

THE CULT MENTALITY:
WHY WE JOIN, HOW IT
CONSUMES US, AND OUR
NEED FOR SKEPTICISM

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This work examines cult mentality -- why group membership appeals to human nature and the psychological effects of said membership. I explored the defining characteristics of cults, cultic methods of influence, and how people become psychologically dependent to the point of willful devotion. I then began to question when any given group environment becomes unhealthy. Greek life, corporations, spirited teams, private schools, and other unified groups are generally valued by society, yet cults are denounced as dangerous. Are all of these institutions not, in essence, the same?

I built a large hollow cube, open at the bottom, to hang at shoulder-level over the viewer's head. As cults embody a strong "us-versus-them" mentality, the cube literally confines the viewer to a single perspective, boxed-off from the outside world. I painted hypnotic optical illusions on each exterior side of the cube to impel the viewer inside, conveying how cults deceptively lure people in and often indoctrinate them through systematic thought-reform. I used soft, warm tones and a comforting repetitive pattern for the inner walls, leading to the light source in the center of the ceiling. This is to illustrate how cult members come to rely purely on faith, loyalty, and their emotional needs, surrendering their critical thinking abilities to a single leader and looking to a definitive, unanimous purpose.

Perhaps the "cult" in "culture" suggests a correlation deeper than etymology alone can explain. Although destructive cults are viewed as extreme manifestations of the group mentality, communal living, and belief overriding reason, many aspects of cults are overwhelmingly present in mainstream society. We must continue to ask ourselves which elements of our society operate on totalitarianism, deception, and coercion. It is critical that people never cease to cultivate curiosity and skepticism, to question that which is accepted, and to think for themselves as individuals.

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This paper aims to examine the psychological effects of cult membership, cultic methods of influence, and the ways in which cults appeal to human nature. The following essential questions launched and directed my research: How are cults different from other institutionalized groups, and when does a healthy group environment become unhealthy? In what ways are aspects of the cult mentality present in mainstream society? And finally, to what extent does faith and belief act as a substitute for conformed knowledge and evidence-based facts in our society?

INTRODUCTION

I feel that compared to a lot of people I know, I'm a relatively skeptical and independent person who isn't too susceptible to peer pressure. While I've definitely been involved in group organizations by way of attending a private school, going to various summer programs, and participating in orchestras, to name a few, I've never "belonged" to a church group, a sports team, a country club, or a camp that I've gone to every year since I was four. My immediate family has never been huge on traditions either. We celebrate holidays and birthdays but not in an all-out sort of way, and we don't tend to stick with the same meal or activity from year to year. We prefer to play things by ear and to question why certain things are established as traditions in the first place. This allows us to then evaluate whether or not there's incentive enough for us to continue doing something.

I think that my parents' and my skepticism of certain group situations and traditions stems largely from my parents' religious upbringings. I grew up in a non-religious household because my mom was negatively impacted by her own mega-religious childhood. She grew up in the Deep South, and most everyone around her held very conservative Church of Christ beliefs. It wasn't until after moving away for college when she truly began to question what she had been taught to blindly accept. As a child her parents made her go to church and Sunday school several times each week, where she was repeatedly told that she would burn in Hell for not doing one thing or another according to the church's doctrine or the Bible. My mom was somewhat traumatized by the church's fear tactic, feeling that it did much more harm than good, and it eventually led to her "escaping" and abandoning her religious beliefs altogether. Of course that's not to say that organized religion is always a negative influence, but hearing about my mom's experience has definitely made me want to think twice before committing to any sort of religious community or belief system. My mom is only one of two people on her side of the family who went somewhere other than Mississippi State for college, who doesn't still live in Mississippi, who didn't raise their children to compete in Bible recitation competitions, and who didn't vote for Donald Trump. It seems as if everybody else in the family has spent his or her entire life in the same small town, going to the same college, knowing little to nothing outside of the world he or she has always known, and not feeling the need to question anything. And that terrifies me. My mom is still somewhat shocked when she looks back at her childhood at just how ignorant she was of all the "cringe-worthy" things going on right in front of her and at how stuck in their beliefs the rest of her family remains.

Not at all to say that the Church of Christ is a cult, but perhaps my mom's vaguely cult-like experience is what subconsciously sparked my fascination in cults. I find it fascinating to analyze from a psychological standpoint the ideologies and motivations behind devout religious beliefs, which I'm sure is also influenced by the fact that my mom went on to study and teach psychology in grad school. I think I was in the fourth grade when one night, my parents and I watched a two-hour cult documentary on a whim when it came on the TV. I wasn't entirely sure why I became so engrossed, but I remember being in awe of how so many people had convinced themselves not only to accept but to worship someone who was so manipulative. Only one or two people could see what was really going on and wanted to leave -- everyone else was fully devoted and seemingly content. Learning about and "seeing" a full-on cult for the first time, I was astounded by the followers' ignorance of and complete aversion to the outside world.

When I hear about destructive cults, I find it hard to comprehend how anyone could have such a strong need to belong to a group and to believe in a "greater" purpose as to join what

seems to me to be something that is obviously suspicious. Being raised to form my own beliefs, I consider myself pretty agnostic -- I know that I don't know the answers to life's mysteries, and for me personally, pretending that I do doesn't give me any more peace of mind than simply not knowing.

A few years ago my mom and I joined a mother-daughter charity group that everyone raved about, but we quit once the year was over. While I knew many people who had become very bonded with their "chapter" of women (there were many sub-groups because the organization was so large), my mom and I found the whole situation to be a bit odd, even though the group is harmless in its intentions and provides many people with a sense of community while also giving back to the community at large. Members, who first had to be sponsored by an existing member in order to join, were required to complete a minimum number of volunteer hours within the group's pre-selected organizations and attend monthly meetings for their chapter. The vast majority of our meetings were spent discussing, through proper parliamentary procedure, group bonding activities outside of our volunteer work, seemingly in an effort to synthesize our work lives and our social lives within the group. These required, exclusive-to-members group activities entailed a significant devotion of time and frivolous expenditures. Participating in gift exchanges and ice-skating at a country club for twenty dollars per person almost seemed to be a way for us to prove our loyalty to the group.

Organizations such as this one fulfill people's social and emotional needs by providing them with a sense of belonging, acceptance, structure, and alleged self-improvement. But how do the positive, healthy aspects of a community membership become the negative, unhealthy qualities that make an environment destructive? In what ways are finding a replacement for family and community within an outside group unsound? Greek life, corporations, spirited teams, private schools, clubs, and other unified groups are valued by society, yet cults are denounced as dangerous. Are all of these institutions not in essence the same?

CHAPTER 1. DEFINING "CULT"

As implied by the proverbial adage, "One man's cult is another man's religion," the definition of the term "cult" is by no means a definitive or unanimous one. It has historically elicited controversy, for the line between organized religion or commune and "cult" is oftentimes ambiguous and subjective. This lack of clarity runs the risk of offending those affiliated with a group that others may view as cult-like. While there is a general consensus regarding the characteristics that define a cult from a technical, sociological standpoint, many evangelical Christians, for example, consider any religious sect that deviates from the "orthodox teachings of the historic Christian faith"¹ to be a cult. Many modern-day religions started out as cults, and conversely, many cults were merely new religious sects when they were first formed. 2,000 years ago, the first Christians -- then known as Nazarenes -- were viewed as a cult for hundreds of years, radically challenging the beliefs of Judaism at the time and worshiping their leader as God himself,² before Christianity became accepted as a mainstream religion. Knowing this begs a

¹ Hanegraaff, Hank. "What Is a Religious Cult?" *Christian Research Institute*. Christian Research Institute, 23 Oct. 2012. Web. 15 Apr. 2017. <<http://www.equip.org/perspectives/what-is-a-religious-cult/>>.

² *Decoding the Past: Cults - Dangerous Devotion*. N.p., 2006. Web. 11 Apr. 2017. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbICD-ge4rY>>.

reiteration of the questions posed in the previous section: What does the switch from benign religion to unhealthy cult look like? When does such a group situation turn treacherous?

The defining characteristics of a cult according to Dr. Margaret Singer, clinical psychologist and researcher of brainwashing and religious influences, are totalitarianism, the presence of a double set of ethics, and deceptive recruiting.³ Robert Jay Lifton, professor of psychiatry at Harvard University, lists a similar set of attributes: the worship of a living leader rather than abstract principles, systematic indoctrination and thought-reform, and exploitation of members from those in positions of power.⁴ According to Dr. Dave Arnott, author of *Corporate Cults: The Insidious Lure of the All-Consuming Organization*, cults require devotion, charismatic leadership, and separation from the outside community, which is eerily similar to the traits that *Fortune Magazine* considers to make a corporation a “best place to work”: a sense of purpose, inspiring leadership, and knockout facilities.⁵ I will address these characteristics, along with other cult practices, more in-depth in the following chapters as they apply to specific cults and how they can be seen in other less-overtly cult-like elements of society.

Although cults are most commonly equated with religious zeal, and most cults do indeed center around religion, cults can form around any subject matter according to many definitions of the term. Just to provide a brief recent history of cults in the US, in the year of 2014 alone, there were an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 active cults -- that’s 2.5 to 3 million people who were involved.⁶ The appearance of cults in the US really took off during the countercultural movement that emerged primarily on the West coast in the 1960s. According to a survey conducted in 1980, “54 percent of high school students in the San Francisco Bay area reported at least one recruiting attempt by a cult member, and 40 percent reported three to five contacts, according to a study of more than 1,000 students by APA President Philip G. Zimbardo, PhD, and Cynthia F. Hartley. Those numbers are expected to have increased with electronic media growing as a recruitment tool for cults.”⁷

Cults have become a subject of much fascination and notoriety throughout Western society. We can’t seem to get enough of the suspense that grips us when we sit down to watch one of the many TV shows, movies (*Holy Hell*, *Jesus Camp*, *The Master*, *The Path*, *Martha Marcy May Marlene*), news stories, and documentaries that have been produced about bafflingly manipulative cults, their power-hungry leaders, and their fanatical members. We teasingly warn one another not to drink the infamous kool-aid, and we all know of the archetypal cults that have gone down in flames (literally in some cases) -- Jonestown, the Branch Davidians, the Manson Family, and Heaven’s Gate, to name a few. In 1999, when many millennialist cults were preparing for a supposed apocalypse to be followed by a second coming of Christ in the year 2000, the FBI launched an investigation in an effort to put a stop to groups that had the potential to do so violently. In 1995, for example, a cult in Japan released poisonous gas throughout

³ *What Is A Cult and How Does It Work?* Perf. Margaret Thaler Singer. *Youtube*. International Cultic Studies Association, 12 Oct. 2014. Web. 15 Apr. 2017.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bRBFhMEQFk&spfreload=5>>.

⁴ *Decoding the Past: Cults - Dangerous Devotion*. N.p., 2006. Web. 11 Apr. 2017.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbICD-ge4rY>>.

⁵ Arnott, Dave. *Corporate cults: the insidious lure of the all-consuming organization*. New York: AMACOM, American Management Association, 2000. Print.

⁶ *What Is A Cult and How Does It Work?* Perf. Margaret Thaler Singer. *Youtube*. International Cultic Studies Association, 12 Oct. 2014. Web. 15 Apr. 2017.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bRBFhMEQFk&spfreload=5>>.

⁷ Dittmann, Melissa. "Cults of Hatred." *American Psychological Association*. N.p., Nov. 2002. Web. 11 Apr. 2017.

<<http://www.apa.org/monitor/nov02/cults.aspx>>.

multiple subways, injuring 5,000⁸. The problem with legal action in respect to such cultic organizations is that the potential for violence is not a justifiable crime. Therefore, there is seldom an opportunity for intervention before disaster strikes, as was the case in this sudden act of terrorism. Our society as a whole clearly views cults with fear, based on the many horror stories we hear of cults gone wrong, but are cults truly destructive by nature, or is it possible for a cult to provide societal benefit without there existing the potential for harm? In my research I noticed that when isolated, many of the qualities that make a cult destructive show up and are even celebrated in other societal circumstances. While our society is largely religious, condoning selflessness and faith, the extreme manifestation of these qualities that leads to group violence in a cult setting is condemned.

CHAPTER 2. ALLURE: HOW PEOPLE ARE RECRUITED AND WHY THEY ARE TEMPTED TO JOIN

How does the nature of conformity/rebellion and trust/skepticism contribute to our understanding of the formation of cults? Much of society is quick to dismiss cult members as insane and completely irrational, however the forces at work behind cults are much more inconspicuously powerful than one might think, which contributes to the unnerving factor of cults and cult leaders. I initially suspected that certain personality types might be more susceptible to joining cults than others. However, through my research I found that the determining factor really isn't personality type so much as the situational vulnerability and trustiness of the individual.⁹

For people going through a period of vulnerability -- oftentimes young people who feel misunderstood by their families and lost in the world -- cult communities can offer the acceptance that is felt to be lacking. The ability to create a loving, accepting environment and a strong sense of community is something that society views as very desirable. Cults capitalize on this knowledge in an attempt to legitimize their organization in the eyes of the public. After all, survival and "Having social support, from an evolutionary standpoint, is far more important than knowing the truth about some facts that do not directly impinge on your life."¹⁰ While some cults, and even political candidates, may present completely false and irrational arguments, intuitive conviction and this need for social support more often than not override impartial rationality. And this phenomenon of indulging our emotional insight at the expense of judicious analysis is becoming more and more prevalent in our society, especially with the rise of the internet and social media allowing for unreliable sources of information to be propagated instantaneously. People now have access to "evidence" supporting practically anything they are determined to believe, without having to search for the truth firsthand. In 2016, in fact, "Oxford Dictionaries chose 'post-truth' as its word of the year, defined as 'relating to or denoting

⁸ *Decoding the Past: Cults - Dangerous Devotion*. N.p., 2006. Web. 11 Apr. 2017. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbICD-ge4rY>>.

⁹ Lalich, Janja, and Madeleine Tobias. "Who Joins Cults, And Why?" *Apologetics Index*. Apologetics Index, 13 Dec. 2015. Web. 17 Apr. 2017. <<http://www.apologeticsindex.org/265-who-joins-cults-and-why>>. Article excerpted from *Take Back Your Life: Recovering From Cults and Abusive Relationships*

¹⁰ Beck, Julie. "This Article Won't Change Your Mind." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 13 Mar. 2017. Web. 11 Apr. 2017. <<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/03/this-article-wont-change-your-mind/519093/>>.

circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”¹¹

As articulated by Dr. Dave Arnott, “Cult leaders, corporate and otherwise, appeal to emotions to gain members, because they know that the emotional ties of familial relationships are missing from the lives of so many people. . . . In the early part of this century, the economic situation led people to move across the country, away from their families, but the need for familial affection didn’t go away. It is this need that leaders speak to so well. Many of them do it overtly, but they don’t force it, it comes naturally.”¹² And it’s true that leaders who are gentle and use flattery are able to lure people in and manipulate them much more easily than leaders who are forceful or aggressive in their approach. Before leading to the mass-suicide (although some might say murder) of nine hundred and nine of his followers, Jim Jones -- a megalomaniacal drug-addict -- was considered by many to be the most loving person they had ever met. Like the many male cult leaders who have demanded to be called “father” or “dad,” he was worshipped as both a paternal and godlike presence in the lives of his followers. This perhaps stems from the fact that many cult leaders struggle with familial affection themselves and as a result attempt to step into the authoritative role that was lacking in their childhood. Jones and Manson, along with other cult leaders, were raised in poverty and neglected by their parents, looking to the Bible and welcoming churches for comfort after having been disappointed by the authority figures in their lives.¹³ Even in the final forty minutes of Jonestown, Jones’s voice remained fairly calm, and although he employed armed guards to ensure that nobody escaped, he himself didn’t become forceful with dissenting members. He retained the trust of many through the very end by assuring them that he agreed with their concerns while rationalizing mass suicide as the best and only option.

Cults recruit deceptively, making it rather easy for a persuasive leader or recruiter to latch onto something that even highly stable and reasonable person find appealing. Jim Jones, for example, moved his People’s Temple from conservative Indiana to countercultural San Francisco, where he recruited both those passionate about social action and those who benefitted from said social action. Jones actively sought out minorities and people in desperate situations because people who had nothing to lose would be more hopeful and less likely to view the temple’s propositions with skepticism. He offered ample assistance to those in need, providing free bus rides, physician consults, assistance from finance experts, and even world-class bands and entertainment to low-income people. He performed fake “miracles” such as removing the cancer from someone’s body, supposedly healing people in order to gain trust as a more-than-human entity. He preached inclusivity and equal treatment, welcoming people of all races, ages, and genders into his temple, which was seen as very progressive for the time (sixties and seventies). And cults are often difficult to recognize in their early stages for just this reason -- the group begins with a noble cause that masks ulterior motives.

In his TED Talk, “The Pattern Behind Self-deception,” Michael Shermer, founder of The Skeptics Society, discusses how belief is a natural state for humans, while disbelief and skepticism are uncomfortable and oftentimes dangerous in life-or-death situations. We are “pattern-seeking primates,” which is what fosters the skepticism that both keeps us alive and

¹¹ Noë, Alva. "Is Being 'Post-Truth' A New Concept?" *NPR*. NPR, 02 Dec. 2016. Web. 24 Apr. 2017.

¹² Arnott, Dave. *Corporate cults: the insidious lure of the all-consuming organization*. New York: AMACOM, American Management Association, 2000. Print.

¹³ *Decoding the Past: Cults - Dangerous Devotion*. N.p., 2006. Web. 11 Apr. 2017. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbICD-ge4rY>>.

makes us superstitious. To avoid letting an existing pattern go unnoticed, our “default” is to assume that all patterns are indeed real. Shermer discusses an experiment done by Susan Blackmore, who found that those who scored high on the ESP test (meaning that they held strong beliefs in the supernatural, etc.) were more likely to identify non-existing patterns when shown “degraded images.” Another experiment conducted by Jennifer Whitson showed that people were more likely to see illusory patterns when experiencing a lack of control in their lives.¹⁴ With this in mind, I can see how people -- especially the emotionally vulnerable and unstable who are lacking control and the most likely to join a cult -- could have the tendency to place their faith in a group or a leader by prematurely infusing meaning into something that they assume to be real, a sign, or fate.

Many people find the stability and sense of purpose that cults and cult-like groups offer to be very appealing. People seek clarity, and cult-like groups provide it by fabricating a tangible sense of purpose. Throughout history, we humans have justified our earthly problems with the intervention of outside, otherworldly forces because it’s easier than admitting to our own faults. People crave answers to complex, unanswerable questions about the meaning of life and life after death. While such questions are in my opinion unanswerable, religious groups claim to have the answers to life’s mysteries or to at least have a way of discovering this “special knowledge.” These “easy” answers to unanswerable questions serve as a way for us to divert attention away from our own problems, and what we really need to do is to first make sure that our problems aren’t coming from right in front of us, even if they are uncomfortable to confront. Now from the outside, the lack of critical, independent thinking and curiosity in an authoritative regime is likely to appear as a negative. People inside the group, however, actually enjoy (even if subconsciously) the ease and simplicity of devoting their life to one unanimous purpose, following the directions of a single person, and handing over their decision-making responsibilities to that person.

CHAPTER 3. PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPENDENCY: WHY PEOPLE MAINTAIN WILLFUL, UNWAVERING DEVOTION

Once someone has joined a cult, some form of indoctrination occurs to foster his or her loyalty and devotion to the group -- as was mentioned in the first chapter, Robert Jay Lifton considers systematic indoctrination and thought-reform to be one of the defining characteristics of a cult. According to Lifton, thought-reform consists of a “breakdown stage” emphasizing confession and self-criticism and a “re-education stage” enforcing new behaviors.¹⁵ Effective “conditions” under which thought-reform takes place often include setting the stage for followers to become dependent by maintaining harsh physical conditions and evoking a sense of fear and urgency amongst members. It is common for leaders to stress an “us versus them” mentality, where the rest of the world is made to seem corrupt, dangerous, and out to get the group. As a result of being isolated and made to feel threatened by outsiders, members become more trusting within their group and heavily reliant upon one another. In addition, leaders exploit people’s irrational fears by threatening members with what might happen if they were to rebel against the

¹⁴ *TED.com*. N.p., Feb. 2010. Web. 23 Apr. 2017.
<https://www.ted.com/talks/michael_shermer_the_pattern_behind_self_deception>.

¹⁵ *Decoding the Past: Cults - Dangerous Devotion*. N.p., 2006. Web. 11 Apr. 2017.
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbICD-ge4rY>>.

group. When members digress or fail to adhere to the leader's rules, they are typically reprimanded -- verbally, physically, or both, all so that they learn to discipline themselves based on their understanding of what behaviors are rewarded and what behaviors are not tolerated in their community.

Aside from the cult leader's efforts to systematically indoctrinate members, individuals for the most part enforce themselves. As mentioned on an NPR newscast, "we base our opinions on beliefs and in the face of contradictory facts, we adhere to our original beliefs more strongly."¹⁶ In Jonestown, for example, some members were beginning to distrust Jim Jones, knowing that he couldn't really heal people of disease. Even so, most of them convinced themselves that he was still a manifestation of God and that he was doing what he needed to do in order to get people to join the movement -- that it was all for the greater good. Because people had become so spiritually invested in the cult, equating it with their sense of identity, purpose, and family, they just couldn't abandon what they had come to believe or admit that their idealistic hopes for a better life were flawed.¹⁷

"Motivated reasoning is how people convince themselves or remain convinced of what they want to believe—they seek out agreeable information and learn it more easily; and they avoid, ignore, devalue, forget, or argue against information that contradicts their beliefs."¹⁸ Going back to the Jonestown example, Jones was constantly preaching contradictory beliefs in his sermons. It may not make sense how so many people could indulge such a scheme, but this is a perfect illustration of motivated reasoning and confirmation bias. Jones knew that everyone in his temple was coming from different religious backgrounds, so instead of attempting to get everyone to agree with one single doctrine, he sought instead to appeal to a variety of beliefs. People have somewhat of a remarkable ability to select the one thing that resonates with their preexisting ideas and to discount everything else. There were even atheists loyal to Jones's temple who felt that the ultimate goal of the movement was socialism, able to turn a blind eye at the religious zeal because they believed the religious component of the group to be a mere effort to gain a following.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the "cult" in "culture" suggests a correlation deeper than etymology alone can explain. Through my research, I was able to gain some insight into several of the questions that launched my line of inquiry. By uncovering all that "cult" entails -- the methods of control, the aspects that appeal to human nature, and the powerful effects on one's mind -- I found that many institutions in mainstream society behave in cult-like ways. Corporate culture is becoming increasingly demanding on employees, requiring them to devote so much of their time working for the good of the whole, which is really the profit of the few in charge. Many brands and social

¹⁶ "In Politics, Sometimes The Facts Don't Matter." *NPR*. NPR, 13 July 2010. Web. 23 Apr. 2017.

¹⁷ *Decoding the Past: Cults - Dangerous Devotion*. N.p., 2006. Web. 11 Apr. 2017.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbICD-ge4rY>>.

¹⁸ Beck, Julie. "This Article Won't Change Your Mind." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 13 Mar. 2017. Web. 11 Apr. 2017. <<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/03/this-article-wont-change-your-mind/519093/>>.

¹⁹ Guinn, Jeff. "Nearly 40 Years Later, Jonestown Offers A Lesson In Demagoguery." Interview by Terry Gross. *Fresh Air*. NPR. 11 Apr. 2017. Radio.

media platforms are cult-like in their branding and the ways in which they compete against one another. Think of propaganda. Cult movies and anything else that people describe as having a “cult following.” And that’s just the slightest overview. We must continue to ask ourselves what else in our society operates on totalitarianism, deception, and coercion.

Another one of my initial questions was: when does a healthy group environment become destructive? I found that the crux of the problem lies in the merging of our individual identity or family life with our outside social community. It is when we devote ourselves fully to something -- when that something becomes a lifestyle -- that we struggle to escape from the tunnel vision that can consume us if we’re not careful.

It is critical that people never cease to cultivate curiosity, to question that which is accepted, and to think for themselves as individuals. People will always form beliefs, which won’t always be based on logic alone, but we must be wary of those who attempt to do our thinking for us, no matter how charming or trustworthy they may seem. “Jones epitomizes the worst that can happen when we let one person dictate what we hear [and] what we believe.”²⁰ “As long as reason can be eclipsed by faith, there will be those who use religion to exploit and those who give up their free will to a charismatic cult leader.”²¹

²⁰ Guinn, Jeff. "Nearly 40 Years Later, Jonestown Offers A Lesson In Demagoguery." Interview by Terry Gross. *Fresh Air*. NPR. 11 Apr. 2017. Radio.

²¹ *Decoding the Past: Cults - Dangerous Devotion*. N.p., 2006. Web. 11 Apr. 2017. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbICD-ge4rY>>.

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N.d. *YouTube*. YouTube, 27 June 2012. Web. 19 Apr. 2017.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICng-KRxXJ8>>. Produced in 1981 and based off of an experiment conducted by Ron Jones in a Palo Alto high school.