. While it may seem irrational, the members' identification with Manson and the distorted set of beliefs is what motivated the members to participate in the murder of Sharon Tate and her friends.

Source Family

The Source Family is a name given to a cult-like group that mostly operated out of California in the 1960s and 1970s. The group was led by Jim Baker. Baker took on many endeavors prior to starting the Source Family. He practiced Judo growing up and served during World War II. Originally, when he came to California he opened his first restaurant, the Aware Inn. He also opened up two more restaurants during this time, The Discovery and the Old World Restaurant. During this time, Baker found himself in legal trouble as he killed multiple people and was sent to jail. He also claimed to have robbed many banks in order to fund his restaurants. Eventually he was removed from these restaurants as he began taking drugs and taking money from the businesses. This did not stop Baker as he opened a new restaurant, The Source Restaurant. The restaurant attracted many customers, including famous actors and musicians, since it was one of the first health food restaurants. The restaurant drew in many potential members. The source family lived a communal lifestyle, all living together in a single house. They all also worked and helped at the restaurant. Their doctrine and beliefs centered around eastern

practices of spirituality and the age of Aquarius. Eventually the Source Family relocated to Hawaii. Here they continued their practices despite the unpleasant treatment from the natives. It was here that Baker was in a tragic hang-gliding accident that took his life. The death of Baker led to the eventual disbanding of the group, everyone going their separate ways (see Figures 8 and 9; The Source Family, 2012).

Figure 8

Members of the Source Family



Note. Photo: Courtesy of Isis Aquarian Archives, [vogue.com/article/dress-the-part-get-the-source-familys-seventies-boho-cult-chic-look](https://www.vogue.com/article/dress-the-part-get-the-source-familys-seventies-boho-cult-chic-look)

Figure 9

Jim Jones during a concert



Note. Photo: Courtesy of Isis Aquarian Archives

Leader. Baker's actions reflect the characteristics and models I previously mentioned. Applying the characteristics of Antisocial Personality Disorder, Baker displayed a predisposition for aggression and dominance. The most prominent example of this aggression was in Baker's early life, prior to the cult. After moving to California and starting up his first restaurants, Baker encountered much legal trouble. He was arrested in the murder of two men. However, he was eventually acquitted in the crime. A few years later, Baker found himself back in the spotlight as he was once again tangled in a messy crime. He became involved with a married actress while still married

to his wife at the time. The affair went public upon the death of the actress' husband at Baker's hands. He was once again acquitted as it was determined that he acted in self-defense. His show of aggression was channeled through more socially acceptable avenues prior to his move to California. As a young man, Baker joined the military and served in World War II. This gave him a way to legally release his aggression with no consequences. Baker also showed predispositions for dominance is prominently seen in his time in the cult. Baker often portrayed himself as a higher being, almost God like. Baker referred to himself as "Father Yod." This symbolic father role further established his dominance and position in the cult.

Baker also fits into the criteria of the Triarchic Model of Psychopathy. This is best seen by applying each dimension of the model to Baker's actions. The dimension of disinhibition is most prominently seen in the years prior to Baker creating the Source Family. Baker went through a downward spiral after opening his first couple of restaurants. He frequently did drugs and wouldn't sleep for days at a time. In order to fund these benders, he would steal cash from the registers at his restaurant, which left them with no money to open with. This reckless behavior shows much impulsivity and lack of forethought. This reckless behavior also can be interpreted through the dimension of boldness. The consistent drug use reflects thrill seeking tendencies. In addition, his previous affairs and arrest that I previously mentioned, also reflect reoccurring thrill seeking behavior. This thrill-seeking behavior that characterizes the boldness dimension would become Baker's demise. Baker ended up dying in a hang-gliding accident. His search for a thrill motivated him to participate in this risky unsupervised activity. The dimension of meanness can be seen in Baker's relationships and actions. In terms of his

actions, his previous murders suggest a lack of empathy or remorse. Regarding his relationships, Baker had a history of marrying women, having children with them, and then leaving them. He did this a few times, exhibiting a lack of empathy and a lack of want for close relationships. While in the cult, he began polygamy taking on 13 wives despite the protest from her first wife. This dismissal of her concerns shows a lack of care and empathy.

Members. The members align with the vulnerabilities that I previously mentioned. Most of the members were very young, some only twelve years old. These younger members were exposed to the vulnerabilities associated with youth that I mentioned earlier. Many of the members were searching for belonging, a way to identify themselves. They found this in the Source Family. Their void of a social group was immediately filled by the cult, and made them feel, like the name suggests, like they had a family. Many members reported that this need stemmed from their issues from their own family. Those who did not have their father in their life reported that Baker became their new father and filled that paternal void. Additionally, some members reported that the cult gave them all the brothers and sisters that always wanted. These reports showcase how the cult created a feeling of social belonging in the members. Another development associated with youth that aligns with the cult members is a search for non-traditional forms of spirituality. During the time period, there was much social unrest due to war at the time and the fight for civil rights. This societal conflict prompted many people to search for a higher meaning or purpose. Baker's teachings combined western and eastern practices with astrological influences. While this was very progressive for the time, many members were drawn to it as it gave them a new sense of meaning in life. In addition, it

also gave members a set of principles to live by which in turn freed them from the burden of choice.

Along with these developments associated with youth, the members also showed signs of Dependent Personality Disorder. This is seen in two ways. The first way is through the viewing of Baker as a paternal figure, as I mentioned earlier. This paternal identification contributes to the process of transference. During this process, Baker's views, opinions, and beliefs, became adopted by the members. This transference contributed to the Dependent Personality Disorder seen in the members. In addition to this, the members began to form a physical dependence on Baker as well. Not only did the members all live together, but they all also worked at the Source Restaurant. This meant that they were dependent on Baker for housing and for money and wages. This form of control over the members, further increased their dependency. To further increase this control, Baker moved the group to Hawaii. This effectively cut off the members connection to the outside world and contributed to their dependence.

Discussion

There are many definitions and types of cults. Some of these definitions just involve deviations from established cultural norms or religions. As I previously mentioned, the definition of cult that I am using involves the manipulation, controlling, and exploitation of its members. Because of this definition it is clear to see that cult involvement can have negative consequences on its members. These consequences can even spread to the family and friends of the members as they do not get to see or contact them as much if at all (Schwartz, 1983). My research investigates what these cults look like, what factors contribute to vulnerability of membership, and what factors contribute

to the leader's influence (see Tables 1 and 2). Table 1 displays that the majority of the factors I investigated were present in the cult leaders I examined, however the category of modification was less present. Table 2 displays that majority of the factors I investigated were present in the cult members I examined, especially environmental factors and Antisocial Personality Disorder.

Understanding these factors are important in avoiding involvement in these kinds of groups. Right now, cults are seen in media to be taboo and obvious. Because of this many people cannot fathom how anyone could join these groups and do not understand the factors that attribute to membership. In order to prevent membership, we must truly understand these groups. Most research examining the membership and leadership in cults often solely focuses on membership or leadership. I have also found that such research often focuses on just internal or external factors, but not both. In my research, I am examining both membership and leadership and both internal and external factors. I believe looking at all four of these things together will provide a new perspective since many of these things interact.

Table 1. Leader characteristics in case examples.

| | Meanness | Boldness | Disinhibition | Modification |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Jonestown (Jim Jones) | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| Kentucky Vampire clan (Ferrell) | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |

| | | | | |
|---------------|-----|----|-----|----|
| Manson | Yes | No | Yes | No |
|---------------|-----|----|-----|----|

Family

(Charles

Manson)

| | | | | |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Source | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|

Family (Jim

Baker)

| | Manipulation | Aggression | Dominance | Self-focused |
|--|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------------|
|--|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------------|

| | | | | |
|------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Jonestown | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
|------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|

(Jim Jones)

| | | | | |
|-----------------|----|-----|----|----|
| Kentucky | No | Yes | No | No |
|-----------------|----|-----|----|----|

Vampire clan

(Ferrell)

| | | | | |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Manson | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|

Family

(Charles

Manson)

| | | | | |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Source | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|

Family (Jim

Baker)

Table 2. Member characteristics in case examples.

| | Youth | Situation | Antisocial Personality Disorder | Dependent Personality Disorder |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|------------------|--|---|
| Jonestown | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Kentucky Vampire clan | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| Manson Family | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| Source Family | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |

Limitations

While the research I encountered and theories I described do provide an accurate picture of this topic, there were some limitations to my research. I believe it would have been beneficial to collect my own data from the population of former and current cult members, however, the taboo nature and trauma involved with cult settings made it nearly impossible to for me to gather a sample of the population I investigated.

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