

# Cult recruitment

Psychology



Effects of Mind Control and ity on Cult members Effects of Mind Control and  
ity on Cult members (Course Code)

(Date of Submission)

Effects of Mind Control and Authority on Cult members

Introduction

Over the past several years, the popularity of cultist behavior around the globe has been alarming. Although, there had been limited information as to its prevalence since their activities are in secrecy, reported cases of suicides and deaths together with many testimonies from members show that many were convinced in joining the mysterious association. According to Stacey (1998), studies carried out in the United States have shown that two to five million young adults of between eighteen and twenty five years of age were involved in five thousand cult groups. With the many people who joined the group, reasons as to how and why people are convinced to join the cult is not well explained. However, some studies had shown that members of cults do not just join them but are recruited. People are known to get into groups that not only appear interesting to them, but also promise to offer solutions to their pressing needs. Stacey (1998) explains that cults use effective techniques when recruiting. They recruit the most capable individuals who can effectively serve the needs of the cult. Many cult members are responsible citizens such as lawyers, doctors, celebrities of high profile and professors, which may be the reason why they continue to survive for decades and function efficiently despite public disapproval, high rates of turnover and angry parents. Of much importance to note is that cult's recruiters make numerous promises to the recruits during the initial induction phases and it is only until a considerable period of time has passed

<https://assignbuster.com/cult-recruitment/>

that that a recruit comes to realize that it was only a ploy to have them comply. By such a time, the member has already been submerged into the group and already in submission and under undue influence from the cult's leadership

Other studies gave other reasons. The study by Stark and Bainbridge (1987) in their book called a Theory of Religion discussed how religion is weakened by its recruiting practices. They state that the Roman Catholic Church for example became weakened in its values but larger in numbers when it became the state religion of the Roman Empire. The Christian view on women's rights was another reason why it grew in popularity. They treated women better than most other religious groups. The idea behind these theories is that people were drawn to this religion for personal benefit and satisfaction, rather than true acceptance and belief in Catholic tradition.

Another study by Stephens (2010) attempted to discover the relationship between authoritative figures in one's personal life, and its effect on participants' psychological welfare. The research question for this study was " Please describe an experience when you realized that an authority figure who has held your trust ceased to be that authority". Each participant in this study described a figure of leadership. Every authoritative figure described was some type of leader in a religion, spiritual, or " cult like group" (Stephens, 2010). The participants then went on to describe the relationships they had with these figures. Each discussed of the tremendous amount of time invested in the relationships and personal levels that had reached with each relationship. All participants shared a similar value in wanting to help fill the void left in their lives with the loss of this authority figure. Participants described this loss and all portrayed personal disillusionment. Stephens

<https://assignbuster.com/cult-recruitment/>

states that “ the result is a general psychological structure that centers around seven essential constituents: Motivation to choose, trust, loss of an illusion of trust, developing an alternative perspective, receiving independent help, pivotal events and awareness, and feelings of loss concurrent with gratitude for gaining a broader perspective (Stephens, 2010). The participants developed certain characteristics from their loss that affected their lives. These effects ranged from career path and need to fix personal voids, to disillusionment. This study implies that the mind is controlled and as a result ended to be a cult member.

Another study that relates to this youth and mind control relationship is the autobiography of Brian Keenan (1994). Keenan was held hostage in a cult-like environment for four years in Beirut, Lebanon from 1986-1990. Keenan is quoted in his biography as saying his time with his captors was “ an evil cradling”. This quote provides for the title of the fore mentioned autobiography. Keenan discusses how this “ cradling” although it may be negative at heart, began to create a sense of safety. He states after time passed in his cult that he was programmed to understand that real fear lied outside his captor’s environment. He was abused physically and mentally all while being forced to come to the understanding that being held captive is where he belonged. This mind control displayed by these Lebanon captors creates and understanding how religious cults change the thinking among its members. They can negatively control the way participants psychologically think and act.

Likewise, a famous experiment conducted by Stanley Milgram displays peoples basic human nature to be obedient to authority figures and conform to people and situations surrounding them. Milgram experimented following <https://assignbuster.com/cult-recruitment/>

the Holocaust to further understand the greatest cult to ever exist called the Nazis. Milgram's research questioned whether the Nazi movement was a shared moral belief amongst all Nazis or whether some were just following orders when committing the crimes. Milgram tested whether humans would administer shocks to other humans when answering incorrect questions. These shock dosages were given to them by a third party of authoritative value. Results showed that majority of participants were willing to obey the orders and distribute shocks to other participants of possible lethal strength. Milgram displayed human's natural tendency to obey authoritative figures, much as Stephens' study showed (Russel & Gregory, n. d).

All of the given studies and researches display a few common themes. People, by nature, like to conform to their surroundings. Obedience gives humans a sense of belonging, but possibly a sense of irresponsibility as well. Milgram's experiment shows that humans are willing to distribute physical pain to others, if only they are being told what to do. This sense of not being responsible just following orders is a problem within our society. These experiments focus on authority however I feel that they lack in certain areas of behavioral psychology. Stephens' experiment displays disillusionment that humans develop through authority or loss of authority. This experiment creates results as to why we develop loss and trust issues however it does not show why these character developments can lead to drastic changes like cult membership. Children lose their parents all the time, friends pass away, and tragedy strikes daily all over the world. So what is it about certain individuals that lead to cults and organized religious crime that other people steer away from. Milgram's experiment showcased how with no sense of responsibility humans are willing to deliberately hurt others. Participants

<https://assignbuster.com/cult-recruitment/>

willingly shocked other participants when told to by an authority figure. This experiment however did not seem to focus enough on the long term effects of the participants. Were the participants who were shocking people more likely to go out and harm others outside of the experiment? I would like to research ideas on what happens to those who have been psychologically brain washed or influenced.

Beyond this identified reasons, the researcher who is a psychology student believes that incorporating her new found ideas help to present a better understanding of the effects of mind control in relation to the authority on cult members. With this in mind, the researcher felt the necessity for this study with the hope of providing a scientific evaluation on how mind control affects a person's psychological behavior. Specifically, it aims to answer why people are inclined to fall into cultish behavior.

With the result, those who are already a member will soon see for themselves objectively and thus shall figure out ways to not to be controlled easily by figurative others. In the field of psychology, its help cannot be over emphasized. Some of the data incorporated will be useful for incoming psychology students to answer their questions related to cult behavior. It can also serve as a guide for future researches in the same line of endeavor. The study covers a few members of cult groups because of the sensitivity of the topic. Cults are often in isolated areas confined to members only. One would not find a cult meeting at a neighborhood or hotel lobby. These communities are often kept in solitude from the rest of the world. Cults are often related to religion and values as well. The sensitive nature of the subject has kept scientists from performing the proper quantity of research on this topic and so with this study. Only numerous documentations of former members of <https://assignbuster.com/cult-recruitment/>

cults who were willing to open the door for research will be included.

Comparing and contrasting ideas and values of various cults could supply us with answers we are looking for. Researching other people's opinions on cults and the idea of brainwashing and conformity is another way to obtain information.

### Methodology

The materials upon which this study is based were obtained through the descriptive method of research using the interview method and prepared questionnaires. Review of materials written about the subject is also considered. In selecting the most suitable participants in the study, all the aspects reviewed from written materials and other assumptions developed thereof shall be put under consideration. The participants shall mostly consist of people who are already members of certain cult movements. However, efforts shall be made to reach out to people outside the cults to gain insight into what they think makes people join cults. Population and sample shall involve a total of 45 respondents upon which 30 are members while 15 will be from outside with knowledge of cult practices. Most of the population comes from ages group between 18-30. Females comprise 35 respondents while males are 10.

### Data Gathering Techniques

The study will mostly involve interviews with the participants, and in some cases distribution of questionnaires to be returned after they are duly filled by the participants. The interview questions for all participants shall be as follows:

1. What is the profile of the respondents as to

- A. Age

<https://assignbuster.com/cult-recruitment/>

B. Gender

C. Race

D. Status

E. Member or not

If yes, answer the following:

What are the practices of the cult

What are the reasons and how the participant joined the cult

How long the participant has been a member of the cult

Determine whether the participant is comfortable in the cult

Determine whether the participant wishes to leave the cult and the reason that may cause the participant to leave.

If no, answer the following:

what the participant thinks about cults

what the participant thinks is the reason why people join cults

determine the participant's prejudices against members of cults

2. What is the degree of effect of mind control among members and outsiders?

3. What is the psychological implication of this study to the respondents?

4. What is the role of the authoritative figure in influencing mind control

After collecting information from respondents, the information shall be analyzed and determined as to their profile, reasons of joining, and how they entered the cult. The data shall be sorted accordingly to established relationships between variables, considering distribution of data based on the four questions answered. After deriving relationships from the collected data, comparison shall be done with other studies conducted before to determine common trends in the reasons why people opt to join cults and

<https://assignbuster.com/cult-recruitment/>



how they actually end up to join. The data shall then be analyzed using known and standard statistical methods of data analysis.

#### Discussion of Result

Results from the study are expected to indicate that:

People who join cults are recruited by individuals who have gained control over them because they have become insecure in their belief system mainly because of staying away from family and friends to do a reality check on their belief system by talking to them (Lifton, 1961).

People who join cults may be due to mystical manipulation, that is, they are given the impression that they are God chosen, especially in the religious cult movements. Being god chosen, the person has been set out on a mission by God to serve a heroic cause such as saving the world and therefore the victim ends up with a strong conviction that the world depends on him or her to fulfill a special responsibility.

People who continue to stay in cults believe in dispensing of existence, that is, only members of the cultic group are believed to meaningfully exist. They alone are good or saved and that non-members are bad and damned. This may also be the reason why members of cults remain in the cult for fear of losing the goodness and damning themselves in the process.

Majority of the cult members are completely normal and only a majority of them have any major psychological issue that made him or her join the cult. The people who join the cults have been manipulated into believing that anyone outside the cult is somewhat tainted, unenlightened or negative and that joining the cult would make the person holy or reveal the truth to him or her (Lifton 1961).

The following graph shows the state of the psyche of people who joined the <https://assignbuster.com/cult-recruitment/>

cult group.

Although majority who joined the cult group are normal, the result gathered shows that most are recruited because of other factors making them at risk of manipulation. A few people who joined have problems who are also easy targets. People who are members are controlled thus have a hard time getting out. It shows deceiving and partly threatening plays a part in controlling the psyche of the members.

To be a member of a cult group is dangerous on grounds that hundreds of people die annually in cult related activities. Mass suicide and homicide are two crimes that have been documented to have relations within a cult community. Rape and false imprisonment are two more serious crimes that are connected with cults. The dispute with members of cults and the outside citizens is that a cult will be described as a religion, way of life, and personal choice

The results of this study display how personal issues involving authority figures can affect our psychological behavior. Participants directly displayed how authoritative figures affect our behavior; be it negative or positive. Leaders within these cults may use authority to prey upon weak minded individuals who are easily controlled and coerced.

Mind control is a big part of how Psychologists state that cults are effective in leading people to extreme decision making. Youth is a component that states to allow for more effective mind control. One example I can think of off-hand is simple parenting tactics that my parents used. My parents, Joseph and Mary Dolan, have stated that simple tactics they used in raising four males were reward and punishment type activities. If one of their children were to act out of line they would take a privilege away from them. Privileges  
<https://assignbuster.com/cult-recruitment/>

included playtime, dessert, television, and other things of this nature. Youth are easily coerced into doing or not doing specific actions by a risk reward tactic. This is a common tactic in our society for teaching children discipline. Parenting tactics and social surroundings all influence human characteristics. This is sociology and psychology at their barebones. In relation to cult behavior I would like to determine why people are drawn and if gender and sex are relevant to these factors. Most horrific cult stories including, Jonestown, polygamist's colonies gone awry, and the Nazi organization, were all headed by male figures.

A simple experiment that I have generated involves all of these issues previously mentioned, along with ideas taken from the experiments I have researched. I theorize that male and females are equally persuaded to conform to adult authority. Also however that young women and men are more likely to conform to male authoritative figures than women, based upon previous research. The theory displays that male leadership roles weigh heavier on the human psyche than that of women.

Another theory would be that male leadership roles are displayed throughout our society more prevalent than that of women. This statement may help understand why most religious cult leaders are male and prey upon the weaknesses of children. My hypothesis is that children are more likely to conform to religious extreme groups especially those with no previous authoritative figure in their lives. We understand people can become disillusioned by loss of authority figures but what happens to those who never had authoritative support at all?

#### References

Lifton, R. J. (1961). *Cults, Religion and violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge  
<https://assignbuster.com/cult-recruitment/>

University Press

Stacey, J. (1998). *Cults: Public Perceptions vs. Research*. New Jersey: Rutgers University

Stark, R, & Bainbridge, W. (1987) . *A theory of religion*. Rutgers University Press.

Stephens, L. ( 2010). *A phenomenological study of the lived experience of loss of an authority figure*. Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center, Vol. 417.

Keenan, B. (1994). *An Evil Cradling: The Five-Year Ordeal of a Hostage* Publisher.

Penguin Publishing.

Russell, N. & Gregory, R. (n. d). *Spinning an Organizational " Web of Obligation"? Moral*

*Choice in Stanley Milgrams " Obedience" Experiments."* Volume 41. 5, 495-518.